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Russia Needs a New Migration Policy

Russia's migration policy fails to respond to the needs of the time and neglects international experience. The state should work to reduce emigration, encourage educational and business migration, make the quota system for foreign workers more transparent, and improve data collection on migration.

Over the last twenty years, Russia's migration policy has come under criticism from various parts of civil society—and quite deservedly so. A key reason why migration policy is ineffective is the absence of a plan for regulating migration that meets the needs of the times and state requirements. Such a plan should set clear goals and priorities in terms of regulating migration, define directions, and take into account the country's need for migrants.

1

At least three key contradictions have now emerged in Russia's migration policy. The *first* involves the inconsistency between migration regulations and demographic policy, although the former should flow organically from the latter. *Second*, there are significant contradictions between the federal and regional levels of migration policy. The regions *should* have different goals and tasks in terms of regulating migration, but federal migration policy leaves no scope for regional flexibility. *Third*,

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a considerable part of the Russian population is not willing to receive migrants, even if they are ethnic Russians and speak Russian. A scornful attitude toward migrants (even ethnic Russian migrants) is widespread in the country, both in everyday life and in interactions between the public and the state authorities. Even more serious are the problems faced by the main stream of migrants, which increasingly consists of people from a different cultural background, not fluent in Russian, with low levels of education and general culture.

It is quite obvious that migration policy should “flow” logically from the state’s demographic policy (see the Concept for the Demographic Policy of the Russian Federation up to 2025 [Kontseptsiiia demograficheskoi politiki Rossiiskoi Federatsii do 2025 goda], adopted by presidential decree in October 2007). In particular, the numbers of permanent immigrants and temporary labor migrants from abroad should be linked to the parameters of Russia’s socioeconomic and demographic development of Russia.

Russia adopted its latest plan for regulating migration in 2003. Its ideology and content are already clearly outdated. For this reason, the Federal Migration Service of Russia (FMS) began a few years ago to develop a new concept for the country’s migration policy. A more or less final draft of the new policy was published in 2010–11, and the general public was invited to comment.

The new concept again argues for expanding the flow of immigrants *without taking into account* the country’s internal reserves—the scope for raising the birth rate, lowering the death rate, and using the labor potential of “reserve” groups of the population (the unemployed, young people, pensioners, invalids)—or losses through emigration. It should be noted that over 6.3 million Russian citizens are unemployed at the same time as 2.5 million labor migrants from abroad work legally in the country each year; estimates of the number of illegally employed foreign workers range from 3 to 5 million. How many migrants do we need to invite and receive? That is a fundamental question for the country. Thus, the proposed migration policy must be clearly linked to the plan guiding Russia’s demographic policy.

Nevertheless, the new draft contains quite a few “breakthrough” ideas that will help Russia regulate migration in its national interests. In particular, for the first time it views migration not only as a threat to the country but also as a source of (resource for) its development. In addition, the concept includes not only administrative approaches to the

regulation of migration but also certain economic instruments, which are much more effective. It is also of no small importance that the document examines the issue of stimulating the internal mobility of Russia's population. Many developed countries have long tried mechanically to replenish their populations with migrants—above all, labor migrants. That approach gave rise to the term “replacement migration,” referring to migration flows that compensated for contraction of the population or of specific age cohorts. As practice has showed, however, large-scale replacement migration brings with it a mass of cultural, social, and even political problems. The migration policy of the economically developed countries is now becoming increasingly strict with regard to unskilled labor; it gives preference to people with superior skills and qualifications and to students. The governments of the economically developed countries are devoting increasing attention to demographic policies aimed at raising the birth rate and supporting families with children.

In my view, the goal of Russia's migration policy is not formulated with sufficient clarity. “To stabilize and increase the permanent population” cannot be the goal of a country's migration policy. This is the goal of demographic policy. The goal of Russia's migration policy should be formulated differently: “to reduce the outflow of emigrants from Russia and stimulate the inflow of needed categories of immigrants for permanent residence, work, and study in Russia within required parameters.” Jumping ahead, let us note that this version of the concept, unfortunately, practically ignores the problem of emigration from Russia. Emigrants are mentioned only in passing, in the context of reverse migration. It is important, of course, to attract our compatriots and emigrants back to Russia, but something must also be done about the continuing outflow of emigrants.

