

Memory Warfare against War Remembrance: Knowledge of the Great Patriotic War with the Young People

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ABSTRACT

Introduction: This article is devoted to the study of the state of historical memory of the Great Patriotic War and its functioning in the youth environment by the example of identifying the level of interest, knowledge, and perception of these events by 1st-year medical students of the Rostov State Medical University (RostSMU). *Materials and methods:* The methodological basis of the research is an integrative approach, the application of which is due to the interdisciplinary nature of the problem under consideration. Also, a systematic and functional approach was used, which facilitated the solution of the indicated problem. The work widely applied the statistical method within the sociological research conducted by the authors, as well as the method of analysis and generalization. *Results:* The work reflects the results of the author's sociological research, which, when compared with the data of authoritative sociological services, allowed drawing certain conclusions and identify several trends in the formation, state, and functioning of the historical memory of the Great Patriotic War among the youth. *Discussion and conclusion:* The subject of historical memory is directly related to the problem of cultural identification. The study of this area acquires special relevance at the current stage, a characteristic feature of which is the ever-deepening crisis of spirituality of modern mankind, when, to please the political elites, historical memory turns into an instrument of political manipulation; attempts are made to rewrite history at the request of leaders or individual politicians of some countries. The obtained results of the study allow making several important conclusions. Victory in the Great Patriotic War is the greatest event on a worldwide scale. It is also one of the main unifying factors in the history of all the peoples that were part of the former USSR. And the fact that today the historical memory of the war is becoming a bargaining chip in the hands of unscrupulous politicians strikes a colossal blow both on every family and on the country as a whole. Meanwhile, a sociological survey conducted by the authors of the article on the eve of the 75th anniversary of Victory in the Great Patriotic War among medical students showed a very mediocre level of interest among young people in these events. The degree of patriotic education among young people also cannot be considered high. The article substantiates the importance of solving problems aimed at the need to increase the level of formation in the youth environment of an active civic position, patriotism, which are laid down in the family.

Keywords

Historical memory; Patriotism; Spirituality; Self-identification; Commemoration

Introduction

One of the global problems of modern society, which is still given much less attention than the threat of a nuclear war or the problem of ecology, is the crisis of spirituality of today's humanity, which manifests itself in the loss of stable symbols of self-identification not only of individuals but also of entire social groups differing in ethnicity, confessional, political, and other allegiance. In the modern unified and diverse world, a controlled process of unification of social communities is observed: a way of life, the standard of consumption, and a system of spiritual values are unified and imposed, and the backbone of this (for some reason!) are the values of liberalism. The consciousness of a modern person is artificially unified and is getting more and more cosmopolitan, while the specificity of the cultural and historical development of entire countries and peoples is furthermore ignored.

An important means of "managing" public consciousness is the historical memory "engineering". Depending on the created "construction", the images of the past form the matrix of reality perception necessary today, either positive or vice versa.

Therefore, the topic of historical memory is today one of the most pressing problems of interdisciplinary theoretical research. The concept of "historical memory" was first used by the French philosopher, sociologist, and social psychologist Maurice Halbwachs, who occupied a prominent place in the French sociological school founded by Emile Durkheim. In 1925, according to M. Halbwachs himself, his best book [1, p. 1] "Social framework of memory" [2] was published, where the scientist expressed the idea of social determinism of the memory of individuals and social groups. However, this term gains real popularity in the 80s of the XX century, when with the collapse of the USSR the former bipolar world order crashed, and the spiritual space was completely occupied by liberal ideas and values, having gotten rid of a long rival, namely, the ideas of socialism and communism and the corresponding value system. In the West, researches by P. Nora [3], P. Hutton [4], Jan Assmann [5], J. LeHoff and others devoted to the topic of historical memory are in demand.

In Russian scientific thought, this concept appeared later, at the end of the 1980s - early 2000s, which is probably due to the need to resist the tendency to revise the most important events of modern history that were already emerging at that time. Many Russian scientists (L.P. Repina [6,7,8], I.M. Savelyeva and A.V. Poletaev [9,10,11,12], O.B. Leontyeva, and others) in their studies have established the fact of the relationship between "historical memory" and "politics of memory", drawing attention to the fact that in recent decades, historical memory has been actively used in the political space as a means of solving political problems.

