Lecture No. 1. What is Russia? (Introductory Lecture)

Target Audience: 1st-year international students.

Course Volume: 8 lectures, 8 practical sessions (seminars).

Format: Combined lecture block (merging the topics "Russia: Facts and Figures" and "Symbols of Russia").

Outline

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Part 1. Introduction to the Course "Fundamentals of Russian Statehood"

1.1. Welcome Address and Introduction

Dear students! We are delighted to welcome you to Russia. For many of you, our country is an entirely new world that you are just beginning to discover.

Russia is a country with more than a thousand years of history. Over the centuries, many generations have created a unique culture and a distinct civilisation here. The main goal of our course is to help you understand how Russia is structured, what values unite its people, how its state system functions, and what place the country occupies in the modern world.

1.2. Course Structure: Lectures and Practical Sessions (Seminars)

The course consists of **8 lectures** and **8 practical sessions (seminars)**. Each lecture corresponds to a practical session where you will discuss the covered material, complete creative tasks, and deliver presentations.

	What is Russia? *(Introductory Lecture)*	**Official and Informal Symbols of Russia**
	The Civilisational Approach: Opportunities and Limitations	**Classical and Modern Versions of the Civilisational Approach**

	Philosophical Understanding of Russia as a Civilisation	**Russian Civilisation in the History of Domestic Thought**
	The Russian Worldview and Values of Russian Civilisation	**Values as a Factor of Social Development**
	Constitutional Principles and Separation of Powers	**Fundamentals of the Constitutional System**
	Strategic Planning: National Projects and State Programmes	**Strategic Planning in the RF: National Projects and Programmes**
	Current Challenges and Development Issues in Russia	**Russia in World Politics and International Relations**
	Scenarios for the Development of Russian Civilisation	

Part 2. Russia: Facts, Figures, and Geography

- **Official Name:** Russian Federation (Russia).
- **Territory:** 17.1 million square kilometres. Russia is the largest country on Earth, covering 1/9 of the world's landmass. It is twice the size of the USA and 50 times larger than Germany.
- **Extent:** From west to east, the country spans 9,000 km, and from north to south,

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- **Geographical Location:** Russia is located in Eurasia: 25% of its territory is in

Europe, and 75% is in Asia. The Ural Mountains serve as the natural border between them.

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- **Capital:** Moscow (population: over 12.5–13 million). It is the political, economic,

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- **State Borders:** Russia borders 14 countries by land (and two by sea: the USA and

Japan). The total length of land borders exceeds 20,000 km. Russia also has an exclave in the west: Kaliningrad Oblast.

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- **Population Size:** Around 146–147 million people (9th place in the world).

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- **Multi-ethnic Nation:** Over 190 ethnic groups reside in Russia, speaking more than

200 languages and dialects.

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- **Official (State) Language:** Russian. It serves as the language of inter-ethnic communication.
- **Religious Diversity:** Russia is a multi-faith state. About 50% of believers identify as Orthodox Christians, and around 20% practice Islam. Historically, Buddhists, Jews, Catholics, and representatives of other faiths also live in Russia.

- **Rivers and Lakes:** Russia has over 2 million lakes and 120 thousand rivers. The longest river is the Lena (4,294 km). The country is home to Lake Baikal — the deepest lake in the world, containing roughly 20% of the world's unfrozen freshwater reserves.
- **Mountains:** The highest point in Russia and all of Europe is Mount Elbrus in the Caucasus (5,642 m).

Part 3. Symbols of Russia

State and cultural symbols represent a "code" through which one can understand a nation's history and character. Symbols are divided into **official (state)** and **informal (cultural-historical)**.

3.1. Official State Symbols

Official symbols were approved by Federal Constitutional Laws in December 2000.

- Consists of a red shield featuring a golden double-headed eagle.
- **History:** The double-headed eagle first appeared in Russia in the 15th century during the reign of Grand Prince Ivan III following his marriage to the Byzantine princess Sophia Palaiologina. It symbolises the continuity of traditions and the country's orientation towards both the West and the East.
- **Details:** Three crowns of Peter the Great above the eagle's heads symbolise the sovereignty of the state and its components. The sceptre and orb in its talons represent power and unity. On the eagle's chest is an inescutcheon depicting a horseman (St George the Victorious) slaying a dragon with a spear (symbolising the victory of good over evil and the defence of the Fatherland).

- Consists of a rectangular panel with three equal horizontal stripes: **white**, **blue**, and **red** (2:3 ratio).
- **History:** It first appeared during the reign of Tsar Alexis on the warship *Oryol* (*Eagle*, 1669) and was officially introduced by Peter I at the end of the 17th century.
- **Meaning of the Colours (generally accepted):**

  - **Red:** courage, valour, historical memory, and love for the Motherland.

- A solemn musical composition performed on official occasions.
- The music was composed by A. V. Alexandrov, and the modern lyrics were written by S. V. Mikhalkov. The anthem's lyrics reflect the unity of peoples, the richness of nature, the memory of ancestors, and faith in the country's future.

3.2. Informal (Cultural-Historical) Symbols

Informal symbols form the "cultural code" of the nation — traditional images by which Russia is recognised worldwide.

- **Natural Symbols:** The *birch tree* (symbol of Russian nature, poetry, and beauty) and the *camomile* (symbol of family, love, and fidelity).
- **Symbols of Hospitality and Daily Life:**
  - **Samovar:** A device for boiling water and making tea, symbolising family warmth, a hospitable welcome, and friendly conversation.
  - **Valenki:** Traditional warm winter boots made of felted wool.

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- **Musical Instruments:** The *balalaika* (a three-stringed plucked instrument) and the *garmon* (button accordion).
- **Symbolic Animals:** The *bear* — "master of the forest", personifying strength, good nature, bravery, and the ability to protect its home.
- **Architecture and Traditions:** The *Russian izba* (log cabin) and *Russian stove* (the centre of warmth, comfort, and family life), as well as the *Moscow Kremlin* and *St Basil's Cathedral*.

Part 4. Self-Control and Discussion Questions

1. What is the area of Russia's territory and how many time zones does it cover?
2. Which confessions and ethnic groups historically inhabit the territory of the Russian Federation?
3. When did the double-headed eagle first appear as a symbol of power in Russian history?
4. What do the colours of the Russian state flag symbolise?
5. What is the difference between official and cultural-historical (informal) symbols of a country?