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NEW APPROACHES TO INTERNATIONAL MIGRATION MANAGEMENT IN RUSSIA IN EARLY 2000s

Abstract

In the last decade, international migration has become one of the most important factors of demographic development in Russia: net migration has half compensated dramatic natural decrease of population. However, all the attempts to work out a reasonable long-term government concept of migration policy in the sphere of international migration or at least a clear position of the State with regard to current and future international migration trends have failed. Nowadays, one of the most topical issues for Russia is to outline its migration management strategy that would take into consideration economic, demographic, ethnic and other dimensions of its development. This strategy should be based on proper understanding of migration as an advantage for Russia but not the evil that is to be repressed by governmental institutions. However, within the contemporary political situation in Russia and in the world when struggle against terrorism is often prevailing over other interests, attitude towards migration is shifting to suspicious and even negative one. The paper demonstrates contradictions in international migration management in Russia, with special emphasis on its trends after September 2001 and September 2004.

I. Migration Policy in the Post-Soviet Russia

During the last ten-fifteen years after disintegration of the USSR and appearance of new borders – international but still transparent – at the post-Soviet space, on the one hand, and facilitating entry/departure regime, on the other hand, Russia was facing the phenomenon of international migration in all its diversity. It appeared unawares for Russian authorities. Due to political and ideological reasons the country had no experience in free *international* migration management. For decades, migration policy in Russia has been focused on management of *internal* migration flows within the country while international migration has been regulated primarily by administrative interdictions and restrictions.

The government had to react urgently upon multi-million flows of forced migrants: their admission, reception, employment, accommodation, integration, etc. So,

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there was an obvious lack of possibility to concentrate on elaboration of the general State concept of migration policy taking into consideration all the varieties of migrants' categories entering Russia and departing from it. Under the circumstances of deep economic crisis, lack of clear economic development strategy, lack of skilled personnel in the field, the attempts to to work out a reasonable state *concept of migration policy* or at least definite state position regarding current and future international migration trends appeared unsuccessful.

Impulsive reaction of governmental institutions to the growth of large-scale spontaneous migration flows that have 'suddenly' gained international character was negative. Its principal idea was the following: both the mass inflow of population from the ex-Soviet republics and the outflow of Russian citizens abroad are undesirable and even dangerous for the country.

Another reaction was unlikely to happen. Spontaneous migration flows became an additional destabilizing factor under conditions of deepening economic and political crisis. By that moment in Russia there were no comprehensive studies in international migration and its interrelation with economic development, i.e. fundamental works that could be the background for long-term reasonable governmental strategy in the sphere of migration. There was also the lack of experts who were competent in migration management. (Regretfully, nowadays also very little attention is paid to training and re-training of migration management personnel).

A serious mistake in developing new inter-state relations between ex-USSR countries was the lack of guaranties of basic civil rights succession for persons who wished to move from one former Soviet state to another. The moment when there was an urgent need to sign bilateral agreements on guaranties of social and legal rights for "ethnic minorities" living in new sovereign states, has been missed. The basic role of Russia in initiation of this process would be natural because there are tens of millions ethnic Russians that have moved to the territories of present sovereign states during the period of united country.

However, the scale of migration was increasing; it necessitated management by the State. In 1992, the Federal Migration Service (FMS) was founded. Its activities were mainly directed at *refugees and forced migrants*, in accordance with migration situation of the time. However, there was no distinction between in-Russian forced migrants who were running away from "hot points" and ethnic conflicts, on the one hand, and interna-

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tional migrants who arrived to Russia from neighboring ex-USSR states, on the other hand. Other forms of international migration, first of all economic/labor migration, dropped out from sight.

In 2000, when the FMS was abolished, the responsibility for migration management was transferred to the Ministry of Federation, National and Migration Policy. Even the title of the Ministry demonstrates that migration policy was regarded primarily as an internal matter. International migration was again in a subordinate position. One year later, in October 2001, the Ministry was restructured, and since February 2002 the management of migration together with migration policy is under the Ministry of Interior. This time, combating illegal migration, mainly in the context of its threat to national security, has become the core principle of migration management.

