

### Public Discourse on Labour Migration to Russia: A Potential Threat to Russia's Soft Security?

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## Public Discourse on Labour Migration to Russia:

### A Potential Threat to Russia's Soft Security?

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## **Abstract**

Russia as a receiving country gains both costs and benefits of international labour migration. Costs of migration to Russia are tangible and may be threatening to the state, however, the central question of the paper is if they are considered to pose a danger to Russian national security in the public discourse of Russia. Although in none of official acts legal labour migration is fixed as a risk to integrity of a state, i.e. it is excluded from commonly accepted soft security threats, Russian and European experience suggests that there has been a number of cases and examples when regular labour migration has constituted a threat to national security in accordance with the criteria of “soft security threat” given by R.Ullman (interethnic conflict in Kondopoga, Russia in 2006; migrant riots in France in 2005). Moreover, globalization puts additional pressure on the nation state contributing to emergence of racist and ultranationalist sentiments in the informal everyday life and in the political agenda.

## 1. Introduction

International labour migration is a form of global economic relations driven by “push” and “pull” factors. Three parties are involved in international labour migration: the receiving country, the sending country and migrants themselves. Each party bears both costs and benefits of migration. With regard to Russia as a receiving country, labour migration offers (based on the speeches of officials, formal records, mass media and academic research):

- o economic profits that can enhance economic growth: relatively “cheap” labour force in the situation of severe labour shortages in certain sectors of Russian economy (especially, in construction, retail, public transport, municipal services), such situation of great demand for unskilled and skilled labour in Russia is likely to continue. Furthermore, labour migration provides a number of other economic benefits and contributes to maintaining stability in the region;

- o probable remedy to demographic crisis in Russia (negative natural growth of population since 1992, aging population, shortages of economically active population). In the 1990s migration to Russia played an important role in demographic terms: net migration nearly replaced the natural decline in population in the early 1990s and in the late 1990s compensated about 45 per cent of the natural decrease.

On the other hand, costs of labour migration to Russia are also tangible: erosion of national labour market and job competition, criminalization of the economy, worsening criminal situation (crime committed both by and towards migrants), ethnic conflicts and xenophobia, damage to public health, marginalization and social differentiation of population, dependency of some economic sectors on migrant labour force and etc. All the stated above issues challenge to contemporary Russia, however, the question is if they are depicted to pose a danger to national security in the public discourse in Russia. Hereby the research question of my paper is: if regular labour migration is considered to be a potential threat to “soft security” in the public discourse in Russia. Firstly, it’s necessary to outline briefly what “soft security” is. The concept of “soft security” is relatively new; it was given rise in the international agenda in the late 1980-1990s. For the first time the definition of “soft security threat” was introduced by American political scientist Richard H. Ullman in 1983. According to it, security is defined in a broader sense. It is divided into military (hard) and non-military (soft) dimensions of security, i.e. the concept “soft security” includes “soft”, nonmilitary threats, namely: nuclear safety

problems, infection diseases and AIDS, environmental problems (mainly, soil, water and air pollution), illegal migration and related to it organized transnational crime and others.

In order to achieve the goal and to answer the research question, the following tasks need to be performed: to analyse the phenomenon of international labour migration, its driving forces, costs and challenges for Russia; to examine the concept of “soft security”, its performance by the EU towards Russia and its implications for Russian security and labour migration policies; to scrutinize cases when labour migration may appear or has appeared as a security threat and to point out factors that influence its emergence.

