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ARE THE HISTORICAL LESSONS OF THE TSARIST AND TOTALITARIAN MIGRATION POLICY WORTH LEARNING OR SINKING INTO OBSCURITY?

Introduction

Written by the Russian author this paper gives a view at the historical experience of migration policy in the tsarist and Soviet periods mainly from the perspective of nowadays Russia. However, this theoretical exercise may be of interest for other post-Soviet countries that are seeking for rational migration management schemes.

In search for conceptual basement and instruments of migration policy the post-Soviet Russia and other newly independent states turn to the practice of other countries, which have more experience in the field of migration management. However, policies and practices modeled for western societies may turn unsuitable for other countries and regions that differ in their mentality, civilization-based world-view, and socio-economic realities.

After the collapse of the USSR there was a natural wish among all the post-Soviet states to dissociate themselves from the previous regime that proved its bankruptcy. In the field of international migration, that was a new experience for former Soviet citizens by itself, elaboration of national policy and legislation was primarily based on the experience of European countries and assisted by international organizations.

However, the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union have had their own historical experience in management of migration flows. It is worth studying from the contemporary perspective before making final decision on whether to sink it into obscurity or re-employ its reasonable grains. For Russia with its vast territory, under-populated regions, low internal mobility of population and numerous inflow of international migrants, learning previous experience can be especially instructive.

The start of the State migration policy in the Russian Empire is related to mid-18th century, while its conceptualization developed in

the second half of the 19th century, i.e. at the same time as other European metropolitan countries. However, learning and reasoning of the previous migration management experience was hampered by social upheavals, which gave up any previous values: first, in the 1920s when ideology of a new revolutionary State radically rejected any old views and ideas, and then in 1990s when the new political and economic reality, as it seemed, is unable to inherit any developments of the planned economy by nature.

Nevertheless, it is well known that any experience, even negative one, is useful for making a new decision when it is evaluated comprehensively. Thus, when elaborating the contemporary migration policy it is not out of place to know what were the aims of the Russian migration policy in different historical periods and by what instruments they were achieved. Of course, it would be naive to use history for direct and immediate answers of the today migration questions. We live in a dramatically different reality.

The new time calls for revisited estimate of outcomes of the migration policy elaborated and implemented within totalitarian regime and state planning system. Market economy calls for mobility of labour. However, low mobility of population in Russia is rooted *inter alia* in the "settled" way of life of Soviet citizens conditioned by all-over State control on population movements. At the same time realization of huge industrialization projects and development of virgin lands in the Soviet period were effectively supplied by labour resources with the help of migration policy. Is there a contradiction between restraining and encouragement of migration? If no, what is the 'philosophy' of migration policy in the Soviet and pre-Soviet periods? What is the rationale of the then migration policy that could shape population movements in accordance with economic, political and demographic interests of the State and to what extent it can be applied today?

Migration policy in the Russian Empire

Historically, the migration policy in Russia started with international migration management. A major concern of Emperor Peter I (1682-1725) and later Empress Catherine II (1762-1796) was how to inhabit and develop the huge fertile lands in the Central European part of the Empire along the Volga river and stimulate agricultural development.

As internal migration of population was severely restricted by the existing serfdom system, encouragement of immigration from

European states became the source of additional population for Russia.

In 1763, a specialized State Migration Management Department – probably the first migration management board in world history – was founded to encourage colonists from Western Europe to move to unsettled areas of rural Russia.

Privileges were granted to immigrants, such as tax relief, freedom of conscience, and exemption from military service. Since then, Russia has had numerous diasporas of Germans and Dutch. By the end of the 19th century, 1.8 million Germans lived in the Russian Empire, of whom 77 percent were farmers (source: the 1897 Russian Census, cited from: Iontsev 1999, 186). Between 1764 and 1866, 549 colonies were founded by foreign resettlers in Russia with over 200,000 male migrants alone (Brockhaus & Efron Encyclopedic Dictionary, 1890-1907, vol. XXIV, 672).

Apart from farmers, thousands of skilled immigrants, including scientists, professors, military men, engineers, architects and businessmen came to settle in Russian cities. Arrival of many of these immigrants was encouraged by deliberate efforts of the Russian State, aimed at "brain gain". In the middle of the 18th century, among 107 members of the Saint Petersburg Academy of Sciences only 34 were Russians (Iontsev et al. 2001, 370).

