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six months now, the announcement of partial mobilization and its subsequent poor implementation significantly accelerated and intensified the process of emigration, creating an unprecedented situation in Russia and in neighboring states alike.

The data presented demonstrate the existence of at least four major groups within the recent flow of Russian migrants. These groups differ with regard to the role that the partial mobilization played in their migration histories and aspirations. Acknowledging this diversity is vital for several reasons. First of all, it allows for

a more nuanced and precise understanding of the ongoing migration processes. Second, the future trajectories of migrants—e.g., the length of their stays abroad and their integration efforts—may depend heavily on their aspirations for migration. Awareness of those differences therefore improves our ability to predict their behavior. Finally, when it comes to policymaking and humanitarian aid, exploring this diversity can help improve our understanding of which forms of assistance and support mechanisms members of each group might need.

About the Author

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ANALYSIS

Russian State-Run Media Coverage of War-Related Brain Drain

By Daria Zakharova (Research Centre for East European Studies at the University of Bremen)

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Abstract

The Russian invasion of Ukraine has caused an unprecedented outflow of Ukrainian refugees to Europe and other neighboring countries. Russia has also faced its own waves of emigration, which reached their climax after the announcement of “partial mobilization” in the country on September 21, 2022. This article analyzes how Russian state-run media have been treating emigrants and covering the process.

Beginning of War: IT Emigration

The beginning of the war caused the phenomenon of “IT emigration” from Russia. Western sanctions on the Russian financial sector that aggravated the outsourcing of IT services, coupled with the withdrawal of some companies essential for IT developers (AWS, Google Cloud, JetBrains and others) from the Russian market, negatively impacted the sector. Moreover, Russian developers are often pursued by foreign recruiters. These factors combined to result in more than 100,000 IT workers leaving Russia in the first two months following the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

Russian state-run media tend to hush up those topics that cast the Russian government in a negative light (for instance, the scale of Russian losses in the war in Ukraine). However, the problem of “IT emigration” at the beginning of the war was highlighted even by the most pro-governmental media. The state-run TV channel NTV aired a news segment titled “How to Accelerate Import-Substitution in the IT Industry and Motivate IT Specialists to Work in the Russian Federation.” In the video, Natalya Kasperky, the co-founder of Kaspersky Lab, indicated that there had been a significant outflow

of Russian developers. Moreover, she clearly linked the phenomenon to the Russian invasion of Ukraine, or, as she called it, the “special military operation.”

In covering the phenomenon of “IT emigration,” Russian state-run media have tended to stress the advantageous environment for developers created by the Russian government through its introduction of a range of reforms. State-run TV channel Rossiya 24 aired a news segment titled “Battle for IT Specialists: Breakthrough Solutions Are Needed.” In the video, Russian Prime Minister Mikhail Mishustin intimated that brain drain among developers is the result of “external pressure.” “The government is taking steps to support the IT sector in the face of external pressure. The main task is to create comfortable conditions for industry workers. This also applies to housing,” Mishustin said.

In March 2022 the Russian government implemented a range of measures to support the IT sector. According to *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*, these included income tax exemption, preferential mortgages for developers, and even exemption from military service for IT specialists (in Russia, the army is formed on the basis of obligatory conscription—D.Z.).

As a result of these measures, state-run media pursued the narrative that the Russian IT sector is fine and continues to develop. For instance, in its article “Sanctions Are Not a Problem. Russian IT Industry Continues Developing,” the state-run news outlet Vesti.ru wrote that “developers who left Russia after 24 February 2022 are slowly returning to the country” thanks to “the measures for the development of IT proposed by Vladimir Putin.”

The measures implemented by the Russian government in the IT sector have genuinely been supportive, offering developers, for example, one of the lowest mortgage interest rates in the country. However, the claims that those developers who left Russia in the first months of the war are returning have been confirmed neither by independent demographers nor by non-governmental researchers.

Mobilization: Mass Exodus

Another wave of mass emigration from Russia was caused by the Russian President’s September 21 announcement of a mobilization. This was officially declared as a partial mobilization, meaning that it was aimed at recruiting only those who possess a valuable qualification (for instance, signalmen) or men with experience in military service below the age of 35. In practice, however, many men without military experience started receiving mobilization orders. This caused a rapid and mass outflow of Russians who feared that mobilization might affect them. According to diverse estimates, the number of “mobilization emigrants” may total 700,000 people

since September 21. Compared to the IT wave of emigration, this brain drain has been covered by state-run media and perceived by officials in a more negative way.