There is no doubt: Russia would benefit from effective combating illegal migration (especially criminal migration). Up to different estimates, the number of illegal migrants in Russia is 4 to 15 millions. Under such circumstances, inactivity of government in migration management can result in lose of control over social situation and serious economic losses. The fact that Russia has been involved in the global criminal net making profit on smuggling of migrants and trafficking in illegal migrants, needs efforts to stop these illegal activities. However, there is no justification of too little attention being paid to other types of international migration, first of all economic/labor migration.

II. A New Turn in Priorities

The scale and importance of labor migration are objectively growing in Russia and elsewhere; that's why it is highly preferable that the next "turn in priorities" of Russia's migration policy will bring labor migration regulation to the forefront. It looks inevitable for a number of reasons, and we point here only some of them.

The first reason is related to the forthcoming inevitable lack of labor resources resulting from existing age structure and population development trends. After 2006 the number of national labour resources (labour age population) will be steadily decreasing, In 30 years national labour force will be less than 50 million compared to 72 million in 2003. In this context, migration is to be regarded not merely as a phenomenon, or merely as a process, but *as a resource*. Being properly used (or not used) this resource is likely to determine positive economic progress in Russia. In these circumstances foreign labor force imports will become one of priorities of migration policy. In case the gov-

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ernment provides no reasonable mechanism for legal temporary employment of foreign citizens, labor migrants will come as irregular workers. This means that government will lose both: the image of population staying at the territory of Russia and economic gains, e.g. from taxation. The growing labor migrants inflow from overpopulated Central Asian states adds to the former migration flows from Ukraine, China, Caucasus states; it is making the question of labor migration management more and more actual.

The second reason results from reshaping of European migration space. In Russia (as well as in Ukraine, for example) there exists a certain segment of population whose wellbeing strongly depends on their trips abroad. They are “chelhoks”, seasonal workers, contract migrants. According to some estimates, the incomes of around 2 – 2.5 million persons in Russia are derived from international migration (it corresponds to about one third of employed in informal sector). Many of them are oriented at the Central and Eastern European states that have joined the European Union in May 2004. After the EU expansion the border control has been restricted, and many of these people were either left without a source of income or forced to become irregular persons within the EU. In order to solve this problem, it is important to undertake official, governmental efforts to provide migration opportunities under the new conditions, i.e. when a new, common immigration policy comes into force. It looks especially topical since cheap foreign labor from neighboring countries has become a structural element in some industries in the Central and Eastern European countries. Like the Ruhr coalfield mines in Germany had been dependent on Polish migrant-miners for centuries, nowadays garment industry in eastern regions of Poland has increased its competitiveness thanks to woman-migrants from Ukraine and Russia. The Czech researchers estimate labor migrants from former Soviet states as *a third* (!) of a total number of labor migrants in the Czech Republic; 30% of them are from Russia.

However, this ‘academic’ view inspired by economic, demographic, and social analysis can come across political conjuncture. After terrorist attacks in the USA in 2001 the attitude towards migration in the world has been shifting to suspicious and even negative one. Russia has also suffered from terrorist acts, hostage captures, apartment blocks explosions, etc. executed by migrants. As a result, migration has become closely associated with danger and security threats. After September 2004 tragedy in Beslan secondary school, further emphasis on restrictions in migration regulation took place, especially in the Northern Caucasus territories. This position inevitably contra-

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dicts Russia's demographic and economic interests, and will make minor input in reducing illegal migration, as the post-Soviet boundaries remain 'half-open' and poorly equipped.

In fact, Russia is in need of a policy corresponding to the real migration situation in the country and around it. Clear understanding of long-term demographic trends, formulating of reasonable migration policy concept, improvement of migration legislation, differentiation of the State attitude towards various categories of migrants, more emphasis on migrants' social and legal rights are to be on agenda. This necessitates new approaches and strategies. Moreover, changes in the global migration situation (expansion of the EU, in particular) should be taken into consideration.