After serfdom in Russia was abolished in 1861, European colonists gradually lost their privileges and internal migration became a major resource of colonization of the Empire's margins (Kaufman 1905). Internal migration was managed by *Pereselencheskoye Upravlenie* (Re-settlement Department) founded in 1896 within the Ministry of Interior. In 1905 the Department was placed under the Ministry of Land Management and Agriculture. This institutional shift was obviously reasonable because the overwhelming majority of re-settlers were peasants who were granted plots of arable land in newly developed territories.

Freedom of movement for peasants had a great impact on the economic development in Russia. It fuelled urbanization processes, gave rise to industries and crafts, and increased agricultural productivity. It also influenced human development prospects by giving peasants the right to be independent farmers or to be employed in a non-agricultural sector.

Since late 19th century the State encouraged migration of peasants from over-populated rural areas in European Russia to the Asian part of the country. Re-settlement of peasants was regarded as a continuation of the centuries-old process of inhabitation of the

territory of the country, the vital process for the Russian civilization (Moiseenko 2008, 250)

Re-settlers were supported financially and provided with jobs, e.g. in the construction of the Trans-Siberian Railway. All in all about 10 million people moved from Central European areas of Russia to Siberia, Ciscaucasia, and the Far East between 1871 and 1916 (Moiseenko 1994, 234). Besides, from 6 to 7 million peasants migrated for temporary (seasonal) employment every year at the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th centuries (ibid).

Putting aside details of mechanisms of re-settlement policy, we are to stress that it was the first successful example in the history of Russia that migration policy is able to (1) shape the scale and vectors of migration flows in accordance with strategic aims of the national development, and (2) to give people – by assisting their voluntary movements – additional possibility to develop their abilities and improve their level of life.

To the great extent, the contemporary population of Urals, Siberia and Far East is formed as a result of the active State west–to–east re-settlement policy. Low-mobile rural population needed some particular encouragements to move from native lands to new territories. The State provided it with such encouragements.

In the period between the end of the 18th century and the beginning of the 20th century Russia has developed a comprehensive State policy towards a variety of types of voluntary migration – international and internal, permanent and temporary, highly-skilled and peasants – and implemented a wide-range toolkit to manage migration flows, from tax relieves to direct financial aid.

During 20 years of existence of the *Pereselencheskoye Upravlenie* it demonstrated flexibility, unusual for those times. It effectively subordinated migration policy to the general socio-economic tasks, namely overcoming of agricultural crisis, supplement of peasants with lands, inhabitance of the margins of the Russian Empire, increase in internal mobility of population, which was crucially important for the developing labour market. High level of economic development of Russia before the I World War was partly a result of the rising internal mobility of population followed by urbanization, industrial development, and growth of productivity in agriculture.

The Soviet period – the era of 'propiska' and deportations. But not only that...

At the beginning of the 20th century Russia faced numerous population movements as a result of the 1917 revolution and the

1917-1923 Civil War. Social transformations, economic regression that resulted in shortage of goods and mass famine, in combination with tough policies of the Government aimed at suppression of resistance and opposition (by collectivization of peasants, dispossession of the *kulaks*, etc.), forced people to move away in search of better opportunities and security. Population movements were spontaneous, and no migrant registration system existed in the early Soviet period. Neither was any unified identification paper system in use for Soviet citizens. This situation was contradicting the idea of total registration and State control of the population. For this reason, in 1932 a common passport system for the whole territory of the USSR and a compulsory registration of the passport holder at a specific address (*propiska*) was introduced by a Government Decree (Moiseenko 2004, 88).

The passport became an exclusive identification document for Soviet citizens over 16 years of age and living permanently in cities, towns and industrial communities. *Propiska* was verified by a stamp of a territorial department of the Ministry of Interior in the person's passport. A passport without *propiska* was considered invalid. A person could live, work, study, vote, send children to school or pre-school, and have access to the social welfare system only in accordance with his/her *propiska*, i.e. at the place of registered residence. For example, it was absolutely impossible for a person with *propiska* in Novgorod to be employed in Moscow. In order to get *propiska* in a city, a statement confirming an employment in this city was necessary. However, to be employed in a city, *propiska* in this city was compulsory. It was, therefore, a vicious circle (Denisenko et al. 1989, 60).

Experts called the *propiska* system the 'serfdom of the 20th century' (Popov 1996). Passport/*propiska* system seriously limited the freedom of movement of Soviet citizens. Limitations for settlement were most strictly applied to big cities like Moscow, Leningrad (Saint Petersburg), Kiev, Kharkov, Gorky (Nizhny Novgorod), Sverdlovsk (Yekaterinburg). By the 1960s, of the total of 300 big cities in the territory of the Soviet Union (with population of over 100,000), about 200 cities were 'closed' for migrants (Regent 1999, 40).