Prohibit Departure and Restrict Rights

While some Russian men fleeing the mobilization faced restrictions on leaving Russia, the country has not been shutting the borders to everyone—neither for men nor for women. However, there have been many calls for a comprehensive prohibition on young men capable of fighting leaving the country.

Russian Federation Council (upper house of the Russian Parliament) senator Andrey Tsvetkov expressed support for such an initiative in late September, shortly after the mobilization was announced. “Every person of military age, in the current situation, should be banned from traveling abroad,” he stated in an interview to Russian news outlet RIA Novosti. The spokesperson of the Russian State Duma (lower house of Russian Parliament), Vyacheslav Volodin, stated that Russia was drafting lists of the men fleeing the country and suggested that the cars they were abandoning on the Russian border should be sent to Russian soldiers fighting in Ukraine. “Their cars are already being abandoned. By the way, we also need to think about whom to give these cars to. Maybe the families of those guys who went to fight? It will be right,” he stated during the plenary session of the Parliament.

Russian state-run TV channel NTV aired a prime-time political show in which experts discussed the prospect of disenfranchising those who fled Russia during mobilization. During the heated discussion, Elena Nikolaeva, a member of the Russian State Duma, stated that “those who leave their homeland at a difficult moment should be struck down in their rights.” After a presenter of the show asked Elena, whether this was legal, she claimed that “Russian law is a living mechanism that can be altered according to the circumstances.”

Russian state-run news agency Regnum published an article titled “One Cannot Run from Himself. Who Are Those and Where Are Those Who Betrayed Their Homeland?” The introduction of the article asks: “Is it possible that all these cowardly, treacherous, hypocritical people will return and continue to eat heartily? No, this cannot be allowed. By no means is it possible!” The article goes on to conclude that welcoming back those who fled the country after the announcement of mobilization would undermine and betray those Russians who went to the front.

Good Russia, Bad Emigrants

In the face of massive emigration, Russian state-run media and politicians have started spreading the narrative that life in Russia has actually been improving.

Vyacheslav Volodin stressed that he does not understand why Russians are fleeing abroad *en masse*. “Where are they running now? We created stability, the Eurasian Economic Union, economic freedoms. In a while these people will stand in a queue to return to Russia,” he commented on air at state-run Duma TV.

Russian media outlet Lifenews published an interview with the Russian Federation Council senator Andrey Klimov in which he claimed that while emigrants would not be persecuted in Russia, they would still lose out. “No one will reimburse them their losses of a hasty escape abroad, and whether leaving the native land in danger will bring luck to the majority of the fugitives is a big question,” Klimov said.

Simultaneously, the media and government officials have been spreading the narrative that something is wrong with the “mobilization emigrants” themselves.

State-run news agency RIA-Novosti published an article under the headline “Fleeing from Their Own: There Is No Turning Back.” The article describes “mobilization emigrants” as people “without the categories of motherland, history, duty” and “deprived of basic values.” It pins the blame for the existence of these “traitors” on the fall of the Soviet Union and the formation of “consumer culture.” “Those who renounce their country in difficult times also renounce their ancestors and betray them,” the article summarizes.

Russian politician and Head of the Chechen Republic Ramzan Kadyrov described the “mobilization emigrants” as “men who cannot be called men.” “How can you, when your people and state, your president, need you, leave your homeland and run away? And where will you run from death?” he asked on Telegram.

In general, the state-run media describe the “mobilization emigrants” in a negative way, often referring to them as panicking fugitives, traitors, and alarmists.

Russians Are Not Welcome Abroad

Another narrative that Russian officials and state-run media have been propagating about the emigrants is that they are highly unwelcome abroad.

Kazakhstan has been one of the main destinations of Russian “mobilization emigrants” due to its proximity to the country, affordability, accessibility by car, and relatively neutral position on Russia. State-run Izvestiya has published a string of articles with such headlines as “‘Damage Their Cars!’ How Kazakhstan Treats Run-away Russians” and “How Kazakhs Bully Fled Russians and Do Not Let Them into Apartments.” The coverage stresses Kazakhs’ bad attitude toward arriving Russians and the range of types of persecution to which they are subjected. In one video, a Kazakh woman tells a Russian emigrant that no one invited them to Kazakhstan; in another, a Kazakh man urges his compatriots

to “kick Russians out of the queues and not to rent them property.” “Kazakhstanis criticize the fleeing Russians. Complaining about the long lines. And they call on their citizens to oppress Russians,” Russian media coverage claims.

Other state-run media claim that Russians “should not go to Georgia” because of potential “provocations” against Russian citizens in neighboring countries. Pravda.ru published an interview with the historian Boris Dolgov in which he claimed that: “There is a time of mass provocations. Now the destabilization of the situation along Russian borders is included in the program of the West. This is obvious. Therefore, the creation of social chaos, including in the neighboring territories, which in some way, naturally, will affect Russia, is also a part of the plans of the West.”