Despite the variability in the interpretation of the concept of "historical memory" and the absence of clearly defined boundaries of this concept, most researchers note its essential property: on the one hand, historical memory is one of the main channels for the transmission of experience and information about the past, and on the other hand, it is the most important factor of "self-identification of an individual, that ensures the identification of political, ethnic, national, confessional and social groups, the sense of community that is forming in them" [13].

However, historical memory is not a static component of culture. It changes along with cultural and historical dynamics. The more radical the changes in society, the more significantly the image of the past changes in the public consciousness.

For Russian society, this is especially important in the year of the 75th anniversary of the end of World War II. The Great Victory of the USSR is a key event for the formation of national identity, perhaps the only real factor uniting all peoples of the former Soviet Union. Meanwhile, in Europe the history of the Second World War is being shamelessly "rewritten", the Victory of

the Soviet Union is being devalued, the role of the USSR in this war is being revised. In September 2019, the European Parliament adopted a resolution dedicated to the 80th anniversary of the outbreak of the war, in which the USSR is officially named its culprit along with Germany, and the role of the allies, primarily the United States, is diligently emphasized.

Should it then be of a surprise the encroachments on the monuments to Soviet soldiers-liberators in Poland and the Baltic countries? In these countries, history is being rewritten against the background of anti-Russian policies, forming their new national identity and using history as a practical means of implementing political tasks within the country and in international relations. The cosmopolitan version of history allows for this. Therefore, special attention should be paid to the questions about sources that are used when presenting historical facts, and what methods and technologies form historical memory.

P. Nora et al. [3], developing Halbwax's ideas about commemoration as a way to strengthen and transmit memory of the past, as a form of interaction between history and memory, warns of the inadmissibility of an unscrupulous attitude to history in the name of biased ideas.

Materials and Methods

Commemorative practices involve a set of methods by which the memory of the past is preserved, consolidated, and transmitted in society, the necessary image of a particular historical fact is updated and filled with the appropriate content. This can lead to the fact that historical material is accumulated in the form of fragments that are not related to each other, but which can be easily used functionally depending on the needs of modern society. In this practice, the phenomenon of "obliteration" is widely used, which is realized in the following forms:

1. Repressive erasure. An example is the purposefully pursued policy of the ruling elite of Latvia to abandon the memory of the Great Patriotic War. To obtain financial and other compensation, Latvia lobbies in European legal institutions for certain resolutions, in which the crimes of the "forest brothers" are qualified as "forced actions", the Salaspils concentration camp is called a correctional labor camp, the SS-legionaries are presented as national heroes. All these facts are stated in the book "History of Latvia, XX century", published in 2005. A similar picture is observed in modern Ukraine, erecting monuments to new "heroes" - Bandera supporters to create a new identity.
2. Suppression of some facts. The Poles "forgot" about the salvation of Krakow by the Soviet army, similarly as in Europe - about the bombing of Dresden by the Americans and its restoration by Soviet soldiers.
3. Changing public opinion over time about who made the greatest contribution to the victory over Nazi Germany in World War II. So, if in France in 1945 the majority of the population believed that the USSR played a decisive role in the liberation of Europe from fascism, and the allies only helped, then in 2005 new generations assess the role of the Soviet Union and allies in the defeat of Germany exactly the opposite: the feat of Soviet soldiers is not denied, but the decisive role of the USSR in the war is not recognized. This suggests that for modern people of the West, the USSR is already history, and with a sad end, and about the increased influence of the United States on the countries of the European Union.

It is obvious that the phenomenon of "obliteration", as well as commemoration in general, is actively used in political practice as a basis for the formation of a new identity, which has significant political consequences.

The history of Russia has always been used in our country to legitimize power, and power has been viewed as the successor to the great heroes. Today, the main factor in the legitimization of

power, leftover from Soviet times, is the Great Patriotic War. According to the latest data from the Levada Center the question "What are you proud of?" received the following responses:

- 87% - Victory in the Great Patriotic War
- 50% - Progress in cosmos
- 45% - Crimea incorporating
- 40% - Native literature
- 37% - Progress of Soviet and Russian Science.

It is evident, that for modern Russia the Great Victory is a key event for the formation of national identity. Therefore, it is very important to form an objective, historical memory of these events in the younger generation.

