Citizenship Education as an Expression of Democratization and Nation-Building Processes in Russia

Over the past several decades, interest in and attention to the concept of citizenship and citizenship education has increased throughout Europe. An insightful observer might distinguish two interlinked discourses in the arguments around citizenship. One, that the political citizenship mostly related to the functioning of representative democracy has deteriorated, as people’s interest in voting and active participation in various political institutions—including the supranational ones—have for a longer time dissatisfied the politicians; the other, that Europe is undergoing a multifaceted transformation of identity. “Old” Europe is experiencing pressures rising from the growing immigration and increased national self-awareness of numerous ethnic groups. The collapse of the Soviet bloc has given birth to a great number of new states, which face the challenge of building a solid national identity amid globalization and internal diversity. What ties the two discourses together is the fear of disintegration, which arises from the growing gap between the elites and ordinary people as well as a crumbling of national unity.

Most European countries, often encouraged by intergovernmental organizations like the European Union, the Council of Europe and UNESCO, seem to hope that education can solve the problems described above. Russia represents an interesting case study: it is attempting to find a solution to the
challenge of political and national stabilization by way of education. The purpose of this article is to discuss how the processes of democratization and nation building have affected the notions of citizenship education as they are promoted by the Russian state. I examine citizenship education at the macro level through various educational policy documents published between 1992 and 2003. The assessment of these documents reveals how citizenship education policies have changed throughout the 1990s and up to 2003.

The main purpose of citizenship education is to connect individuals to their respective states and nations and to make them realize and accept certain roles, rights, and duties within the territorially defined political unit. Thus, citizenship education carried out by institutions of formal education represents one form of what is generally referred to as political socialization, the process by which “regimes attempt to justify their rule and motivate populations behind national goals . . . , whereby children are taught about, and encouraged to form attitudes supportive of, the political system and the nation” (Fairbrother 2003, p. 20).

Below, I argue that in Russia the notion of good citizenship reflected in the educational policies is complex and contains antithetical ideas. On the one hand, citizenship education is expected to foster democratization and to develop an active civil society. On the other hand, citizenship education has throughout the 1990s and especially visibly since 2000 contained a patriotic element, which can be interpreted as an attempt to construct Russia in national rather than political terms. Since the breakup of the Soviet Union, the balance between political and national elements has been rather unstable, which indicates that Russian citizenship is still in the making. The analysis of citizenship education policies offers an interesting view of how education is influenced by the changes in the country’s ideological space.

On citizenship and nationality

The definition of political socialization implies that citizenship education connects to both the state and the nation. Thus, what requires further clarification and what is of central importance to the content of the paper is the relationship between citizenship and nationality. Derek Heater has written that the “equation of nationality and citizenship has been the keystone in the construction of political stability in new states” (1990, p. 185). Affiliating nation with the political concept of citizenship meant that modern citizenship had to incorporate not only rights and duties but also a sense of tradition, community, and identity (Heater 2002, p. 99).

In the time when liberal democracy has become the leading political ideology, states are built on liberal democratic principles. The school of thought,
often referred to as liberal nationalism, argues that liberal-democratic principles work successfully only within nation-states (see Kymlicka and Straehle 1999). These theorists aim at explaining the relation between democracy and nationhood and thus they shed fresh light on transitional or unconsolidated democracies, such as Russia, where processes of democratization and national reconstruction take place simultaneously.

Since the breakup of the USSR Russia has put democratization on its priority list. Vera Tolz (1998a) argues that since the beginning of the 1990s the Russian Federation and other former Soviet republics have gone through two important processes: nation building (redefining the notion of the people and their national identity) and state building (redefining state boundaries in the way that would be acceptable to various political parties, and creating new political institutions legitimate in the eyes of the people). These two interlinked processes have an immense impact on how democracy is implemented.

Juan Linz and Alfred Stepan claim that “democracy is a form of governance of a modern state” (1996, p. 17, [emphasis added]). The authors point out that the question of the legitimacy of the state has been largely neglected in political literature (ibid., p. 26). Referring to Robert Dahl, Linz and Stepan claim that agreement about the state, that is, the democratic unit, should precede the establishment of democratic institutions (ibid.). Thus the coexistence of various conflicting visions of Russia’s political unit all throughout the 1990s has undermined further consolidation of democratic institutions (see Dunlop 1994, Matveeva 1997, Simonsen 1996 and 2001, Tolz 1998b).