It is worth noting that only urban citizens were granted the right to hold a passport, while villagers (*kolkhozniki*) had no passports and therefore had no right to move even within the borders of the administrative unit (province) where they lived (Moiseenko 2004, 89). Only in 1974, in accordance with a Decree issued by the Communist party and the Government, peasants got passports and

were equalized in the rights with other Soviet citizens (Popov 1996). This was mainly a result of ratification by the Soviet Union of the United Nations International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights in 1973. Article 13 of the UN Covenant declares that everyone lawfully within the territory of a State shall, within that territory, have the right to liberty of movement and freedom to choose his/her residence. The *propiska* institution was generally in conflict with this statement; but the fact that millions rural citizens in Russia who were fully deprived of their right to move within their own country was an outrage.

Despite the strict limitations of freedom of movement, the scale of internal migration in the Soviet Union was large. *Political i*nterests of the totalitarian regime called for strict control over population, therefore the *propiska* system tied people down to a certain place of living. However, *economic* interests of the state needed mobility of labour resources for implementation of industrialization projects and development of virgin lands. In the Soviet period mobility of labour and flexibility of labour market were provided with instruments, which were the only possible under centralized planning economy – the rigidly organized labor recruitment system (*orgnabor*), 'distribution of graduates' (*raspredelenie)* and often forced re-settlement. This way the State was solving a task of reasonable (from its perspective) distribution of population over the territory of the country Zaslavskaya and Rybakovskiy 1978).

Therefore, on the one hand there were *voluntary* (but strictly State-driven) employment-led migrations: people were moved to large-scale construction and industrial sites within the frames of the *orgnabor* system. During the 1930s, over 28.7 million people were re-settled across the Soviet Union under this system (Moiseenko, 1994, 234). These were mainly rural citizens recruited to construction and manufacturing sectors in urban areas, and the urbanization process was accelerated in line with the industrialization policy.

Resettlements to remote regions of Northern and Eastern Russia were encouraged by a set of stimulating economic measures, including a traveling allowance, 'regional wage increments', early retirement and a higher pension, accommodation, annual paid vacation with transport fares covered by the state, free vouchers to a health resort and so on.

Voluntary by form, migrations under *orgnabor* were strictly determined by directions. Migration to remote underdeveloped regions with severe climatic conditions was encouraged while

movements to developed areas, even for a family reunion, were limited. Regulated by the *propiska* policy, migration was permissive by nature.

On the other hand, *involuntary* (also State-driven) migration was an objective reality of the Soviet Union, particularly in the 1930s-1950s. The migration policy was chosen as an instrument of political suppression and struggle against dissent. Initially deportations were aimed at well-off farmers (*kulaks*) who were dispossessed and – in order to avoid their recovery – forcedly moved to underdeveloped northern areas. Later deportations/displacements of whole ethnic groups (Crimean Tatars, Ingushs, Germans, Chechens, Kalmyks, Koreans, and others) from their native lands to remote areas in Siberia, Kazakhstan, and the Far East were aimed at destruction of their unity and ethnic identity. Between 1932 and 1940, the number of so called 'special resettlers' (*spetspereselentsy*) as this type of migrants was named in the official statistics, totalled 2.2 million; by 1953 their number increased to 2.8 million (Bruk and Kabuzan 1991). During the Second World War, whole ethnic communities were (often falsely) accused of assisting the German army and were urgently moved to the Asian part of the USSR. Totally, over 2 million of Germans, Chechens, Tatars, Ingushs, Kalmyks, Karachaevs, Meskhetian Turks were displaced. 78 percent of them were women and children. According to estimates, every fifth of the migrants died on the way (Mukomel 1991).

The ethnicity-based deportations in the Soviet period was a part of the State policy of mass repressions and one of the most tragic pages of the Russian history (Vishnevsky 2007). Forced and politically driven migrations swept millions of people and ruined a lot of human lives, impressing a dramatic image on the nation's character (Roshin 2008). This explains *inter alia* why 'human rights & freedoms' is a difficult-to-understand value in Russia even now, two decades after *perestroika* has revised priorities in favor of the 'socialism with a human face' ideology (Vinogradov 2001).

Nowadays Russian researchers (Aleshkovski 2006; Moiseenko 2004; Roshin 2008) tend to evaluate the Soviet experience of internal labor migration policy as positive because (1) the *orgnabor* policy achieved its goals to supply the growing manufacturing and transport industries with labor resources; (2) it succeeded in redistribution of the population across the country and development of its Asian territories; (3) it attracted thousands of young people to industrialization projects and helped distinguish the most initiative and active individuals who later became administrative or political leaders.