Employees of the Department of History of Rostov State Medical University conducted their own research aimed at determining the state and functioning of the historical memory of the Great Patriotic War, and more broadly about the Second World War, among the youth. For this purpose, from 9.01 to 23.02.2020, a sociological survey was carried out, in which 1,094 1st year students of the Rostov State Medical University took part. Among the respondents who arrived from various constituent entities of the Russian Federation, the majority is from Stavropol and Krasnodar Territories, Rostov Region, the Republic of Dagestan, Chechnya, Ingushetia, Ossetia, etc., including 130 foreign students from Nigeria, Egypt, Ecuador, Bangladesh, Israel, India, Afghanistan, Iran and other countries of the world.

The wording of the questions and the options for the answers in the questionnaires are set out in the edition proposed by the experts. The data received is shown as a percentage of the total number of responses.

Considering that knowledge of the events of the Great Patriotic War is indicated as a priority task in the Comprehensive Plan "Concept of Russian Patriotism", the question of practical interest is: do you know the exact date of the beginning and end of the Great Patriotic War?

Results

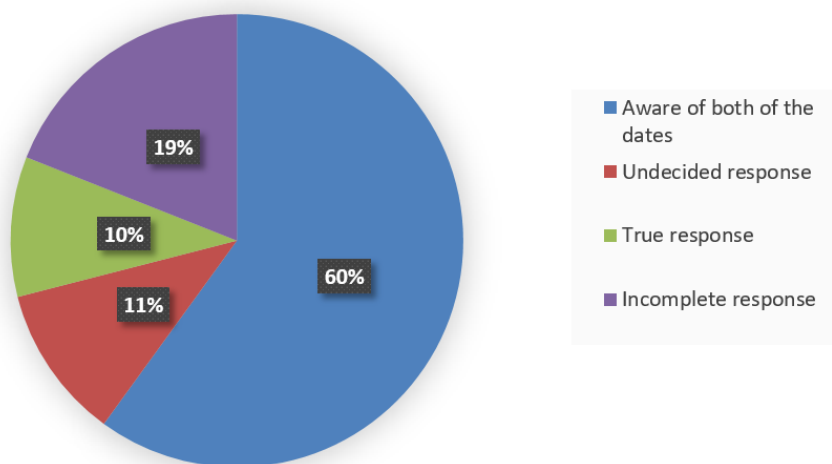


Figure 1. Knowledge of the chronological framework of the Great Patriotic War demonstrated by the respondents

As Figure 1 shows, 79% of survey participants know or have some idea of the chronological framework of the Great Patriotic War, 21% indicated either absolutely incorrect dates or found it difficult to answer this question at all, because, apparently, they do not know anything about this stage in the historical development of the Russian state.

The fact that there are gaps in the modern education of the younger generation is evidenced by the fact that the respondents, answering the question: “which of the major Soviet commanders (TOP 5) of the war years you can name”, only few coped with the task. So, only 7% of the students who participated in the survey were able to name 5 Soviet military leaders during the Great Patriotic War, 61% of students could not name any of the generals who contributed to the victory over Nazi Germany, 25% of respondents remember less than 5 military leaders, 7% - could name only one last name which, as a rule, was the name of G.K. Zhukov.

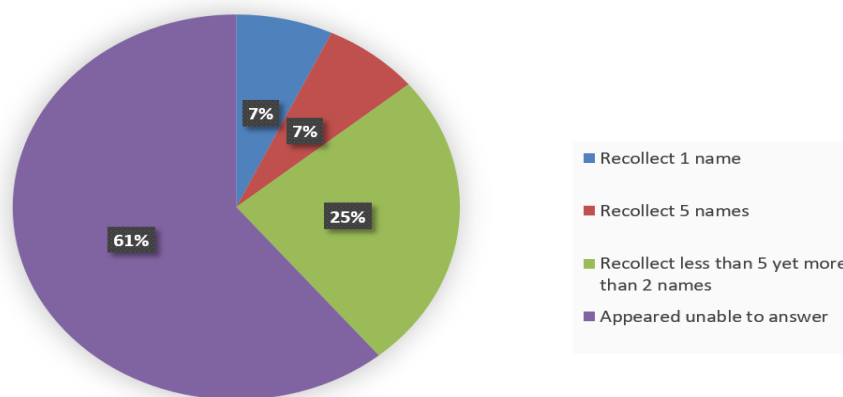


Figure 2. Knowledge of the major Soviet commanders of the years of the Great Patriotic War

Assessing the dynamics of the study of the theme of the Great Patriotic War, the respondents were asked the question: do you want to know about the events of the Great Patriotic War of 1941-1945? The majority of answers were "very much" (63%); "rather yes" comprised 26%; there were also those who answered that they were not interested in the events of the Great Patriotic War and did not want to study them (11%).