Second, our contemporary understanding of democracy implies that it is about people exercising control over the decision-making process. Democracy requires identification with the state on behalf of the people living on its territory (Linz and Stepan 1996, p. 7). Canovan (1998, p. 23) has written that “the existence of a professional bureaucratic state is not enough for political legitimacy . . . it should be our state: the political institutions should belong to and express the people” (emphasis original). Furthermore, the author claims that democracy requires a stronger bond between the people than an autocratic form of government (Canovan 1998, p. 23).

What follows is the need for the people to develop a bond with the state before democracy can develop. This issue is critical for states that have undergone a redrawing of national borders and critical changes in national identity. Liberal nationalists have raised questions about the nature of the people. Margaret Canovan (ibid., p. 16) argues that democratic theorists have taken the existence of a solid people for granted. She writes that theories of democracy are developed on a tacit assumption about a stable nation-state. That is why democratic theories have failed to acknowledge the need for collective
identity for democratic aspirations to make sense (ibid., p. 20).

Why is a solid nation a prerequisite of democracy? Liberal democracy requires participation in the elections as well as deliberation of political issues. The practicing of deliberative democracy requires trust. There should be trust that others, for example the parliamentarians, are genuinely interested in considering everyone’s opinions. More so, trust is needed for people to respect and act upon the electoral results no matter who has won the vote (Kymlicka and Straehle 1999). National trust should prevail over trust for one’s religion or ethnicity “to make possible equal laws, public probity, and government that is effective but impartial” (Canovan 1998, p. 44).3

Second, genuine deliberation, liberal nationalists argue, is not possible without a common language. “When nation-states promote a common national language . . . they can be seen as enabling a more robust form of deliberative democracy” (Kymlicka and Straehle 1999). More so, shared national language ensures dignity and a strong national identity of all people regardless of class or occupation. And third, democracy relies on people’s solidarity and on the ability to act as a collective people (Canovan 1998, p. 44). Nationhood, being sustained by a vision of a common heritage and future, ensures that solidarity continues throughout generations, making political units more stable and providing immunity against humans’ mortality.

As a consequence, the feeling of national identity is indispensable. More so, it should be formed before democracy can consolidate. In Russia, democratization and national reconstruction have started simultaneously, which gave rise to various problems. For Linz and Stepan (1996) nation building and democracy have conflicting logic, especially when nation building is based on the preferential treatment of one cultural group over others. This question is especially difficult in the case of highly heterogeneous states such as the Russian Federation. Of course, one could argue that nation building does not need to take an exclusive form. Nevertheless, a prominent student of nationalism, A.D. Smith, has argued that modern nations were built around an “ethnic core that continues to perform a vital role in providing the nation with the historical depth that modern politics need if they are to function properly” (in Canovan 1998, p. 57, emphasis added). The problem, therefore, is that nation building is always to some extent discriminatory. What makes nation building more liberal is progress in democratization (Kuzio 2001).

The controversy could be illustrated as follows: democracy requires a nation, but the process of nation building is always to some degree biased and thus at odds with the tenets of democracy. In Russia, this controversy is deepened by the fact that there has not been one clear vision of the Russian nation and the very definition of democracy has been fiercely contested.
The system of education is an integral part of the society. One of the central aims of education since the establishment of state education has been to prepare future citizens to function in the state. Education is always affected by serious social and political changes because they redefine educational value-basis, goals, and contents. Thus education is also vulnerable to institutional and ideological inconsistency. In the following I will show how citizenship education policies have been affected by mutually contradicting processes of democratization and nation building in Russia.

Citizenship education policies

In January 2003, the Russian Ministry of Education published a letter titled “On the Citizenship Education of Comprehensive School Students of the Russian Federation.” This document established goals for citizenship education and listed other relevant materials that defined citizenship education earlier. These data form the core of my analysis. I also examined more general documents that define the goals and values for the whole system of education. Then, utilizing available online databases of Russian educational legislation, I enlarged the set of documentary sources via keyword searches. The set of documents analyzed for this paper is not complete, but it is sufficiently rich to provide a general picture about citizenship education policies in Russia.