These arguments can be accepted, but the 'philosophy' and inhumane methods of the Soviet migration policy can hardly be approved. The state migration policy was fully governed by the demands of the State, not people. The interest of the state was the highest priority while the interests of its people were largely ignored.

The migration management in the Soviet period was coordinated with the general economic and political strategy of the State. The need for industrial development and cultivation of virgin and long-fallow lands called for mass resettlements that were encouraged by administrative and economic tools, while the trend for a total control over the nation realized through the *propiska* system limited migration to big cities. The authoritarian migration management ensured people would move to where the State interests needed them. The state planning covered not only the economic development of the country, but also shaped migration flows.

Thus, on the one hand, participation in *orgnabor* gave opportunities to young people, particularly those from rural areas, to improve their living, be active in social life, get professional skills up to higher education, and as a result expand their horizons. However, on the other hand, *propiska* severely limited direction and scale of migration and left the people little chance to decide their own destiny. Limitations of movement inhibited people's development, both in terms of professional and career growth and income earning. In many cases it resulted in underdevelopment of human capabilities (Khorev 1974).

This situation has deeply influenced the mentality of the Russians. It has damaged the understanding of the role of individuals in their country's development. The farfetched economic 'law' put a heavy focus on the development of production means, including machines, equipment and tools, while virtually ignoring production of consumer goods to meet the basic human needs. The State policy was aimed mainly at economic growth and output rather than on satisfaction of human needs.

It is admitted now that the socialist system failed in Russia and other countries of the socialist block mainly due to its irrational human outcomes. Real socialism turned to be a mono-power and mono-property society with underdeveloped needs of the population and even less possibilities to realize those needs; it was a society of 'a cheap worker' with no purpose of high living standards (Kolesov 2008, 15).

Besides, the *propiska* system that limited the people's mobility in the Soviet period has had its long-term effect on the post-Soviet Russia. The low level of internal migration in the contemporary

Russia that impedes development of the national labor market and its progress towards a market economy is psychologically deeply rooted in the artificial restrictions on mobility imposed by *propiska*.

In addition to the above limitations of internal migration, it should be said that international migration was an exception rather than a rule in the Soviet Union. For decades of the Soviet regime the USSR was a 'closed' country where international migration was strictly limited by the State. The entry and departure rules, granting and revoking citizenship and deportations were regulated by decrees and ministerial instructions issued in 1918, 1925 and 1959 that reflected the restrictive stance of the State (Tiurkin 2005, 21-22).

Immigration and emigration were meager in number and mainly of a political / ideological nature. Trips of Soviet citizens to other countries were regulated by severe security checks: permission to go abroad was closely related to the ideological loyalty and political allegiance of a candidate, even for tourists. To depart from the USSR, temporarily or permanently, Soviet citizens had to get an exit visa. Membership in the Communist Party and personal testimonial from the SPSU unit was a compulsory requirement for any person to be sent on a temporary job to another country. Temporary labor migrants were sent as specialists to participate in development and construction projects in the 'satellite' developing countries like Afghanistan, Algeria, Angola, China, Egypt, Iraq, Syria, Vietnam, etc., that were encouraged to follow the socialism model and given the economic and financial support.

Arrivals and stay of foreign citizens in the Soviet Union, for diplomats and tourists alike, were also strictly controlled. International labor migrants from satellite countries (Poland, Bulgaria, Yugoslavia, Vietnam, and China) came to Russia in teams to work in politically significant projects (like oil & gas pipelines and power lines that were parts of the European socialist energy supply system) or in manufacturing industries. Another channel of temporary migration to the USSR was student migration. The low-cost and high-quality education in the Soviet universities and professional schools increased human capital of the Soviet Blok states, and supplied them with qualified doctors, teachers, engineers, geologists, etc. At the same time, it was an effective way of strengthening the ties between the countries. The outer borders of the USSR were effectively guarded. Illegal migration, if any, was negligible and concerned criminal cross-border activities; it was effectively counteracted by security services.

Therefore, in contrast to the tsarist period the Soviet system of migration management was extremely strict; it was based on the idea

of absolute control of a State over people's movements. Even if we put aside the practices of forced/involuntary resettlements, other instruments of the Soviet migration policy seriously limited the rights and freedoms of people – the right for freedom of movement, the right to leave the country, the right to freely choose a place of residence inside the country. At the same time, we cannot reject that a system of *economic* mechanisms of migration management was elaborated and successfully implemented during the Soviet period. It provided mobility of labour resources to inhabit and develop territories which were non-attractive for people but vital for economy.