The state-run TV channel Rossiya 24 issued a reportage titled “They Run, but No One Waits for Them” dedicated to Russian “mobilization emigrants.” According to the reportage, Russians are not welcomed in the countries to which they flee, such as Georgia. Moreover, these countries are allegedly too poor to actually accommodate large numbers of emigrants. Nor, according to the news presenter, is Europe going to accommodate “mobilization emigrants.” “Unemployment is growing in Europe—the economy is in decline due to anti-Russian sanctions,” so “alarmists from mobilization are hardly welcomed,” the coverage summarizes.

The narrative of “unwelcome Russians” is not a complete falsification, as many countries—especially in Europe—have imposed significant barriers to the entrance of Russian citizens since the beginning of the war in Ukraine. Many European countries do not consider the announced mobilization in Russia as a reason to mitigate entrance rules; only Germany has left open the option of granting political asylum to those who have fled mobilization.

Kazakhstan, demonized by the Russian state-run media for its “russophobic” attitude, has in reality opened its doors to “mobilization emigrants.” Kassym-Jomart Tokayev, the president of Kazakhstan, claims that it is essential to greet the arriving Russian citizens with humanity, patience, and organization. “We must take care of the coming Russian citizens and ensure their safety. This is a political and humanitarian issue. I have instructed the government to take the necessary measures,” Tokayev indicated when discussing the situation with Russian emigrants.

Conclusion

The propaganda on Russian “war-related” emigrants displays both “classical traits”—such as blaming the West, besmirching emigrants, and praising Russia—and new elements. It is quite a new phenomenon for the state-

run media to cover a post-Soviet country not opposed to Russia, like Kazakhstan, in a negative way. Kazakhstan has become—in the coverage of state-run media—“russophobic” and “dangerous” for Russians to live in. This narrative may be an attempt on the part of the Russian government to curb mass emigration by presenting emigration as undesirable.

The difference between coverage of “mobilization emigration,” on the one hand, and “IT emigration,” on the other hand, is also quite stark. The first category are covered in the classic way Russian propaganda treats

dissenters: according to this coverage, the problem is with the “mobilization emigrants” themselves, who are described as bad/traitors/fugitives/alarmists, and not with the government. When covering “IT emigration,” meanwhile, state-run media take the opposite approach: they confirm that the problem lies with the government, or certain governmental policies, and do not refer to the developers in a humiliating way. This may also indicate that the government understands the impact of losing approximately 100,000 developers, but does not yet find the emigration of 700,000 other people critical.

About the Author

Daria Zakharova is a German Chancellor Fellow of the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation in the field of media research. She is based at the Research Centre for East European Studies at the University of Bremen. Daria holds a Bachelor's degree in Journalism and completed her Master's degree in Public Policy at the Willy Brandt School of Public Policy (Germany).

ANALYSIS

Russia: The Migration Dimension of the War in Ukraine

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Abstract

The Russian invasion of Ukraine on February 24, 2022 has drastically changed both the internal situation in the Russian Federation (RF) and the country's relationship with the international community. The impact of these developments is multidimensional and has a significant human dimension, including the formation of new migration flows marked by high shares of young people, males, and members of various elite groups. The elite migrant flow generally includes four major categories of migrants: academic personnel, highly skilled workers (including representatives of professional, business, creative, and athletic elites), students, and so-called investment migrants.

Economic Impact

Shrinking economic output¹ and the withdrawal of numerous transnational companies from the RF have threatened the jobs and livelihoods of a large segment of the Russian population, hurting first and foremost its elite segments. Indeed, the introduction of new sanctions cut the long-term international ties established in the economic, political, academic, artistic, and athletic spheres, to name just a few, impacting the lives of millions of people, chief among them the representatives of various professional, business, academic, cultural, and athletic elites.

This negative impact has been aggravated by both the transborder transfers of transnational corporations' offices and the flight of numerous Russian businesses, as well as individual entrepreneurs, to locations outside the RF. These movements, mostly economically and professionally motivated, have been supplemented by the emigration of people opposing the war as a matter of principle.

Second Wave Exceeds First

The second wave of emigration, significantly larger than the first, formed as a direct consequence of the decla-

1 In particular, Russia's industrial output in September 2022 was 96.9% of that in September 2021 (Federal'naia Sluzhba Gosudarstvennoi Statistiki, “Operativnye Pokazateli,” 2022, <https://rosstat.gov.ru/>).