First of all, an important change in the understanding of education has taken place. The “Federal Development Program of Education” adopted in 2000 states that a fundamental task is to reestablish the unity of schooling [obuchenie] and upbringing [vospitanie] within the education system. These two educational functions were strongly interlinked in the Soviet education. However, after the collapse of the Soviet system vospitanie was largely dismissed as too ideological and the Education Act of 1992 stated that the family is primarily responsible for children’s upbringing.

Nevertheless, as early as 1994 we find references to vospitanie, intensifying toward the late 1990s. In 1999 the Ministry of Education adopted “The Upbringing Development Program for 1999–2001,” followed by another program for 2002–4. The program argues that families have been deeply affected by socioeconomic instability, which has lowered their capacity to carry out socializing functions. In addition, it stresses that the prohibition of media censorship, ethnic conflicts, and the new role of religion make educational institutions the main sources of upbringing and social integration. According to the program, citizenship and patriotic upbringing are among the key goals of state educational policies.

Two discourses are constantly intertwined in the citizenship education
policy documents: democratization and national formation. “The Development Strategy of Historical and Social Science Education in Comprehensive Schools” (1994) argues that the establishment of a democratic state and Russia’s revival require a thorough renewal of education in history and social sciences. In order to foster democracy, the document stresses education in the Russian constitution, human rights, citizenship, and respect for the individual and ethnic cultures. National consolidation, on the other hand, should be fostered by teaching Russian history and encouraging patriotism. The document acknowledges the importance of teaching about ethnic, national \( \text{obshchenatsional'nye, rossiiskie} \) and universal values, but the primacy is given to the national ones. Thus, we could argue that the aim is to strengthen national identity and to lessen the influence of the local/ethnic identities.

Importantly, citizenship and patriotism are presented as separate terms. This division is traceable throughout all analyzed documents. Later in this article I argue that the increasing gap between these terms forms one of the central conflicts in contemporary Russian citizenship education.

The emphasis on law studies is evident in the documents published between 1994 and 1999 (see also Morozova 2000; Vaillant 2001). Numerous ministerial letters and decrees were issued on the topic of constitutional studies, studies in electoral process and studies in human rights. For example, the ministerial letter “On Citizenship and Legal Education of Students in Comprehensive Schools of the Russian Federation” (1996) highlights the need for legal knowledge. It refers to President Yeltsin’s speech on 6 March 1996, when he stated that one of the prerequisites in the transition to a legal state is the legal education of citizens. The document puts emphasis on building a democratic legal state and a civil society and pays less attention to national identity. Citizenship and legal education are said to unite schooling and upbringing in an inseparable way. They are expected to begin directly at the pre- and primary school level. However, the contents suggested for these early stages combine knowledge of democracy and human rights with knowledge about the Russian state, its symbols and laws. In the later documents we can observe that the contents for primary school have been entirely refocused on patriotism and national consciousness, leaving democratic contents to later stages.

The ministerial letter “On the Citizenship Education of Comprehensive School Students of the Russian Federation” (2003) states that the aim of citizenship education is “upbringing citizens for life in a democratic state and civil society.” The citizen should possess certain knowledge, skills, and democratic values and be prepared to participate in the sociopolitical life of the school and local communities. This document, referring to “The Concept
of Modernization of Russian Education” (2001), strengthens the upbringing function of education. Citizenship education is organized into three levels. The first level, associated with primary education, is clearly concentrated on basic moral values (without stating what these are) and on developing citizens of the Fatherland. The choice of the term “Fatherland” would imply that the main emphasis is on prompting patriotic feelings. The level of secondary education includes the history of the Fatherland, as well as respect for law and knowledge of human rights. The third, upper-secondary level focuses on human rights and political, legal, social, and economical processes.

The ministerial letter published in 2003 emphasizes the importance of forming a democratic school ethos, which is expected to provide students with participative and decision-making opportunities. Interesting innovations include: priority to the rights of the individual, which should become part of the whole educational process; democratization of school administration, turning school into an open community; students’ participation in decision making concerned with school, local, and social issues; and support for open discussions about school matters. This finding demonstrates that citizenship education has acquired a new participative element. In the earlier documents, the educational function of real experience was also mentioned, but not in such an extensive and a relatively well-defined manner.

