

## **Dealing with Ethnic Diversity:**

The Challenges of Immigration to Sub-National Authorities in  
Nizhny Novgorod and the Volga Federal District

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*Conference paper draft*

*Bucharest, April 10-12, 2003*

### **Introduction**

The social and economic reforms have the chances to be implemented only provided that Russia has adequate human capital. That is why for better understanding of Russian perspectives it is so important to keep an eye on what is going on in the field of multi-culturality and ethnic diversity.

The social structures of Russia are much more diverse than it used to be a decade ago. Yet the problem is that some of these social structures are not quite visible. Within society there are invisible borders that separate people on the basis of ethnicity, race and/or religion. Regional society - due to immigration - becomes more sensitive to the pressures of globalization, and very often more vulnerable. Therefore, public decision makers need new policy tools to adequately comprehend and appraise the nature of societal changes currently underway.

There are different categories of immigrants: Russian and non-Russian citizens, officially registered forced migrants, legal refugees, illegal migrants and others. Among CIS countries, the biggest suppliers of the labour force to the Russian market are Ukraine, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova and Armenia<sup>1</sup>. Several categories could be distinguished among them: immigrants oriented towards long-term residence in Russia, “pendulum” migrants, and season

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<sup>1</sup> Garcia-Iser, Margarita. "Edyniy rynok truda SNG: realii i perspektivy", at <http://pubs.carnegie.ru/books/1998/10gv/toc.asp>.

workers<sup>2</sup>. Basically they prefer to concentrate in those sectors (like commerce or construction) that allow for quick revenues.

The majority of newcomers are young and rather well qualified people – from 20 to 29 years old<sup>3</sup>, which turns them into successful labour market actors. For example, the construction workers from Ukraine are strong competitors in many Russia's regional markets, which provokes protest reactions in the regions.

### **Background information about the sub-national authorities**

#### ***Nizhny Novgorod***

Nizhny Novgorod oblast (NNO) was a closed area till 1991 due to heavy militarization of its industry in the Soviet times. The whole decade of 1990s was the period of gradual adjustment of the regional elites and institutions to the international environment. NNO started to reclaim its historical reputation as the commercial “pocket of Russia”. From the beginning of 1990s, NNO has declared far-reaching international ambitions (historically, Nizhniy Novgorod Fair was an important international trade point; by the end of 1990s the NNO government has launched a project to turn the region into a leading Eastern European cultural centre).

Of all Volga cities, Nizhny Novgorod is one of leaders - along with Samara, Saratov and Tatarstan - in attracting foreign immigration. However, the number of illegal immigrants is estimated as about 10 thousand; according to the local law enforcement agencies, 103 enterprises were reported to employ illegal labour force.

#### ***Volga Federal District***

Projects for enlarging the Russian regional units were a part of the political agenda in Russia throughout the 1990s. Many politicians have

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<sup>2</sup> Kuz'min, Alexei. "Trudovaya migratsia s Ukrainy v Rossiu: potoki, pravovaya situatsia, posledstvia", at <http://pubs.carnegie.ru/books/1998/10gv/toc.asp>.

<sup>3</sup> Zaionchkovskaya, Zhanna. "Rynok truda kak reguliator migratsionnykh potokov", at <http://pubs.carnegie.ru/books/1998/10gv/toc.asp>.

advocating the policy of giving priority to the so-called “regional poles of growth” to become in the future the centers of “large lands” all across Russia.

In May 2000, with Putin as the new Russian President, the old idea of reshuffling the whole system of Russian regionalism obtained a more concrete design: according to the Presidential decree seven federal districts were created, each one to be run by a Presidential envoy. VFD - with its center in Nizhny Novgorod - was created as agglomeration of the whole Volga & Viatka economic region complemented by some territories of Trans-Volga and the Urals economic regions. Sergey Kirienko with a good reputation of intelligent and well educated political leader<sup>4</sup> was nominated the Presidential representative.

VFD is the second macro-region in Russia after the Central Federal District in terms of immigration flows. The mass migration is one of the most important factors that affect socio-economic and political processes in the VFD regions. During 1990s, 1 million 165 thousand immigrants have settled in the VFD territory. The most intensive immigration occurred in 1993-1994.

