

תקציר הרצאה של ד"ר מרינה רמניק, אוניברסיטת תל אביב, במסגרת פגישה של  
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בנושא:

## **"Between the two worlds: Recent and Veteran Young Immigrants from Russia Rethinking Their Identity"**

Between 1989 and 2004 more than a million people immigrated to Israel from the former Soviet Union. They are usually called "Russians" by native Israelis who often view this group as homogeneous ignoring social, cultural, educational and ethnic differences between the members of the group and the time of their arrival to Israel. The last factor is very important not only because the initial stage of immigration is the most problematic mainly due to the socioeconomic problems, but as well because of the quality differences in the immigration from the FSU in early 90-s and after 1995-6. It is difficult to draw the line but the tendency is quite evident – the percent of academic degree holders from big industrial and cultural centers was much higher in the first group as well as the percent of Jews.

The present study involved two groups of participants: adolescents who immigrated to Israel from 1989 to 1995 and those who came from 2000 to 2002 i.e. lived in the country not less than two and not more than four years. The first group consisted of the one hundred twenty two participants and the second – of one hundred forty. The data was collected via semi-structured interviews.

The main task was to investigate the process of forging a new identity, to find out if there are substantial differences in the self-definition of the teen-agers in these two groups and what they have in common regarding their identity and their perception of being Israeli, Russian and Jewish.

### **Results**

Members of both groups view their Russian roots as something completely positive. They share very positive attitude towards Russian culture and language, many of them believe that due to Russian origin they are more Europeans and hence more civilized and more cultural than the locals.

At the same time in terms of group self-identification the "veterans" consider themselves as all three – Jews, Israelis and Russians and in many cases see no contradiction between them.

The recent newcomers feel mainly Russian, less Jewish and almost not Israeli. The latter can be explained by the short period of time they spend in Israel, but the first two are quite revealing. These findings prove their strong Russian identity and hesitant attitude to Jewishness, since many of them were brought up in Russian milieu by non-Jewish families. "Russianess" means for all the adolescents celebration of Russian holidays and eating Russian foods, belonging to Russian culture, though they do not know much about it, but only the recent immigrants connected being Russian to knowing Russian language

The most interesting is the perception of Jewishness. The members of the first group see it as something "build-in" completely divorced from language, culture religion and tradition. They inherited this approach from their parents and grand parents, who were assimilated by the Soviet regime but still felt Jewish. For this reason it is easy for the

teen-agers to feel Jewish – they were just born this way, it does not demand anything from them.

For many second group members being Jewish means something strange and unknown, very often connected with tradition and religion, and since the vast majority of them are secular the adolescents find it difficult to identify themselves as Jews.

Both groups are agreed on the definition of Israeli as one who first and foremost speaks Hebrew, that is why the newcomers mainly do not feel Israelis.

### Conclusions

Despite the substantial differences in the self-definition the Russian identity in both groups is very strong. It enables us to speak about very strong Russian component of Israeli society not only now, but in the nearest future.