The document also pays attention to patriotic education. It argues that citizenship competences are inseparable from Russian and world cultural values. Upbringing should be based on sociocultural and historical achievements of the multinational Russian nation, accomplishments of other countries, and cultural and historical traditions of the home area. Subjects such as Russian language and literature are said to contain rich materials on the heritage of “our country.” They help to foster national consciousness [samosoznanie] and to form a patriotic feeling. At the same time, all documents express concern about the “harmonization” of national and ethnocultural relations and the preservation of and support for languages and cultures of all nations of the Russian Federation (The National Doctrine of Education of the Russian Federation 2000). Thus two tendencies are present: to develop a civic national Russian identity and to ensure ethnical heterogeneity by allowing cultural subgroups to maintain and pass on their traditions and languages.

Despite the document on the value of democratization, the tendency from the late 1990s has been to stress national identity in educational policies. This is demonstrated by the fact that in 2001 the Ministry of Education issued a letter titled “On the Official Rituals Related to the Use of State Symbols in Comprehensive Schools” and in 2002 the ministry distributed other
recommendations that aim at improving teaching about the national symbols (“About the Organization of Upbringing Activities Aimed at Familiarization with the History and Implication of Official State Symbols of the Russian Federation and Their Popularization”). The Ministry of Education classifies this activity as an important element of patriotic and citizenship upbringing, which is expected to guarantee generational continuity and to ensure social unity. More so, in 2003 the ministry established a Coordinative Council on the patriotic upbringing of young people. The work of the Council is directly related to “The State Program of Patriotic Education” (2001).

The program and “The Concept of Patriotic Upbringing” (2003) that followed could be seen as a first attempt to establish a coherent state policy in patriotic education. “The Concept of Patriotic Upbringing” offers a definition of patriotism: love and loyalty to one’s homeland, a determination to serve its interests, as well as a readiness to protect the Fatherland up to the point of self-sacrifice. Among the documents analyzed, the state program is the first policy document to define patriotic upbringing: it is a systematic activity of state authorities and other organizations aiming at the development of patriotic consciousness, sense of loyalty to the Fatherland, willingness to fulfill one’s civic duty, and constitutional responsibilities to defend the interests of the homeland.

In line with “The Upbringing Development Program” (1999), the document legitimizes the state’s involvement and core role in the upbringing process by arguing that economic disintegration, social differentiation, and the erosion of spiritual values have harmed social consciousness and lowered Russia’s cultural and educational potential to raise patriotism. The traditional patriotic consciousness is said to have disappeared, while in some places patriotism has turned into nationalism. The true understanding of the value of internationalism is also believed to have vanished. As a consequence, patriotic upbringing is expected to alleviate if not fully eliminate these harmful developments.

It is not clear how the program will affect the formal system of education. It is evident that the main role is to be played by the extracurricular activities of various clubs, associations, and unions; there is very little mention of comprehensive schools. When looking at the action plan, the following measures are most likely to stimulate patriotic upbringing in formal education: lessons of courage organized together with army and fleet veterans, contests, conferences, and students’ written work on Russia’s heroic past and major events in the life of the nation, and better evaluation of humanities and upbringing programs of educational institutions. It is likely that only increased evaluation measures will push educational institutions to pay greater attention to patriotic work.
“The State Program of Patriotic Education” (2001) argues that patriotism is the clearest features of the Russian character. Such claims can be interpreted as an attempt to make patriotism the uniting idea behind the Russian nation. In addition, “The Concept of Patriotic Upbringing” (2003) argues that Russian patriotism is inseparable from the idea of internationalism, but is alien to nationalism, separatism, or cosmopolitanism. Thus the patriotic idea aims at uniting the Russian nation on a multinational basis, but ensures that there is a distinction between Russia and the outside world. With the help of patriotic upbringing Russia should turn into a superpower. The document stresses the responsibility of people to serve the country. In other words, patriotism is constructed as a one-way relationship, where the state has the exclusive right to determine the direction of this interaction.

Discussion: citizen of a democratic state and/or patriot of Russia?