Analyzing the public discourse regarding labour migration to Russia requires the following methods that are employed in the research (it is worth mentioning here that public discourse may represent a more nationalistic view of the situation that does not take place in reality):

□ Content analysis of official documents: analysis of Addresses of Russian President to the Federal Assembly and President’s Messages, federal and St. Petersburg laws, federal and regional programmes, the concept of national security, European security strategies and speeches of officials; comparative analysis of Russian and European experiences and practices in the field of regulation of labour migration and integration of migrants; analysis of development of Russian migration policy, European Union and Russian security strategies in the timeframe from 1991 till now; comparative analysis of Russian and European experiences and practices in the field of regulation of labour migration and integration of migrants). After the end of the Cold War the Russian Federation was on the way of revising its views on security agenda. Suffering socio-economic difficulties of the transition period, the Russian Federation was not able to transform its security identity easily. Due to a lack of its own experience in regulating migration, Russia applied to European practices of migration regulation in the 1990s and, as a consequence, it was imposed fearful attitudes towards migration and, therefore, rather restrictive migration policies that time. In other words, European practices and the concept of “soft security” employed by the EU in the relations with Russia formed a basis for anxious and cautious views on migration in Russia and, as a result, entailed Russia’s choice in favour of restrictive migration policies in the 1990s. In this regard, it is worth noting the idea of “securitization” proposed by B.Buzan, O.Waever and J.deWilde. In the framework of this approach, it might be suggested that migration was presented as a security threat in the EU policies and strategies not because in reality migration from Russia and Eastern European countries posed a valid threat to the EU but because it was presented and constructed like this . The government has started to liberalize migration policy since the earlier 2000s. Nowadays, Russian top officials are not recognized regular labour migration as a threat to Russia’s security. Presidents V. Putin and D.Medvedev repeatedly stated that

regulated labour migration contributes to solving demographic problems and stimulating economic growth, i.e. the government perceives labour migration in positive terms and supports the interests of business communities in this regard. Nevertheless, according to the Concept of National Security of the Russian Federation of 2000, exacerbation of interethnic conflicts is one of main threats can be caused by many reasons, including uncontrolled migration and a rise of extremist movements.

□ Qualitative method (semi-structured interviews with experts in the field of migration and security – they are still in progress). Experts are selected by chance: researchers, officials, leaders of national culture associations that deal with issues of migration, tolerance education or security questions. The interviews are aimed at pointing out the interests of different parties and appraisal of labour migration for Russia.

Analyzing the theoretical grounds of “soft security” studies, development of the European Union and Russian security strategies, the conclusion can be made that though the notion “security” has been extending after the break-up of Yugoslavia and the break-up of the USSR in both theoretical discourse and in the international and European agenda, in none of official acts legal labour migration is fixed as a risk to integrity of a state, i.e. it is excluded from commonly accepted soft security threats. Nonetheless, the hypothesis is that in spite of this fact under certain circumstances the public discourse on labour migration in Russia can change and regular labour migration can turn up to pose a real danger to national security in the short, medium or long run. Therefore, the further questions are: what the factors of the emergence of the security threat to Russia are. It is essential to bear in mind that the image of ingoing labour migration can be depicted in public discourse as a potential threat to a state and challenge to Russianhood, even it is not as such in reality. The public discourse can not reflect the situation in the country. Nevertheless, the public discourse influences opinions of people via mass media and, therefore, indirectly it may have influence on Russian reality. Consequently, public discourse is a fact of reality and an important factor to take in to account to give a full picture of the situation on labour migration to Russia.

There are assumptions and three main arguments to illustrate why labour migration can be seen as a potential threat. The assumptions are:

□ In spite of the fact that Russia constitutes a multinational state and has a long tradition of living a number of ethnicities together, up to date Russia has lost most of the institutions for maintaining historical advantages and for integrating new people into the society and it has failed to set up new forceful mechanisms and institutions for integration and socialization of significant flows of new people and tolerance education. Therefore, current

Russia is not able to take an advantage of the preconditions of less cultural differences between migrants and native population, high adaptability and integration ability of migrants, i.e. Russian multinationality can not be considered as a critically mitigating factor for emergence of social tensions, ethnic conflicts and xenophobia.

□ The nationality of migrants may have an impact on the probability of the emergence of a threat. The assumption is that if the country of origin is ethnically and culturally close to the country of employment, it results in lower degree of a societal threat. In other words, “ethno-cultural distance positively correlated with societal threat and more restrictive policies” . The more ethno-culturally different the countries are, the more it may threaten to societal security of a state of the destination.