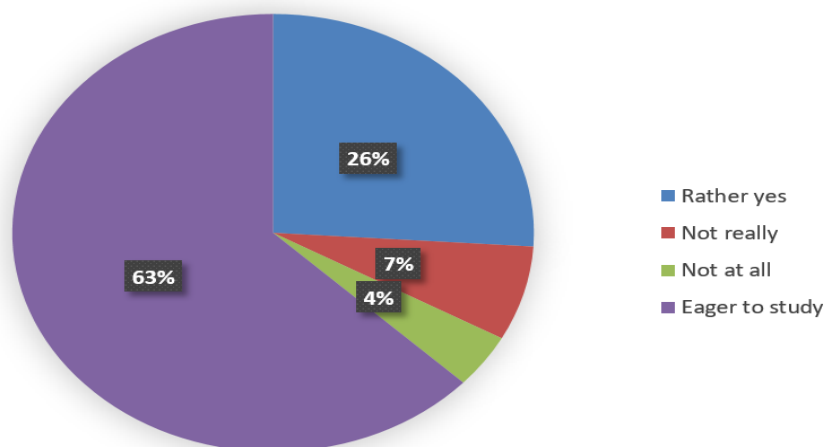


Figure 3. Wish to study the events of the Great Patriotic War by the respondents

This approach is especially common in non-core universities, where the attitude towards the humanities is poor. This is due to a general decrease in interest in the national history, low level of school teaching, as well as poor ideological justification for the need to study the "History" discipline.

When assessing the knowledge of students about their relatives who fought on the fronts of the Great Patriotic War, a tendency for the loss of historical memory is revealed. 10% of the respondents answered that they do not know whether their relatives fought during the Great Patriotic War. And this already speaks not only of the low preparation of young people at school but also of the role of the family in raising the children. Unfortunately, there is a loss of intra-family values; young people do not know the names of their great-grandfathers and great-grandmothers. 13% of respondents answered that their relatives did not participate in the Great Patriotic War, and this is at least puzzling, given the scale of those events. 77% - remember their family members who fought on the fronts of the Great Patriotic War.

The respondents were more unanimous when answering the question: "Whom, in your opinion, belongs the main merit of the Victory in the Great Patriotic War?" Thus, 58% of respondents recognized the leading role of the Soviet people, 28% believe that the role of the USSR in the Victory over Nazi Germany can only be viewed in conjunction with the members of the anti-Hitler coalition. 8% of the respondents could not answer the question at all, which indicates a lack of knowledge about the Great Patriotic War. But it is even more dangerous that the result of attempts to rewrite history on the part of several political forces is beginning to bear fruit - 6% of respondents already believe that the merit in the Victory belongs to a bloc of countries: the USA, England, France. This position is especially common among foreign students.

It should be positively assessed that 81% of respondents know which countries the Soviet Union fought against in World War II. At the same time, 9% found it difficult to answer the question posed, and 8% of respondents attributed France to the aggressor countries, and 2% expressed their conviction that the anti-Hitler bloc included such countries as the United States, England, France, i.e. they are unaware of France's role in World War II.

The opinions of the respondents noticeably split on the question of which countries were part of the anti-Hitler coalition and opened the second front in 1944. Due to the situation that developed immediately after World War II, when the allies (England and the United States) insisted on including France in the partition of Germany, the opinion appeared that France was part of the coalition. This is an example of the fact that historical memory still depends on subjective factors: if for a long time France is called a member of the coalition, then in the minds of the modern generation this becomes true. This is exactly what the politicians of some Western countries are doing, trying to silence the unseemly aspects of their government's activities (for example, France's participation in the Munich Agreement), and ascribing to themselves merits that they actually do not have.