Above I examined how citizenship education has been affected by democratization and nation-building processes taking place in contemporary Russia. I will now summarize the findings and connect them to some theoretical assumptions.

The processes of democratization and national reformation led to the renewal of history and social studies curricula. In the beginning of the 1990s, citizenship education documents emphasized legal education, which was expected to contribute to the transformation of Russia into a legal state. The latest document, “On the Citizenship Education of Comprehensive School Students of the Russian Federation” (2003), shows that democratic citizenship education has developed into a wider concept that includes knowledge, attitudes, and real experiences of democracy. The emphasis on the democratic school ethos and active involvement are parallel to how citizenship education has lately been approached in the West. On the basis of these findings we should acknowledge that from the beginning the Russian education system was expected to play an important role in the democratization of the country.

However, democratic education is confronted by the growing emphasis on patriotic education, which has been recently promoted to the position of an official state program with an extensive financial backing. It is obvious that the patriotic discourse appeared as early as 1994, justified in terms of the disintegration of the nation and a growing gap between the people and the state. The documentary analysis traced attempts at reducing the regional ethnic influences on the educational value basis, contents, and even the physical space of educational institutions. This development can be interpreted as a
reaction to the power of ethnic regional authorities brought by the process of decentralization. For all these reasons patriotic upbringing should be interpreted and analyzed as an evolving process.

In particular, two developments should be considered. First, in the early 1990s patriotism was articulated in a vague manner and was only associated with consolidating the disintegrating nation. As Gregory Simons has stated, attempts to reintroduce patriotism “amounted to nothing” (2002, p. 14). Now patriotism and patriotic education have a much clearer definition and a significant legislative, conceptual, and financial basis. Second, patriotism has acquired a stronger connection to the state and is constructed as an uncritical one-way relationship between the individual and the authority.9

The policy documents reveal that contemporary citizenship education consists of two conflicting elements. On the one hand, citizenship education is expected to develop citizenship, which is associated with building a democratic state and an active civil society. At the same time, patriotic education aims at consolidating the nation, strengthening the state, and bringing up a citizenry aware of its responsibilities and ready to serve the country. As a result, the documents construct two opposite concepts, the citizen and the patriot. The following picture, while to some extent simplifying the content of the documents, demonstrates how citizen and patriot are built in an antithetical way:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Citizen:</th>
<th>Patriot:</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>democracy</td>
<td>nation building</td>
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<tr>
<td>civil society</td>
<td>state</td>
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<tr>
<td>active participation</td>
<td>subordination</td>
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<td>pluralism</td>
<td>consensus</td>
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<td>rights</td>
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<td>individual</td>
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<td>reason</td>
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However, at least three aspects unite the citizen and the patriot in Russia. First, both adhere to a multinational ideology; the documents do not express any kind of ethnic Russian nationalism. Second, all documents are silent about encouraging critical analytical skills. Finally, citizenship education is mostly concerned with “intra”-Russian rather than European or global identification. The last two points are contrary to the Western understanding of citizenship education, which puts stronger emphasis on critical skills and European and global dimensions of citizenship. In this respect we could suggest that the current Russian government has resumed the Soviet idea of “inner” internationalism.
As has been illustrated, Russia is facing the challenge of reconciling the construction of democracy with the building of the national unity. The policy makers today seem to follow the argument introduced by the liberal nationalism school of thought that democracy requires a stable national identity. However, the politicians do not acknowledge the inherent tension between democratization and nation building, which, in the Russian case, has resulted in the antithetical construction of the notions of citizen and patriot.

In the situation where educational documents contain such obvious contradictions, meso- and micro-level actors become extremely important as interpreters and implementers of macro-level controversial instructions. As a consequence, it is impossible to estimate whether governmental orders have any consistent resonance in educational institutions. It remains to be seen whether the two antithetical constructions will continue to coexist, leaving the educational institutions to choose between patriotism and democracy. However, it is also possible that the authorities will try to merge the two concepts by making patriotism more democratic or citizenship far more patriotic.

The same challenges seem to occur in the wider European context. For example, European politicians believe that by encouraging a unified European identity for the members of the European Union they can increase people’s interest and participation in the EU’s political institutions and thus secure the proper functioning of European democracy. However, while European citizenship is still an ambivalent term, there is a danger that any unifying idea will exclude some fragments of the European population and hence violate core democratic principles. Therefore, the question that most of the European countries and the EU confront could be put in the following manner: If the crumbling of national unity and the vulnerability of the common European identity endanger the functioning of democracy, could democracy be reconsolidated on any other grounds?