2

Labor migration is one of the most massive sources of migrants entering Russia. At present, it occurs largely in a spontaneous manner: the state registers labor migration from abroad rather than controlling it. Nor does the policy under discussion clearly establish a process for regulating external labor migration. The system of setting quotas for foreign workers in Russia gives rise to serious criticism. There is no clear mechanism or methodology for estimating the real need for foreign labor; no balance of labor resources exists. Due to various circumstances, not all employers

can accurately predict their long-term requirements for migrant labor. Some employers simply do not submit their requests for migrant labor in time. The requests themselves are collected and aggregated at the regional level in such a way that links to specific employers are lost. It is not rare for a request to be submitted by one employer and the quota used by another employer, with the first employer not receiving the foreign workers requested! As a result, a black market has arisen in the country: firms buy up these migrant labor quotas and sell them for 25,000–30,000 rubles (as against the 2,000 rubles officially charged by the state). The plan should adopt a clear stance regarding the recruitment of foreign workers on the basis of a transparent system of quotas, with quotas assigned to specific employers without the right to resell them.

As shown by an analysis of the current situation and by generalization of the experience of regulating labor migration in various countries, the fundamental basis for setting policy on labor migration from abroad should be a clear assessment of labor requirements. These assessments should be based primarily on the economic and geopolitical interests of Russia.

Therefore, before determining policy regarding the recruitment of foreign workers it is necessary to envision the scale of these requirements and link them directly to the state's prospective socioeconomic development. Not long ago, someone suggested that doubling the gross domestic product (GDP) might serve as such a priority. It is possible to achieve this goal by one of two means or by a combination of both. On the one hand, we might increase the size of the workforce. On the other hand, we can and must raise labor productivity, renovate equipment, and develop advanced technologies, using tax incentives to reward entrepreneurs who invest funds in the modernization of production.

The arguments that most employers adduce regarding the need to hire foreigners are not always unambiguous. At present, employers benefit from hiring foreign workers because they are illegal. They are highly dependent on the employer, who can save money by paying them less or nothing at all; it is easier to hold them in subjection, frighten them with their lack of registration or a work permit, and threaten not to pay their wages. It is obvious that wage increases in the sectors where foreign workers concentrate would lead to local workers taking some of those jobs. Some employers have demonstrated the advantages of hiring workers with homes, families, and children nearby and a long-term commitment to the city where they live. But then the employer must raise wages and

comply with labor legislation. Not all employers are willing to do this: the temptation to economize significantly on labor outlays is strong. Moreover, everyone acts in this way, starting with ordinary people who hire a foreign worker to repair their apartment or clean up their dacha and ending with big firms.

Research shows that the labor of migrant workers from various countries is widely used in different sectors of Russia's economy—practically everywhere. In many industries, firms hire foreign workers but officially record them as Russian workers. As foreign workers are much cheaper, the difference between their official wages and their real wages represents pure profit for the owners of the firms.

The problem has a serious social or humanitarian aspect. Migrant workers live in poor conditions, receive much lower wages, and suffer exploitation at the hands of employers. Their rights as workers and as human beings are violated at every turn. In fact, it is possible to speak of the formation of a segment of forced labor in certain sectors of the Russian economy. Due to the low wages, local workers lose the desire to seek work in these sectors, while employers lose interest in hiring local workers. Focused efforts are needed to fix this situation.

3

As migration increasingly plays a compensatory role in forming the population of the country, we are also seeing significant change in the *sociodemographic and ethnic composition of immigrants*. In the 1990s and the 2000s, immigration compensated for 50–80 percent of the natural decline in Russia's population. In 2010, immigration fully compensated for natural population decline in the country as a whole and in five Russian regions. At present the main flow of immigrants into Russia comes from the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS): Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, and Tajikistan. Throughout the 1990s, this flow consisted mainly of ethnic Russians (and others who were originally from Russia) returning from the former Soviet republics of the South Caucasus and Central Asia. Recent years, however, have seen considerable change in the ethnic, educational, and social composition of immigrants from the CIS. *First*, a declining proportion of immigrants are ethnic Russians: they accounted for about 60 percent of the flow in 2007, as against 74 percent in 1995. *Second*, the educational level of migrants is falling: rural residents and other socially vulnerable population strata are increasingly caught up in

migration. Under the impact of immigration and the outflow of Russian citizens, many of Russia's regions and cities are undergoing gradual change in the ethnic and social composition of their population—a development fraught with sociocultural risks for the country.

Too little attention has been paid to *student (educational) immigration* into Russia. The proposed policy focuses on student migrants from the CIS. This is, of course, an important region for Russia. But we must adopt a more active stance in the world market for educational services and attract foreign students not only from the CIS but also from other countries. Currently Russia occupies only the eighth place in the world in terms of the number of foreign students—about eighty thousand. This is a very low figure relative to the size of Russia's population and the potential of its educational system. The educational migration of young people should be regarded as one of the most desirable types of migration for the country, inasmuch as it has many positive social consequences: it has a rejuvenating effect, increases the size of the able-bodied population and the number of highly qualified specialists in the labor market, and stimulates cultural exchange and the development of the national educational system.