The example of France. France is one of the oldest countries of destination for migrants in Europe. Immigration to France became a mass phenomenon in the 20th century. After World War I there was a great demand for labour force to regenerate the economy that induced the wave of immigration consisting of migrants from European countries such as Poland, Italy, Portugal, Belgium. The next wave of immigration to France started in the 1950s and was also stimulated by labour shortage in French economy to reconstruct the state after World War II. This wave has continued till now. The composition of immigrants has been different from the former wave: they are mostly immigrants from the former French colonies and predominantly from the countries of North Africa (Morocco, Alger). The origin of migrants in combination with other factors (weakening assimilating and integrating institutions) eventually played an important role in assimilation, integration and socialization of migrants. Immigrants from Maghreb more often become victims of racist sentiments and hate crimes while immigrants from European countries have relatively well integrated in the society: there is a big percentage of intermarriages, children of immigrants have high academic ranking in schools.

According to the Federal State Statistics Service, the main countries of origin of migrants coming to Russia are Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Ukraine, Kyrgyzstan, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Moldova, Georgia, Tajikistan, Belarus, and Turkmenistan . Therefore, the general trend is that the total overwhelming majority of flows come to Russia from Central Asia (more than 55-60 per cent of migrants), followed much further by Eastern European States (Ukraine, Moldova and Belarus) and then by the countries of the Caucasus. A large share of unskilled migrants from Central Asian states (ethnically and religiously they are more unlike than from Ukraine, Belarus and Moldova) in the overall structure of migratory flows into Russia may have an additional impact on the emergence of social tensions in the society caused by international labour migration, i.e. the probability that a security threat may occur increases. The alternative solution is considered to be policies aimed at remigration and resettlement of



Russian population from the near and far abroad to their “homeland”. Such policies may be inherently less threatening to national stability and security due to ethnic, cultural and religious proximity of repatriating people to the native population.

□ Temporary labour migration to a great extent turns to be permanent (based on European post-war experience) because once movements start, they become a cause of “chain migration” that is likely to persist even if conditions and state policies have altered. As post-war experiences of European countries suggest that temporary migration is often deemed to turn out to be permanent due to better economic conditions and wider opportunities in the country of the destination.

The three main arguments why labour migration to Russia may emerge as a potential security threat in the public discourse are:

1. Historical lessons teach that new security threats may emerge under changing conditions, in particular regular labour migration one day may escalate into a valid state danger. So, illegal migration was also not seen as a soft security threat by R.Ullman – the pioneer in the “soft security” studies – in the 1970-80s, however, when in the 1990s illegal migration became a mass phenomenon, European and other states facing this challenge unanimously agreed to include illegal migration in a list of security threats. The same can happen to regular labour migration.

2. Migrants may cause ethnic conflicts and riots. Labour migration to Russia leads to a considerable change in ethnic composition of the Russian population, especially in the areas of high concentration of migrants. Disproportion in ethnic composition of the population might become ground for ethnic conflicts and migrants riots (the case of interethnic conflict between Chechen and Russian population in Kondopoga, Karelia in August-September 2006 when the brawl in the restaurant “Chayka” turned into mass race riots, arsons and required decisions and control over the situation at the federal level; furthermore, there have been other separate beatings and deaths of migrants in the Astrakhan and Rostov regions, in Haragune, the Chita region and in Syktyvkar, Komi Republic , for instance, murder of an 8-year-old Tajik girl in 2004 by about 10 teenagers , attacks to foreign students in Voronezh, St. Petersburg and Moscow). Ethnic conflicts and migrants riots are especially likely to appear when cultural and social behaviour is considerably unlike to native/titular nationality’ ones; there are little chances for integration and social mobility of migrants in the society. The essential point is worse socio-economic conditions of migrant families in comparison with natives ones, first of all – poor housing conditions. Migrants tend to live together in cheaper districts that results in specific marginalized and ghettoized areas of migrant settle-