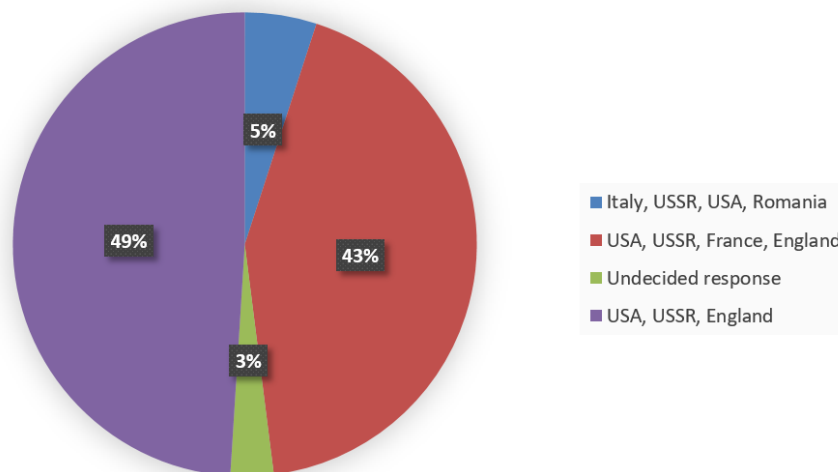
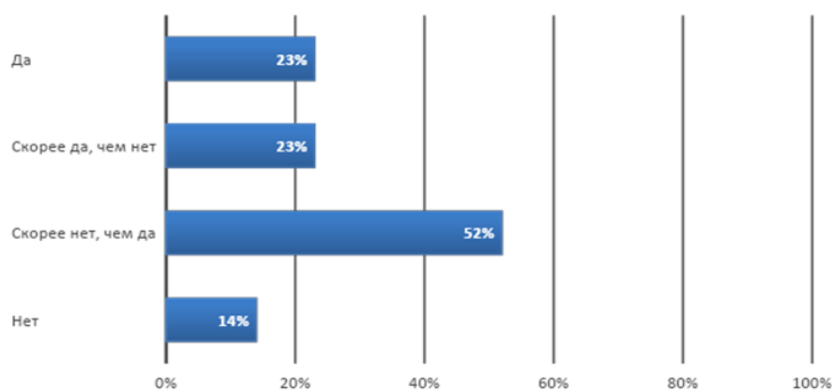


Figure 4. «Whom, in your opinion, belongs the main merit of the Victory in the Great Patriotic War?»

Thus, as shown in Figure 4, only 49% of respondents correctly identified the countries that were part of the anti-Hitler coalition, 43% attributed France to the anti-Hitler coalition, 5% of respondents attributed Italy, Romania to the allies of the USSR, that is, countries that were part of a bloc with Germany. 3% - found it difficult to answer.

To analyze the knowledge of the political leaders of the Allied countries, the students were asked to answer a question on this topic. As a result, 37% of the respondents could not remember a single name. They could not even name the political leader of the USSR, J.V. Stalin! 32% were able to recollect the political leader of the USSR, having correctly named J.V. Stalin. Only 31% know the names of political leaders who were allies of the USSR in World War II.

Answers received to the question: "Could the USSR have won the Great Patriotic War without opening a second front?" are shown in Figure 5.



- Yes - Да
- Rather yes – Скорее да, чем нет
- Rather not – Скорее нет, чем да
- No - Нет

Figure 5. "Could the USSR have won the Great Patriotic War without opening a second front?"

These answers, unfortunately, show that the modern generation with a low level of patriotic upbringing made their choice, not in favor of the Soviet Union. Thus, 41% of respondents believe that the USSR could not have won the Great Patriotic War without opening a second front, 14% were adamant, speaking about the impossibility of victory. Only 23% answered positively and the same number of respondents (23%) believe that it is more likely yes than no. Thus, 55% of the respondents assessed the role of the USSR in the Victory as insignificant.

Discussion

For a sociological study, the question of the reasons that contributed to the outbreak of World War II is important, given the attempts of Western countries to shift the responsibility for unleashing the war to the Soviet Union. In this regard, the answers of students are noteworthy: 60% believe that the cause of the outbreak of World War II can be considered the aspiration of fascist Germany, Italy, and militaristic Japan for world domination. 24% determine the reason for the start of the war by the desire of the leading countries of the world (including the USSR) to seize new territories, raw material resources, and sales markets. Only 10% believe that there is a political motive behind all actions, this being the desire of Western countries to destroy the communist Soviet Union. 6% of the respondents found it difficult to answer at all.

Of interest are the respondents' answers to the question: "How do you assess the attempts of the United States to prove that the victory in World War II was only due to their intervention?"