There are two main sources of migration to the VFD: ethnic conflicts and Russia's vicinity and economic hardship. Ethnically, 85% of all immigrants are of Russian cultural and linguistic background; as far as ethnically non-Russian immigrants is concerned, they are mostly Kazakhs (40%), Central Asians (30%), Caucasians (11%) and Ukrainians (11%)<sup>5</sup>.

### **The problem**

Immigrants usually face multiples challenges in course of getting adapted to the regional social milieu. This study is focused on the way the regional public authorities react to and deal with immigration challenges.

Managerial problems are multiple in this domain. *First*, should the regional institutions fail to accommodate all interests existing within regional society, these interests - including those ethnically-grouped - will inevitably be

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<sup>4</sup> *Pole mneniy*. Issue 06, November 2000. Moscow: Public Opinion Foundation, pp.71-72.

<sup>5</sup> <http://antropotok.archipelag.ru/keys2/keys2-0.htm>

manifested in extra-institutional forms that lay outside public policy space (informal bargaining, the importance of personal connections with bureaucrats, bribery, etc.).

*Second*, inter-ethnic clashes based on security-threatening events (terrorist attacks, wars in Chechnia and Iraq, etc.) are prone to sharpen conflicts on grass-roots level, since negative attitudes and ethnic cliches are easily projected downwards.

### ***Gravity and trends***

The importance of ethnicity (in terms of the sense of belonging to certain ethnic groups) is growing in regional Russia due to several reasons:

- globalization fosters mass migration across borders;
- regionalization sharpens differentiation among domestic regions, thus making most successful of them very attractive for immigrants;
- economic liberalization provokes more intensive competition among social groups; therefore, ethnicity is an instrument that facilitates the access to resources related to employment, public goods, etc.;
- other forms of social coalitions based on ideological or political affiliations are in crisis.

Sociologically speaking, NNO is one of most tolerant regions in the whole country (the 'tolerance index", i.e. correlation between negative and positive attitudes to aliens, is estimated as 0,86). Nevertheless, the problem of ethnic diversity is one of those issues that has recently entered the regional public discourse and possesses a great deal of destructive potential. Within the framework of 2002 electoral campaign in the city of Nizhny Novgorod this issue has appeared on the surface in a number of rather disturbing forms:

- one of candidates for the city mayor (Andrey Klimentiev), using nationalistic rhetoric, has called for "cleaning of urban marketplaces from people of Caucasian and Central Asian background", which was received quite positively in many social groups;

- as a negative campaigning tool, one of candidates has ascribed to his opponent the pseudo-intention to transfer to Nizhny Novgorod hundreds of families of Chechenian refugees; the clear purpose of this misinformation was to destroy the campaign of one of forerunners by scaring voters. The issue was taken to the courts by initiative coming from law-enforcement agencies and the territorial department of Ministry for Mass Media, yet the accusation in deliberate fostering inter-ethnic hatred has not been legally proven.

There are many other indications of ethnic intolerance in the society. For example, the attempt of the Nizhny Novgorod Human Rights Society to open the local branch of the Russian - Chechenian Friendship Society has received predominantly negative coverage in the regional mass media.

The public opinion is under heavy influence of the media messages: thus, these were ethnically non-Russians who featured in two major criminal high-line events of recent time (kidnapping and murder of a group of local policemen). The media has also reported about violent clashes between Asian students studying in the Nizhny Novgorod Medical Academy and local dwellers<sup>6</sup>.

### ***Trends:***

- Russia is a country attractive for immigration; yet in the Volga Federal District, immigration is decreasing (neither of 6 mega-cities of VFD is able to keep its attractiveness for immigrants on a steady level)<sup>7</sup>;
- By 2031 the population will go down (from 10% to 27%), yet despite economic rationale, restrictive pattern of immigration prevail (Federal Migration Service is a part of the Interior Ministry).

## **Prior efforts to deal with the problem**

### ***Regional level***

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<sup>6</sup> <http://www.nizhny.ru/report29832>

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.prometa.ru>

The regional government has some impact on the way the ethnic diversity is managed, mostly through labour market regulation. The oblast-level authorities are in charge of social infrastructure, economic monitoring, and business regulation.

The problem is that they widely apply administrative measures to manage the problem. Immigrants are seen as a heavy burden for the local budget and social infrastructure. By the same token, some of regional authorities used to artificially inflate the number of immigrants residing in their territories in order to gain additional funds from the central government.