ment (such migrant districts occur in many European big cities – in London, bidonvilles in France and so on). The situation worsens by a lack of chances to improve the situation that become a ground for discontent and frustration, especially among the second-third migrant generations. Furthermore, migrants tend to group and establish “closed” ethnic communities that cause their exclusion from the host society. As a result there is a high probability of migrant riots (as in France in October-November 2005 when the French Cabinet approved application of “a state of emergency throughout the country” for a period of three months for the first time since 1955 ). To conclude, as the case in Kondopoga shows that segmentary conflicts that tend to be described by Russian state as “family brawls” may escalate upon certain conditions into a valid threat to soft security of a state. It is worth emphasizing that labour migration does not necessarily leads to the ethnic confrontation and armed conflicts as a apogee of it, however, high concentration of migrants in certain area, their compact settlement over a certain territory, emergence of closed communities and segregation of migrants together with little state regulation and integration policies may raise probability of frictions and violent actions between locals and migrants.

3. Globalization puts pressure and stimulates a rise of nationalistic movements. The process of globalization undermines the concept of nation state and, therefore, national security. The idea of homogeneity of nation state and common cultural, racial and linguistic identity is challenged by globalization. The nation-state is eroding and the models of political organization are changing. This idea is confirmed by emergence of supranational institutions such as the European Union. Moreover, the high level of migration caused by globalization has challenged the traditional forms of citizenship. S.Castles and A.Davidson state that “bas-ing citizenship on a singular or individual membership in a nation-state is no longer adequate, since the nation-state itself is severely eroded” . With reference to A.Smith, under pressure of globalization the nation-state faces an external crisis of autonomy and internal crisis of legitimacy . Furthermore, unclear division of tasks and roles between national and supranational (the European Union) authorities (on migration and other issues) calls into question the significance, power and responsibilities of the nation state. It results in a crisis of sovereignty and a crisis of political culture and, consequently, in “a collective sense of identity panic to be produced and maintained” . Such situation leads to psychological insecurity and contributes to emergence of racist and ultranationalist sentiments in the informal everyday life and in the political agenda. This result in the rise to power nationalist and far-right parties (the National Front in France, the Freedom Party in Austria, Flemish block, northern Italian League) and strengthening xenophobic sentiments among the host population. Far right parties find useful to exploit xenophobia to maintain a relatively diverse electoral base. The programmes include both national populism and neoliberal economic populism. Fur-

thermore, hegemonic neoliberal capitalism gives a rise to reactionary responses. Due to global economic and political liberalization and significant transformations in the structure of the workforce, there is an increase in the population who faces “deteriorating prospects with regard to their life chances” . Moreover, long-lasting economic insecurity and social inequality may become a ground of permanent large-scale social conflict . Far-right parties and movements stir up anti-migrant feelings in the society through mass media. Migrants become the embodiment of globalization and economic uncertainty in minds of many people. So, according to the polls of the Russian Public Opinion Research Center conducted in April, 2005, 60 per cent Russian citizens agreed that immigrants create competition in the labour market and take the jobs of natives, in Moscow and St. Petersburg this figure is 82 per cent. Besides, 40 per cent of Russian respondents (63 per cent in Moscow and St. Petersburg) believe that the Russian migration laws shall be toughened up. In comparison, with other countries (in Britain 58 per cent in favour of more restrictive migration policy ), however, as we see from the figures the situation is much sharp and critical in the main cities of destination – Moscow and St. Petersburg. To conclude, under pressure of globalization, increasing flows of information, finance and people – first of all economic migrants – undermine the idea of nation state, its homogeneity and integrity. As a consequence, globalization gives a rise to both defensive xenophobic response among the native population towards migrants as a threat to the nation and national identity (migrants become the embodiment of personal failures) and, therefore, growth of nationalist sentiments among migrants. As reaction to migrants’ presence in the country, far nationalistic and ultra-right parties appear and become strong in the political arena, for instance, the National Front in France, the Freedom Party in Austria, Flemish block, northern Italian League. Far-right movements promote and support local residents in “the resistance” to migrants because exploiting xenophobic sentiments of the population can be politically profitable. Moreover, emergence of ultraright and extremist parties in the political arena induce centrists and centrist right parties to “revise” their views on issues towards righter ones, including the questions of immigration, the national identity and citizenship. Such situation is exacerbating in the periods of economic regression when local population attributes all their own socio-economic difficulties to migrants, particularly if they are different culturally, ethically and religiously. According to findings of Institute of Ethnology and Anthropology, “57 per cent of Muscovites cannot make up mind with presence of migrant workers and almost 2/3 of the interviewed people believe that they are to send away and not to let new ones come” .