Thus, what can be learnt by the contemporary Russia from the historical experience of the Soviet migration policy?

First, it is the understanding that in a country with vast territory and unevenly distributed population, internal migration policies is to be an important element of the State strategy, especially in the periods of realization of big economic projects. Nowadays, importance of such a policy is enhanced by the demographic crisis that Russia is facing and unfavourable spontaneous migration trends (e.g. outflow of population from Far East region; concentration of population in the Moscow agglomeration).

Second, it is effectiveness of economic measures designed to encourage internal migration that are able to shape reasonable migration flows, even in the circumstances of low mobility of population. For example, the well-defined State task to increase population of the Russian Far East region, when supported by a *system* of long-term economic incentives, appears quite realistic. According to sociological surveys conducted in 2008-2009 among the citizens of the European regions of the Russian Federation who face employment difficulties, *every fifth* (!) person is ready to consider possibility to move to Siberia or Far East in case of sufficient support from the State (Denisenko et al. 2010). The former "regional coefficients" to the salaries can be hardly used today as such a support because the state sector of economy has shrunk while market economy has different principles. But there are other mechanisms – social benefits, privileged mortgage, tax benefits, including those for small-scale business.

Undoubtedly, migration policy by itself is not able to re-direct migration flows to the Far East region. It is necessary to create favourable conditions to attract Russian and foreign investments, develop technically advanced sectors of economy and infrastructure, increase the region's image. Attracted by growing economic activity in the Far East, people will likely migrate there themselves (if they

are not forestalled by Chinese migrants). However, if the issue of demographic and economic recovery of the Far East region is announced as a nation-range project that is supported by the complex of corresponding economic, social, demographic and *migration* policies, the situation in this vitally important geopolitical region of Russia can be radically and positively changed in the foreseeable future.

Third, it is principal difference in methods of management applied to internal and international migration. The Soviet period gives us a lesson that management of internal migration can sometimes apply methods, which are acceptable from the perspective of the existing state morality but do not correspond to the universally recognized International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. A State can construct its relations with its own population on the basis of national norms while the international migration policy must take into account international laws, mechanisms and practices. For example, severe methods realized in the sphere of migration in the Soviet period up to forced resettlements of whole nations, cannot be applied in international migration management where international agreements, standards and conventions play an important role.

In this context, we can remind how an attempt of the Soviet authorities to introduce such a 'innocuous', as it seemed, limitation on departures of the Soviet citizens as payment for the higher education received free of charge in Soviet universities[1] has caused such a protest in the Western countries that the payment was cancelled already in a year. However, the Jackson–Vanik amendment introduced in the USA trade law as a response to restriction of emigration by "diploma tax" is still valid and continues to harm interests of the Russian Federation in its trade relations with the USA.

In 1990s, there were again political calls to introduce "diploma tax" for emigrants and compensate expenses of Russia related to acceptance of refugees from other republics of the former Soviet Union (who were mainly ethnic Russians returning to their motherland) by the countries of departure (Kamensky 1999: 224-237). All these calls are the vestiges of the Soviet times and an attempt to solve the problems of international migration with "habitual" strongarm methods. Similar confusion is seen in the policies towards refugees and forced migrants in the early 1990s

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[1] The Decree of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR of 3 August 1972 "On reimbursement of the education expenses by Soviet citizens departing from the Soviet Union for permanent residence in other countries".

when mixing of these two categories of migrants – international and internal – resulted in a nexus of non-solved problems of both. The big "positive" experience of management of international population movements in the Soviet period has played a nasty trick on the elaborators of the post-Soviet migration policy in 1990s. International migration with the former Soviet republics was interpreted by them as a continuation of the former inter-republican migration in the Soviet period while it was already fundamentally different by nature *international* migration. The former experience of experts specializing in management of internal migration during the Soviet period did not fit the need to elaborate very quickly – as the time needed – the full-range Russian international migration policy. It has resulted in many methodological mistakes in international migration management in the post-Soviet period (Ivakhnyuk 2011).

Therefore, major lessons of the tsarist and Soviet migration policy important for future development of Russia are dealing not with its results in re-distribution of population over the territory of the country in accordance with the State needs and even less with methods of how these results were achieved but with incorporation of internal migration policy into the general strategy of the national development and determination of the role of migration policy in solving economic, demographic and political problems which the country is facing.

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