Thus, 51% of the respondents define this as an attempt by the United States to "falsify the outcome of the war, to rewrite history." 16% - opted for the fact that "the United States reasonably considers its participation in the war to be predominant." 14% believe that this is "an attempt by the United States to solve its internal problems," and 19% found it difficult to answer. Thus, the country, which lost 27 million people, experienced all the hardships of the occupation war, deprivation, and grief, instead of a victorious country turned out to be an outsider country, due to the low level of patriotic education of young people.

Among the priority tasks that need to be solved to bring up an active civic position, patriotism in the youth environment is the formation of these qualities in the family. However, this function is extremely weak. This is evidenced by the answers to the question: "Have you preserved any relics of the war years in your family?"

The survey showed that 65% of the respondents have in one way or another the attributes of clothing, manuscripts, etc. However, 20% of students answered that nothing survived, 15% were not interested in this issue, that is, 35% of young people were cut off from the history of their family, let alone the history of the country.

Of practical interest are the respondents' answers to the question: "Could you repeat the feat of Soviet soldiers?" Only 12% answered positively, 23% doubted, and 65% answered negatively. And in this regard, it is necessary to remember in which collectivity of respondents the sociological survey was conducted. These are medical students who should always be at the forefront, providing an example of humanism, patriotism, generosity.

Insufficient awareness of the respondents about the Great Patriotic War also manifested itself when answering the question: "With whose name do you associate Victory in the Great Patriotic War, who was the Supreme Commander-in-Chief in the USSR during the Great Patriotic War?" As a result, 64% gave the correct answer, but 36% answered incorrectly or found it difficult to answer. Whereas 10-15 years ago, school graduates, first-year students knew not only the commander-in-chief but also the commander who hosted the Victory Parade on Red Square in Moscow in the summer of 1945.

Of interest are the answers to a whole range of questions, from which students could choose the one that they considered correct. So, to the question: "How do you assess the attitude of modern Germany to the lessons of the Great Patriotic War?" the majority of students (37%) answered that Germany is trying to rewrite history, whitewash the role of Nazi Germany in the Great Patriotic War; 29% - believe that they remember the lessons, honor the memory of the war. Most likely, this is the answer given by students who are interested in history, watch the media, and have been to Germany. At the same time, 15% - believe that the modern generation of Germans seeks to forget about their role in the war, and 19% - found it difficult to answer.

The second question of this complex was related to "the assessment of the attempts of Poland, Ukraine, and the Baltic countries to prove that the USSR, along with Germany, was an occupier, not a liberator." As a result, 53% answered that it was falsification, and these countries should be grateful to the USSR for their liberation. 14% - believe that small countries with imperial manners want to forget the unfavorable facts of their history in the Second World War. Thus, 67% of the respondents inspire optimism with their answers that not all is lost and young people can be taught to love their Motherland. At the same time, already 5% of the respondents noted that "these countries have the right to such an assessment"; 28% - found it difficult to answer.

The answers to the following question also add optimism: "Is there a need for a policy of activating the memory of the Great Patriotic War and the role of the USSR in it?" 59% of respondents believe that this policy is necessary; 29% answered "rather yes than no"; 5% - "more likely no than yes"; 7% of respondents were categorical, believing that this policy is completely optional.

The reaction of students to the question: "Do you think our country cares enough about war veterans?" 52% of respondents indicated that the care is poor, 20% - think that the care is sufficient and 28% found it difficult to answer at all.

It was mentioned above that in some cases the low level of patriotism and knowledge of history among modern youth directly depends on how this issue is resolved at school.

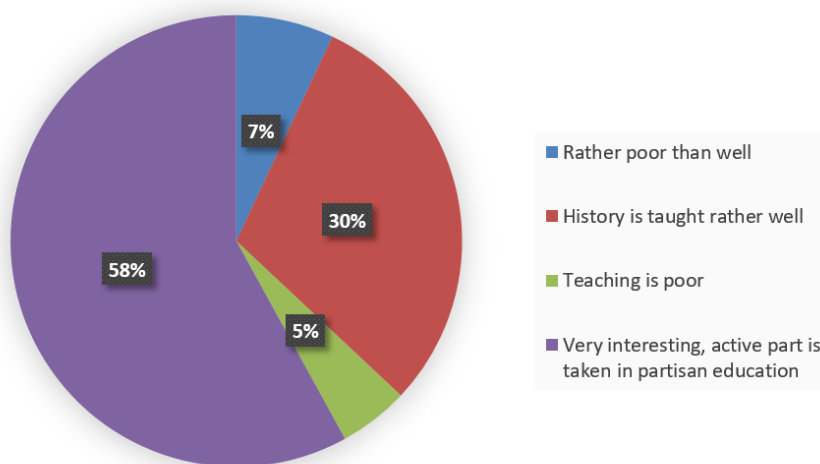


Figure 6. "How, in your opinion, does the school contribute to the formation of knowledge about the Great Patriotic War?"