III. In Search for Migration Policy Concept

The State activity in the field of migration management can be effective and corresponding to the nation's interests when: *first*, it is based on clear understanding of the existing migration situation; *second*, it evaluates this situation in the context of economic and demographic trends; *third*, it is guided by general development strategy of the country; *fourth*, when it employs the whole complex of migration management tools, including legislative, administrative, economic, information, etc.

The major problem for Russia is the lack of clear long-term guiding lines for migration policy. The lack of understanding of the scale of Russia's need for migrants based on economic and demographic expediency provokes uncoordinated steps of the Federal Migration Service mainly aimed at restrictions rather than reasonable managing. However, migration policy is poorly developed in Russia not because the government maliciously ignore it. On the contrary, the public debate is focused on migration issues and the number of laws, decrees, instructions, etc. in the field of migration management adopted in the Russian Federation during the last 15 years is more than in any other country of the world during the last 30 years. But migration policy is not isolated: normally, it is inserted in the general strategy of the development of the nation and it is in fact 'secondary policy'. Lack of long-term strategy of development in Russia (priority industries, basic resources for competitive strength, place of high technologies, education development strategies, labour

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market preferences in the context of declining population in labour ages, etc.) makes secondary policies irrational.

This is the main reason for numerous failed attempts to formulate the State concept of migration policy in Russia. In 2003, the Government adopted the Concept of Migration Flows Regulation in the Russian Federation as an official State strategy in the field of migration. It's quite clear that *regulation of migration flows* – is only one side of migration policy that is to be accompanied by protection of migrants' rights, integration of migrants in the receiving society, etc.

Comprehensive approach is to be the core feature of reasonable migration policy. It is especially important for Russia that is a receiving country, a sending country and a transit country at the same time. Each of these 'migration roles' includes a variety of migration flows, and each of them needs particular approach. Thus, citizens of former Soviet republics should not be equally treated in obtaining Russian citizenship with citizens of non-former Soviet states; in counteracting illegal migration restricted measures towards migrants smugglers and traffickers are to be combined with liberal attitude towards illegal migrants who are often victims in fact; in the field of international labour migration the State is to be consistent in establishing rules for labour imports and create 'civilized' mutually beneficial conditions for overseas employment of Russian citizens.

The latter consideration is especially topical in view of growing role of labour migration as a mainstream of Russia's participation in the international migration flows. Labour migration is to be understood as an objective process of the global development, and position of the State in many respects determines whether Russia will benefit from its potential advantages.

Elaboration of better conditions for Russia's 'civilized' integration into the world labour market is to be regarded as an independent direction of its migration policy. In this context, the following tasks are to be of primary importance:

- Improvement of legal basis for international labour migration, both in terms of labour imports and labour exports, by means of development of national legislation, signing bilateral agreements on social and labour guarantees for migrant workers, and working over conditions to join UN, ILO and the Council of Europe Conventions on migrant workers' and their family members' rights protection;

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- Providing effective coordination between federal and regional administrations aimed at protecting national labour market and preventing groundless competition between migrant workers and national workers, as well as strengthening control over Russian employers in hiring foreign labour force (compliance to legal regulations in the field, implementation of foreign labour employment permissions terms, and execution of work contract terms);
- Conjunction of labour migration management to socio-economic policy, e.g. measures to combat illegal migration can play the secondary role in general offensive against 'shadow' sector of economy where illegal migrants are primarily employed. Enlargement of legal job opportunities can reduce the scale of illegal migration;
- The State is to play more active role in labour exports, i.e. legal temporary labour migration of Russian citizens, to provide Russian migrant workers with social and legal rights protection and enhance responsibility of employment agencies engaged in assistance in job-seeking in other countries;
- To offer incentives for return migration of Russian citizens who have left the country for permanent residence or for work contracts, first of all, highly skilled specialists;
- To elaborate urgent measures to support highly skilled workers in the priority industries and the advanced fields of science in order to impede 'brain drain'.

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