In many regions it is extremely hard to get official residence registration, which is indispensable for applying for the Russian citizenship, getting a job and launching business. According to the information released at the Second Forum of Migrants' Organization, 67% of the immigrants have faced the refusal of the regional administrators to register them officially<sup>8</sup>. In some subjects of federation (belonging to the VFD) authorities introduce additional registration fees, which contradict to the federal legislation. The federal authorities had cancelled some of these undue restrictions, but de facto some of them are still in action. Some regional authorities, in overt conflict with the federal legislation, deny employment rights for those immigrants (even having the Russian citizenship) that are not registered in their specific region.

There are serious practical obstacles in receiving the status of official immigrant and refugee (lack of official information and the need to regularly travel to the regional offices of the Federal Migration Service). Among negative consequences of regional anti-migration policies is de-socialization and marginalization of newcomers, their exclusion from the social and public life, and vast possibilities for exploitation of their cheap labour – the less rights

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<sup>8</sup> Fillipova, Elena. "Polozhenie migrantov v Rossii – pravo i real'nost", at <http://www.golos.ru>.

the migrants have and the more are they dependable on local bureaucrats, the less expensive is their labour force<sup>9</sup>.

There were only a few initiatives to accommodate immigrants that used to be declared on the regional level - and both have failed. The Oriol oblast governor Egor Stroevev has agreed to accept more immigrants - provided that the federal budget would make adequate financial contribution; while the Saratov oblast governor Dmitry Ayatskov in 1999 has expressed his readiness to bring to the region a group of refugees from Yugoslavia - yet the initiative was cancelled because 97 per cent of the local population refused to support it.

### *City-level*

Municipal authorities in Nizhny Novgorod are mostly concerned about *religious* organizations, taking this issue basically from cultural distinctiveness perspective. The city Department for Public and Inter-confessional Relations thus became engaged in heated debate over differentiating between "traditional" and non-traditional religions - the issue that has polarizing effect on the regional society. Another controversial issue declared by the city administration officials is that the state, according to their reading, should have declared its own interests in religious sphere (for the sake of public order, and preservation of cultural traditions) and should not hide its reservations with regard to certain minority groups (often controversially called "non-organic religious groups") that deviate from what is called "cultural mainstream", depend on foreign sponsors, and are eager to import "foreign values". Igor Simonov, the deputy director of the above mentioned Department, deems that Nizhny Novgorod is a mono-national region, with the Orthodox church as the dominating religion; in his view, there is no "market" for the religious groups in the region. The city administration has criticized the federal authorities for programs that focus on special ethnic groups (Ukrainians, Finno-Ugrians, etc.),

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<sup>9</sup> Vitkovskaya, Galina. "Vynuzhdennye migranty iz novykh nezavisimyykh gosudarstv na rossiiskom rynke truda", at <http://pubs.carnegie.ru/books/1998/10gv/toc.asp>.

and pledged to avoid introducing ethnic quotas and special electoral districts based on ethnic background.

### ***Federal District-level***

Initially, the VFD authorities have treated the immigration from national security viewpoint. Rearranging the 2400 km border with Kazakhstan was declared one of top challenges for VFD administration. Specificity of VFD external border is that it plays simultaneously two roles - communicative and defensive. From one hand, according to new Foreign Policy Doctrine of the Russian Federation, border with Kazakhstan - CIS member - is supposed to function as a tool of further integration of both countries. From another hand, areas bordering with Kazakhstan face the problems of contraband, poaching and illegal migration. With creation of a new administrative district the VFD became a border area and thus inherited the problems related to the cross-border crime, including the drug trafficking from Kazakhstan<sup>10</sup>. Valentin Stepankov, Sergey Kirienko's deputy on law enforcement issues, was quite explicit in saying that non-protected border is the cause of illegal migration and religious extremists. In the meanwhile, because of weak border protection Russia loses raw materials, food, stolen cars and other contraband items<sup>11</sup>.

There is a number of border problems that we addressed by VFD administration:

- lack of federal resources for adequately protecting the border. In practice, these are regional administrations that provide frontier troops with housing, transportation, energy supply, and building or overhauling frontier posts.
- substantial increase of the geographical area to be covered by Volga Customs Department due to inclusion of Orenburg oblast to the VFD. According to Vladimir Egorov, Volga Customs director, one of the problems is that customs offices are located far away from border-crossing stations.