Notes

1. Citizenship education is embedded in the educational practices in at least three forms. First, it can be a separate subject taught at different school levels (in Russia this subject is usually referred to as grazhdanovedenie). Second, it can be a cross-curricula theme integrated explicitly and implicitly into various subjects, such as social studies, history, and mother tongue. Third, citizenship education can be conceived of as an educational ideology, which contains notions of the kind of citizens the school is expected to nurture. In this paper I mostly adhere to the last definition.

2. The republican model of democracy, in contrast with the liberal democracy, stresses the primacy of public duties over private interests and explicitly puts great emphasis on communal loyalty to the polity. Liberal democracy, whose starting point is the individual and his/her rights, often neglects the role of communal identity. Re-
searchers such as Margaret Canovan (1998) argue that even liberal democratic theories are based on the assumption of some sort of a common identity.

The term “nation-state” is very controversial because most states are comprised of various national groups. More so, building a nation is a never-ending process, which is the reason why Kymlicka and Straehle suggest using the terms “nation-building states” or “nationalizing” states instead of “nation-states.” At the same time, concepts such as “nationalizing states” point out that nation-states are not natural phenomena. They are “the product of careful nation-building policies, adopted by the state in order to diffuse and strengthen a sense of nationhood” (Kymlicka and Straehle 1999). Michael Billig (2002) has adopted the term “banal nationalism” to describe how national sentiments are maintained on the daily basis in the so-called established nations.

3. It is not clear why Canovan insists on trust in the nation to supersede trust in other collective arrangements. Linz and Stepan (1996, p. 35) are convinced that people are perfectly capable to maintain multiple identifications. This ability makes democracy in multinational states possible. Thus one could rephrase Canovan in the following way: national identity should be at least as strong as other (sub)-identities.


5. The term citizenship [grazhdanstvennost'] is widely used but rarely defined. Morozova, in her short analysis of citizenship education in Russia writes that grazhdanstvennost’ refers to “a human quality, articulated in the readiness and ability to participate actively in the society; it is a feeling of share in the society’s affairs” (2000, p. 31).

6. The document expresses concerns about the “deformation” of interethnic relations due to the unbalanced representation of national and ethnic features in regionally published textbooks.


8. See, for example, the Finnish “Civil Participation Policy Programme” (www.valtioneuvosto.fi/vn/liston/base.lsp?r=40242&k=en/), the Council of Europe’s Education for Democratic Citizenship project (www.coe.int/edc/), and the European Union’s Learning for Active Citizenship report (www.europa.eu.int/comm/education/archive/citizen/citz_en.html).

9. The need for patriotic education is also supported by the Russian people. In 2004 The Public Opinion Foundation (FOM) conducted a survey on patriotic upbringing. The majority of respondents (89 percent) stated that more attention should be drawn to patriotic upbringing, while only 5 percent disagreed. Most respondents favored restoring the Soviet experience of patriotic upbringing (62 percent against 22 percent) (Vovk 2004). Yet 55 percent could not tell exactly what experiences should be transferred (Public Opinion Foundation); 46 percent of respondents think that patriotic upbringing means fostering love, respect, and pride for the Motherland, and feelings of loyalty and responsibility for the country; 11 percent replied that patriotic upbringing is first of all education for army service and defense of the Fatherland.
However, participants tended to interpret lack of patriotism in terms of social problems rather than insufficient ideological education. In other words, they thought that a certain well-being guaranteed by the state is required to produce patriotism; no governmental measures to foster patriotism will bring any effect unless accompanied by changes in the general sociopolitical context (Vovk 2004). The poll did not contain questions on “The Program of Patriotic Upbringing.”

References


**Documentary Sources**


“Strategiia razvitiia istoricheskogo i obchestvovedcheskogo obrazovaniia v obcheobrazovatel`nikh uchrezhdeniiakh” [The Development Strategy of Historical and Social Science Education in Comprehensive Schools], 28 December 1994, no. 24/1.

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