To sum up, regular labour migration is not considered as a danger to national security at the moment. However, Russian and European experience suggests that there have been a number of cases and examples when regular labour migration has been depicted to pose a

direct threat to national security in the public discourse in accordance with the criteria of “soft security threat” given by R.Ulmann (Kondopoga case in Russia in 2006, migrant riots in France in 2005). On the basis of the investigated cases, the following conditions of emergence of ethnic conflicts and xenophobia and as a result a potential threat to national security can be drawn:

- high concentration of migrants in certain areas;
- compact settlement of migrants in particular districts of a city – ghettoization;
- a large population of migrants from one country, region;
- bad socio-economic conditions of migrants (first and foremost, poor housing conditions and high unemployment rate) combined with “lack of visible short-term or even medium-term hope” ;
- emergence of closed ethnic communities and their marginalization from the host society;
- ethnic, cultural and religious distance to the native population;
- employment of migrants in certain “sensitive” sectors where migrants involve in face-to-face interaction with native population (retail, service sector);
- lack of state policies and institutions in the field of integration, tolerance education, social mobility of migrants;
- social segregation and low social mobility of migrants;
- exacerbation in periods of economic regression.

It is worth noting that only a certain combination of these conditions can threaten to state stability and security, while a single factor will very unlikely to cause a valid peril. However, in the conditions of few integration and regulation state policies, labour migration is more likely threaten to soft security with emergence of one-two of the other abovementioned factors. In addition, it's essential to bear in mind that public discourse via mass media plays an important role in formation of negative attitudes towards migrants and in giving the image of labour migration as a threat to the state.

To conclude, international labour migration is a part and parcel of our contemporary globalized world. Under the conditions of globalization and integration, labour migration into Russia

goes and will go on. As a receiving country, the Russian Federation gains the benefits of international labour migration in terms of fulfilment of labour shortages, development of infrastructure and service sector, contribution stability in the region and so forth. Moreover, migration remains a “major demographic resource” for Russia in the medium and long run. On the other hand, international labour migration bears challenges to the country. Based on the criteria of the soft security threat given by R.Ullman, the main finding is that labour migration to Russia may appear in public discourse in Russia as a valid threat to national security, especially if few or irrelevant measures are taken by the state, i.e. if the government fails to regulate and manage migratory flows and to integrate migrants. Based on the definition of the soft security threat given by R.Ullman, Cases of the emergence of the threat may be: uncontrolled migrant riots (as in France in October-November 2005), interethnic conflicts (As in Kondopoga in 2006) or strong presence of far-right parties in the political arena (the National Front in France, the Freedom Party in Austria) under pressure of globalization. Averting the negative patterns of development and maximizing benefits of labour migration require from the Russian government to elaborate and pursue the well-managed migration and integration policy directed to both migrants (integration and regulation policies, family reunification) and native people (tolerance education) based on own and European experiences and taking into account current tendencies of Russian economy and demographic situation.

This research has proposed an interdisciplinary framework that could act as a starting point for empirical research in this field, as well as for political action. The suggestion is to apply a qualitative method of semi-structured interview with experts in the field of migration and security. The questionnaire for interviews has been partly elaborated and several experts have been interviewed that can become a basis for a future research.

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