Nevertheless, for all the significance of this phenomenon, the effects of student migration are still underestimated at various levels. Russia currently has no clear state policy for promoting Russian educational services in foreign markets, nor is there an effective migration policy for attracting educational migrants. Existing practice for attracting student migrants to Russia is not linked to geopolitical strategy, migration policy, questions of employment, or the country's demographic policy. Unfortunately, student migration is not as yet considered a strategic resource of Russia.

Meanwhile, the governments of many of the world's receiving countries focus their migration policies on attracting student migrants, who may be regarded as a significant form of capital. The reserves of the Russian educational system have not been exhausted, especially considering that higher educational institutions are in need of funds and new entrants. Many higher educational institutions try to approach governments of other countries on their own with proposals to teach foreign students in Russia. *Given growing world competition, however, we need a state policy to promote the Russian educational system and the Russian language abroad—a policy that would take into account the positive experience of foreign countries.*

The concept also fails to indicate channels for *attracting business immigrants* from various countries (the CIS, Europe, North America, Japan, China) who would be willing to do more than invest money in the Russian economy. Business immigration—or special immigration programs for investors willing to invest their money in the economy of the receiving country—is no new phenomenon for most developed countries. Russia has as yet absolutely no mechanism to promote the immigration of potential investors willing to develop a business in Russia. We must create a mechanism to stimulate economic activity among migrants. For this purpose, we must devise a set of measures to ensure preferential credit and taxation for commercial organizations created by foreign business people. Private entrepreneurs must be offered the opportunity to resettle in Russia even if there is no corresponding entry in the register of vacancies, or else the position “private entrepreneur” should be introduced into the register.

The concept does not propose ways of *reducing the outflow of emigrants from the country*. Since 1989, over 1.2 million people have left Russia for countries of the far abroad [outside the former Soviet Union—Trans.]. The main countries where emigrating Russian citizens take up permanent residence have traditionally been and remain Germany, Israel, and the United States. New destinations include European countries (Finland, Spain, Britain), Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and China. Many firms operate in Russia offering their services as intermediaries to people seeking to leave for permanent residence abroad, acquire real estate and businesses in various countries, and obtain residence permits and foreign citizenship. Their existence indicates an expanded geography of emigration from the country. Official data suggest that the scale of annual emigration from Russia is not large: in 2010, just 11,400 people left Russia for countries of the far abroad. Such low absolute figures, however, reflect not so much a real decline in emigration as the emergence of new forms of emigration that simply cannot be recorded by the old instruments. Numerous cases are known in which our citizens live abroad without losing their Russian citizenship or residence permits.

The small absolute figures for emigration from Russia to countries of the far abroad conceal problems connected with the qualitative structure of the migration flow. In the age structure of emigrants from Russia, people of working age and younger are overrepresented, while pensioners are correspondingly underrepresented. *Russia has become a country that “exports” children for adoption.*

Another massive migration flow out of Russia consists of girls and young women who marry foreigners. Emigration from Russia to the countries of the far abroad also has the character of a “brain drain.” One-fifth of emigrants have a higher education—a proportion almost 50 percent higher than among the general population. Specialists in the fields of space technology, applied and theoretical physics, computer technology, nanochemical engineering, biochemistry, microbiology, genetics, and mathematics are all leaving Russia for abroad.

The concept for the state migration policy should indicate ways to *improve and develop the system for keeping records of migration*. At present, adequate migration records are not maintained in Russia. Above all, I must note that information about migration is fragmentary in character. The Federal State Statistics Service (Rosstat) registers the migration of Russian citizens to a permanent place of residence, while the Federal Migration Service keeps track of the temporary labor migration of foreign citizens and the number of foreigners who have obtained Russian citizenship. The Ministry of Education and Science collects information about the educational migration of foreign citizens to Russia. The Federal Border Service registers border crossings by Russian and foreign citizens. None of these various sources of information provides a coherent overall view of migration. Moreover, under the current system of record keeping none of them reflects the real situation regarding migration; all their figures require serious adjustment.

According to Rosstat data, migration to a permanent place of residence in Russia had a tendency to decline throughout the 1990s. This trend can be attributed largely to under-recording of temporary forms of migration. But only in a formal sense can these “temporary forms of migration” be called temporary. Research shows that many people live and work in Russia who lack Russian citizenship or a Russian residence permit only because they do not own their housing. If a person does not own housing and no landlord will register him by place of residence, then it is difficult for that person to obtain a residence permit or citizenship. Meanwhile, many “temporary” migrants live and work in Russia for seven or even ten years while remaining foreigners. This conclusion finds confirmation in the results of the 2002 census, which unexpectedly found two million “extra” people in Russia—probably migrants who for various reasons had slipped through the net of current record keeping.

The proposals presented above need to be taken into consideration at the level of state migration policy because they are of fundamental importance for Russia's development. The adopted document will set the direction for the evolution of migration patterns in the country for several years, and the measures proposed will be long-term in nature.