

Usage 6—Nationality and Citizenship

Definitions

To properly understand what Eastern Europeans tell you about their nationality and citizenship you have to know how they understand these concepts. Let's start with some definitions.

Nationality (народность)—membership in a large and widely recognized group which is united by multiple factors such as common ancestry, common language, and common culture. An individual's nationality is determined by birth and cannot be changed. It is sometimes possible for a family's nationality to change as each generation becomes more assimilated into a local majority nationality.

Citizenship (гражданство)—a legal arrangement between a person and a state (such as France, Russian, or the United States) under which the state grants rights and the citizen agrees to perform duties for the state. A person can apply for and be granted citizenship after meeting specific legal requirements.

Based on the above definitions, Eastern Europeans see nationality and citizenship as distinctly different concepts. A person can be a Russian citizen, live in Russia, and speak Russian without being a Russian. Another person born, raised, and living in a neighboring country might still be considered a Russian because his parents or grandparents are Russian.

Nationality

Nationality is generally indicated by applying a suffix to the name of a tribe's patriarch, or to the name of a place from which the people lived, or to a descriptive word:

Tribe	Member	Member (female)	Members (plural)
Израи́иль (a patriarch)	израи́льтянин	Израи́льтя́нка	Израи́льтя́не
?	евре́й	евре́йка	евре́и
нем*	не́мец	не́мка	не́мцы
Рус	ру́сский	ру́сская	ру́сские
Христос	христиа́нин	христиа́нка	христиа́не

*The word “нем” means “unable to speak intelligibly”. It was originally used to describe Westerners in general since their speech (unlike that of Belorussians, Ukrainians, or Poles) was completely unintelligible. In modern usage it is the accepted term for Germans.

Some examples:

Он израи́льтянин.

He is an Israelite.

Он ру́сский.

He is an ethnic Russian.

Он христиа́нин.

He is a christian.

Она́ христиа́нка.

She is a Christian woman.

Они́ христиа́не.

They are Christians.

Вам письмо́ от христиа́нина.

Here is a letter for you from a Christian.

Здесь нет христиа́нок.

There are no Christian women here.

Здесь нет христиа́н.

There are no Christians here.

Он писа́л письмо́ христиа́нам.

He wrote a letter to the Christians.

Usage 6—Nationality and Citizenship

Citizenship

We can indicate someone's citizenship by adding suffixes to the name of the city (or in the modern world state) to which he belongs. For example:

City or State	Citizen	Citizen (female)	Citizens (plural)
А́нглия	англича́нин	англича́нка	англича́не
Израи́ль (modern)	израильтя́нин	Израильтя́нка	Израильтя́не
Испа́ния	испа́нец	испа́нка	испа́нцы
Ита́лия	италья́нец	италья́нка	италья́нцы
Рим	римля́нин	римля́нка	римля́не
Росси́я	россия́нин	россия́нка	россия́не

Notice also that the suffixes change to indicate gender and number. After that they are declined according to the usual rules. Some examples:

Он америка́нец.	He is an American.
Она англича́нка.	She is a Englishwoman.
Он израильтя́нин.	His is an Israeli.
Он римля́нин.	He is a Roman.
Она римля́нка.	She is a Roman woman.
Они римля́не.	They are Romans.
письмо́ от римля́н	letter from the Romans
письмо́ римля́нам	letter to the Romans
Он россия́нин.	He is a Russian citizen.

In English we capitalize both Rome and Roman, Russia and Russian. In Russian only the place name is capitalized, but not the word for its citizens.

As a side note, the Russian word for citizen uses one of the suffixes shown above. Just as the English word “citizen” contains the word “city”, “гражданин” contains a slightly altered form of “град” which in turn is an old fashioned form of “город” (city):

City	Citizen	Citizen (female)	Citizens (plural)
град	гражда́нин	гражда́нка	гражда́не

Political Ideals of Nationality

Democratic ideals provide a powerful incentive to see everyone living within the borders of a state as belonging to a single nationality. Where such efforts have proven successful, the nationality may be named for the state rather than for a patriarch or tribe.

State	Citizen	Citizen (female)	Citizens (plural)
Аме́рика	америка́нец	америка́нка	америка́нцы
Фра́нция	францу́з	францу́женка	францу́зы