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<sup>10</sup> *Izvestia*, 20 September 2000, p. 2.

<sup>11</sup> <http://www.pfo.ru/main/news.phtml?id=1310>

- The second troubling issue he addressed is the practice of recruiting customs officers among local population which increases possibilities for corruption.
- weak coordination between customs service, border-guards and railway authorities in preventing smuggling and other illegal actions.
  - activities of Cossack units in border territories claiming to play more significant role in defending the border. This is a highly controversial issue. From one hand, the whole set of border-related matters can't be solved without involving local population, including Cossacks as its most organized force. The Cossacks have their own - inherited from the past centuries - system of inspecting the borderland, which could compliment other security appliances (barbed wire, electronic alarm system, etc.). Yet on the other hand, by law Cossacks (as well as other self-ruled groups) are not supposed to participate in protecting the state border. Among factors that complicate interaction between the Cossack units and frontier-guards are widely spread among Cossacks nationalist and jingoist feelings, as well as numerous complains from the local population accusing the Cossacks in extortion.

### **Nature of the innovative policy practices**

The policy discussion initiated at the *district level* in fall 2002 stems from the assumption that Russia faces the lack of labour force, and its deficit will be sharpened in the years to come. Those areas the immigrants are heading for suffer from depopulation, which might be compensated by immigration at least by one half. For many enterprises and villages<sup>12</sup> the workers coming from CIS were a kind of “doping” that allowed to survive the crisis<sup>13</sup>. Starting from 2006 Russia will loose about one million of labour force per year. Should Russia close its borders for immigrants, the country's population would shrink by 70 million at the middle of the century<sup>14</sup>. That means that immigration is

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<sup>12</sup> “*Nezavisimaya gazeta*” Web site, at [http://regions.ng.ru/printed/club-89/2000-04-11/5\\_ecodemo.html](http://regions.ng.ru/printed/club-89/2000-04-11/5_ecodemo.html).

<sup>13</sup> Kirillova, Elena. "Ukrainskie trudovie migranty v Rossii", at <http://pubs.carnegie.ru/books/1998/10gv/toc.asp>.

<sup>14</sup> *Itogi*, May 29, 2001. P.39.

one of few hopes for Russian industrial perspectives. And vice versa: scarce immigration will inevitably lead to urban stagnation.

The general policy assumption is that the potential to accommodate migrants is still significant. In Vladimir Zorin's words, without immigration Russia has no future<sup>15</sup>. At the same time, the new policy is based on the assumption that immigration does not seriously alter the existing ethnic balance in the regions. Therefore, the immigration issue is deliberately de-securitized<sup>16</sup>.

What is peculiar in the new vision of the immigration is that the new - and ostensibly liberal - views have been generated in the expert community, and then translated into practice. The new terms - 'antropo-flow' (antropotok) - was coined. It differs from immigration by including social values, ideas and institutions that are included.

### ***Goals and objectives of the perspective policy***

The managerial problem for public authorities is to relate to each other the following policy tasks:

- To secure the social rights of ethnic communities. The core of the ethnic policy is to assure each person to feel safe regardless of his ethnic background.
- To deal with illegal immigration (its ration ranger, according to some estimates, from 1:1 to 1:20). According to official statistics, in NNO in 2001 about 9000 illegal immigrants (mostly from CIS countries) have been identified.
- To fill the labour force gaps for the sake of economic efficiency;
- To keep social stability and peace, avoiding inter-ethnic conflicts.

### ***Activities:***

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<sup>15</sup> <http://antropotok.archipelag.ru>

<sup>16</sup> S.Artobolevskii, I.Badysheva, Zh.Zaionchkovskaia, D.Mukhmanov, N.Mkrtchan. "Migratsionnaia situatsia v PFO" (Migration in the Volga Federal District), at <http://antropotok.archipelag.ru/keys1/keys1-1.htm>

- *Actors*: Volga Federal District administration; Commission on Ethno-Cultural and Confessional Relations at the apparatus of presidential representative in the VFD; the Center for Strategic Research (CSR) of the VFD.
- *Activities*: a) public debates; b) lobbying in the federal organs.
- *Beneficiaries*: according to the CSR blueprint, municipal authorities should be given stronger voice in tackling the plethora of immigration-related issues. VFD is lobbying for municipal rights and the rights of immigrants.
- *Condition of operation*: instead of isolating themselves from immigration flows, the cities and regions have to compete for immigrants with each other.
- *Interpretation*. Apart from administrative factors (bureaucratic inertia, corruption, etc.) other factors also should be taken into account - for example, high realty prices and lack of due banking mechanisms for taking loans.