However, the data in Figure 6 show that when answering the question: "How, in your opinion, does the school contribute to the formation of knowledge about the Great Patriotic War?", 58% of

the respondents highly appreciated teaching history at school, 30% - noted that teaching is rather good than bad, and only 12% rated the teaching of history at school as “rather bad than good” and “teaching is poor”.

A point of view of the respondents on the issue of personal involvement in the events of bygone days through their attitude to the current situation in the geopolitical space seems to be interesting. So, to the question: "How do you feel about the demolition of monuments to the heroes of the Great Patriotic War in Ukraine, Eastern Europe?" the majority answered negatively (59%). However, it causes concern that out of 41% of the remaining respondents, 13% believe that “these countries have the right to forgetting”; 27% - found it difficult to answer, 1% believe that this historical period should be forgotten since it has long been in the past.

Thus, 41% of respondents, one way or another, do not see anything wrong with the demolition of monuments and, in their opinion, it is better to forget than remember. This situation can contribute to the obliteration of what happened during the struggle against fascism, which is very dangerous for the preservation of "historical memory".

Analyzing the problems that led to the first setbacks in the Great Patriotic War, the students pointed to the unexpectedness of the attack by fascist Germany (29%), the second place was taken by Germany's superiority in technical equipment (26%), the third was the strategic miscalculations of the Soviet leadership (14%). 11% consider the main reason for the first failures to be repressions in the army, which took place actively in 1937; 13% of the respondents recalled such a document as the "Secret Protocols" of 1939, so they think that the reason for the first failures was the lack of time for the construction of defensive lines in the annexed territories. 7% - found it difficult to answer. All this allows assuming that the knowledge of modern youth about the Great Patriotic War is very fragmentary and shallow.

Among others, an important question is: "Do you consider it necessary to study the "History" discipline in non-core universities?" And, unfortunately, only 14% consider the study of the "History" discipline in non-core universities necessary; 23% indicated that it is rather necessary to study this discipline, and 49% believe that it is not necessary. And only 14% paid attention to the fact that much in teaching a discipline depends on how interesting the teacher presents the material.

Conclusion

Summing up, it should be said that the attitude to the past is a factor in the formation of national cultural identity. It is necessary to abandon a biased attitude towards history when the historical epochs of certain stages are conventionally divided into "black" and "white". Yulia Kantor, Doctor of Historical Sciences, Professor of the Department of General History of the Herzen State Pedagogical University, in an interview with the correspondent Ksenia Snegireva pointed out very correctly: “History should not so much provide answers, but prompt questions. Documents should be published as much and as widely as possible. Patriotism is not a national idea, it is a feeling. And history a priori brings up this feeling. You need to know both the good and the bad, but without denying anything and analyzing everything. Patriotism is love for the Fatherland, and it is not always identical with love for the regime that is in power. History cannot be disfigured by ideology. Let's find out everything about ourselves, and evaluate history as it was: with colossal successes and disasters. And we love it the way it is, otherwise, we don't love”.

To form such an attitude towards the native history, it is necessary, at a minimum, to abandon the formal teaching of the course of national history in schools and universities. Nothing happens just

like that. If 75 years later, the West began to actively revise the archives and correct the past, then this is required by today's world politics aimed at redistributing borders and property. In our opinion, the most important task of history teachers is to forever "put" into the heads of young people a simple postulate: a historical fact is always interpreted, i.e. is stated and presented, especially in the media, according to a certain social order.

Of course, Victory Day is not the only theme that consolidates our society and our historical memory. But the memory of the Victory is one of the questions of history, which today evokes the "maximum consensus". Let us carefully preserve this memory, passing it on from generation to generation, so that our descendants will firmly remember: first of all, the Soviet people liberated the world from the "brown plague"! And it cannot be otherwise.

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