### **Tentative results**

Since 2002 the federal government has introduced the practice of distributing the residence quotas among the regions according to their estimated needs. Therefore, the regional authorities have received the right to submit to the federal government the numbers of residence permissions to be delivered to foreign immigrants. Yet most of VFD regions not only lack immigration inflow, but do not wish to incite it in the forthcoming future.

The first results of regions' intervention into migration policies are very contradictory. The quota demands drastically vary from region to region.

Here is the example of uneven quota distribution between the Volga Federal District regions:

- Orenburg oblast - 30 000
- Bashkortostan - 20 000
- Samara oblast - 6 000
- Chuvashia - 5 800

- Tatarstan - 3 000
- Ulianovsk oblast - 2 980
- Nizhny Novgorod oblast - 2 000
- Mordovia - 2 000
- Perm' oblast - 1 000
- Udmurtia - 500
- Mari El - 450
- Penza oblast - 250
- Saratov oblast - 200
- Kirov oblast - 50
- Komi-Permiak autonomous district - 0

What is clear from this table is:

- quota demands coming from the regions do not correspond to regions' economic potential;
- the figures given by regional authorities are in stark contradiction to the fact - proven by experts - that within VFD these are Samara and Nizhny Novgorod regions are the most attractive for immigration. In particular, Orenburg oblast that has declared the major quota for immigrants, is an example of border region - adjacent to Kazakhstan - which is basically used as transit territory for incoming aliens;
- regions that have declared minimal - from less than 1000 per year to zero - figures seem to have no clear idea on how to deal with immigration. They definitely lack long-term strategy of accommodating the immigrants.

Another effect of the new policy approach is the creation of the External Relation office at the Oblast Legislature to deal with religious and ethnic minorities. The first experience of this new unit has shown that there are many problems to be raised by ethnic groups residing in NNO: they are interested in lowering the energy rates and land taxes, and having more ethnically-specific media outlets in the region<sup>17</sup>.

### *Recommendations*

Migration, being a part of the global challenges, raises a number of issues.

- The immigration policy has to become more flexible and territory-sensitive. Regions have to learn how to decide on quantity and quality of immigrants, the same way as the Western European countries did in starting from 1960s: what kind of people they need, in which spheres of labour markets, etc. More powers have to be given to those regional and municipal authorities that have expressed their clear interest in preventing segregation within the cities. Russian immigration policy has to move from centralization to subsidiarity, and the regions' role has to transform from transit terrain to accommodation. In accommodating the immigrants, the regional authorities have to start treating organized ethnic communities as their partners that may effectively deal with a number of social issues.
- More specific division of functions between different layers of public authority is needed. Local authorities ideally have to be in charge of helping in assimilation and adaptation to local conditions; the federal districts are supposed to lobby for most effective measures of immigrants adaptation on behalf of most successful regions.
- Corruption within immigration-related institutions should be properly addressed. In particular, discretionary powers of immigration officers should be minimized.
- Ombudsman offices have to be installed in the regions (nowadays, only 20 regional administrations in Russia have introduced human rights officers). As the practice shows, ombudsman is one of most effective means to deal with ethnic minorities rights ("Strategia" Center of St.Petersburg is the most active Russian NGO to promote this idea).
- Local think tanks have to be strengthened in their capacity as public policy actors. They should be welcome to give their rational assessments on the

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<sup>17</sup> [http://www.infonet.nnov.ru/nsn/arch/mess.phtml?mess\\_id=119769](http://www.infonet.nnov.ru/nsn/arch/mess.phtml?mess_id=119769)

state of ethnic diversity and the scope of managerial problems the authorities face;

- There is a need for positive media strategy to provide coverage for new pro-immigration policy. Some steps have been made already in this direction: the VDF administration has initiated the introduction of teaching courses on "Confessional Journalism" in Nizhny Novgorod State University.
- Educational modules have to be developed for regional immigration officers, basically focusing on such issues as tolerance, ethnic diversity, multi-culturalism, religious and linguistic pluralism).