



**Risks of the high-scale
immigration in the public
discourse of Russia**

RISKS OF THE HIGH-SCALE IMMIGRATION IN THE PUBLIC DISCOURSE OF RUSSIA

RIESGOS DE LA INMIGRACIÓN A GRAN ESCALA EN EL DISCURSO PÚBLICO DE RUSIA

ABSTRACT

The article is devoted to the study of public discourse in the Russian society in terms of immigration. The immigration has become an integral part of Russian reality and one of the most important factors in its development. Indeed, immigration is destiny for Russian society. So, these forecasts suggest that the number of migrants arriving into Russian Federation will increase in the short-to-medium-term. The arrival of migrants who are different from the host population raises serious concerns among people in Russian society. The part of these risks is justified and the rest is more the result of existing stereotypes and prejudices. The article aims to highlight the main scenarios related to the immigration risks assessment as well as to analyze the reasonableness of mentioned ideas. The article formulates some recommendations that can reduce conflict potential degree in migration flows and thus diminish the importance of some stereotypes and prejudices in the modern Russian society.

KEYWORDS: Russia, immigration, public discourse, risks, stereotypes, prejudice.

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RESUMEN

El artículo está dedicado al estudio del discurso público en la sociedad rusa en términos de inmigración. La inmigración se ha convertido en una parte integral de la realidad rusa y uno de los factores más importantes en su desarrollo. De hecho, la inmigración es el destino de la sociedad rusa. Por lo tanto, estas previsiones sugieren que el número de migrantes que llegarán a la Federación de Rusia aumentará en el corto y mediano plazo. La llegada de migrantes que son diferentes de la población de acogida plantea serias preocupaciones entre las personas de la sociedad rusa. La parte de estos riesgos está justificada y el resto es más el resultado de los estereotipos y prejuicios existentes. El artículo tiene como objetivo destacar los principales escenarios relacionados con la evaluación de los riesgos de la inmigración, así como analizar la razonabilidad de las ideas mencionadas. El artículo formula algunas recomendaciones que pueden reducir el grado potencial de conflicto en los flujos migratorios y así disminuir la importancia de algunos estereotipos y prejuicios en la sociedad rusa moderna.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Rusia, inmigración, discurso público, riesgos, estereotipos, prejuicio.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The development of the Russia in the 21st century will be mainly conditioned by the migration processes. Depopulation and dramatic reduction in labour force will increase the importance of the immigration processes. By 2060 the total demographic load on the working population will have risen in the Russia from 38.6 on 100 people of the working age till 70.9 [Electronic version of the bulletin "Population and Society", 2017].

Immigration is able to soften the negative consequences of demographic processes. One can say that mass migrations are inevitable for our country. Russia's future is to be a country for a mass migration. But opponents of active migration policy point out surge of inter-ethnic animosities and conflicts in the society.

The main purpose of our study is to identify stereotypes associated with migrants as well as the factors contributing to their appearance in public discourse. In conclusion, we will try to assess the migration risks existing in public opinion.

2. METHODS

The main method used in this study was a qualitative research of publications on immigration in the leading media that had an impact on the formation of public sentiments in 2011-2016 and the analysis of the results of sociological researches conducted by WCIOM. The other method in the study was an own sociological survey on issues of migration, xenophobia and intolerance among students (2048 respondents). The sociological poll was conducted in four Russian regions (Tatarstan, Mari El, Archangelsk and Krasnoyarsk regions) in 2014.

3. RESULTS

First of all, it is necessary to define the list of threats related to immigration, which is laid down in the official documents. The official position of Government has a direct impact on a variety of public sentiments. "Concept of state migration policy in the RF till 2025" lists the following possible risks of migration processes:

1. Migrants, arriving in the RF from the CIS countries, in comparison with their predecessors, have a lower education level, the Russian language skills, and professional training.
2. There occurs the migrant isolation from the host society, that leads to social exclusiveness of migrants, spatial segregation and ethnic enclaves formation.
3. Growing negative attitude to migrants, including the growth of xenophobia and intolerance ["Concept of state migration policy in the RF till 2025" 2017].

Thus, the main threats are linked to the cultural differences between arriving migrants and the host community, which whether can lead to the isolation of migrants and cause an increase in the inter-ethnic tensions.

If we look at discourse of Russian media, we can see a much wider list of issues under discussion. Partially, they are related to the list of risks, stated in the official documents. As a result of analysis of publications we were able to identify the following significant public perceptions of immigration risks:

1. Immigration flows are from the countries with difficult sanitary conditions. The origin countries of migrants in the last time there were outbreaks of epidemics as new diseases, such as «avian influenza», and as well as cholera, for instant, seemed to have been forgotten.
2. Foreign communities in the border areas of Russia are intensively forming, especially in the regions of Siberia and the Far East. The poll of WCIOM demonstrates that occupation of Russian area by representatives of other states was the main fear of the 27% of Russians in 2014 ["Report WCIOM about interethnic relations in Russia, WCIOM", 2017]. The main reason for this stereotype, that in 2010 in the Siberian Federal district there li-

ved only 19.3 mln people, in the Far Eastern Federal district - 6.3 mln people ["Informational materials about the final results of the National Population Census 2010", 2016]. In comparison with the data of 1989 the population of the Siberian district decreased by more than 7.5%, while in the Far Eastern - by more than 19%. These indicators are higher in the whole in Russia. It is important that migrants are replacing the shrinking population, thereby creating a threat of separation of these territories in the future. According to V. Gelbras's calculations, there were from 200.0 to 450.0 thousand Chinese on the territory of Russia in 2001 [V. Gelbras, 2017]. Given that a large part of the Chinese migrants concentrate in the Far Eastern district, a similar process may lead to the most deplorable consequences trying to preserve the Russian control in the sub-region. "Concept of state migration policy in the RF till 2025" notes this threat also .

3. The migrants' isolation from the receiving society leads to social excluding and forming ethnic enclaves living by their rules and laws. According to the public opinion, in the context of mass migration the differences of migrants with cultural traditions of host society might trigger serious conflicts. Immigrant enclaves as the self-organization system also contribute to the formation of ethnic criminal organizations as one of the most effective adaptation models [I. Kuznetsov, 2006, 9].

4. As an immigration's result, ethnic structure of the population is changing. The census of 2010 gives an opportunity to point out the significant increase in the number of some Central Asian people in the country. In particular, in the period from 2002 to 2010, the number of Kyrgyz increased from 31.8 to 103.4 thousand, Uzbeks – 122.9 to 289.9 thousand, Tajiks – from 120.1 to 200.3 thousand . Census of 2010 showed that, in general, centers of migrant's concentration are Moscow and St. Petersburg, and Tyumen, Samara and other regions.

5. Consequently, immigration is changing confessional structure of the society. The share of Muslim population in Russia between 1989 and 2002 increased, mainly as a result of migration, from 8% to 10% [Simon J., 2010, 19-20]. The census of 2010 confirmed the growth of the Muslim population: the

share has already exceeded to 10.5% . According to J. Simon, by 2050 Muslims might have closely reached the position of majority in the country [Simon J., 2010].

6. Mass migration of foreign citizens from Central Asia creates a basis for the terroristic threats and religious extremism. Religious extremism between 1990 and 2000-ies already showed up in Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan. Members of extremist and terrorist organizations enter Russia's territory with the migrants. WCIOM explains that one of the main reasons for intolerance toward migrants was a fear of terroristic attacks (32% in 2011 and 37% in 2013) [V. Belokrenitsky, 2008].

7. Labour migrants create additional dumping pressure on the labour market and social infrastructure. As known, the migrants, as a rule, do not have high requirements for the salary, ecology, safety, and conditions of work. The active presence of migrants with low demands in the labour market leads to the degradation of the social relations and labour norms of the host society [V. Boikov, 2012, 76].

8. Mass immigration provokes the growth of xenophobia, national and racial intolerance. On the background of the migrant-phobia radical nationalist organizations start their active work and propagandize destructive ideology. Of course, in a certain extent the xenophobia is convenient for the authorities as an ethno-political mobilization instrument, but xenophobia also course the process of Russians' "ethnicization" (ethnic mobilization) which leads to a rift of the Russian ("Rossiiskaya") nation. According the WCIOM the 10% of Russians supported idea that "Russia is the country only for ethnic Russians" in 2014 [V. Boikov, 2012]. Our research showed that 8.4% of students supported it in 2014 and 31.6% thought that "Russia is the country only for Russians and other indigenous population" except immigrants.

9. Mass migration assigns a specific vector of the all-Russian identity formation. Census of 2010 stated the reduction in the proportion of Russians from 81.5% 2002 to the level of 77.7 %, while the number of Russians has decreased for 8 years by 4 mln people .The mass migration processes will aggravate the situation and lead to a change of the Russian

nationality. Russia – the country with a dominant Russian population – may become the country where the Russians will be only relative majority. The tendency may greatly hinder the process of the all-Russian identity formation.

10. Migration as a factor of electoral processes. Migrants' electoral preferences will become an important factor of the Russian policy in near future. Virtually, after 2050 the electoral ratings of political leaders and political parties will considerably depend on the new citizens' preferences and their descendants. Taking into account the predominance of migrants from the Central Asia, it can suppose a certain transformation of political consciousness and attitudes in the Russia.

4. DISCUSSION

According to the public opinion, a lot of Russians promote the idea about the strengthening of the migration control. Our study shows that 32% of respondents consider migration to be a threat to Russian national security, 44.6% did not agree. In other words, one-third of the respondents consider migrants to be a potential threat to the country's existence.

Many prominent Russian scientists think immigration to be the main issue for society and illegal immigration to be the main threat [I. Aleshkovski, 2012, 103].

According to the author opinion, immigration, of course, induce the risks of violent crimes and terroristic attacks, if immigrants face the unemployment among the economic crisis or if they arrive from the countries with high level of terroristic danger. And, of course, illegal immigration connects with problem of safety, but illegal immigration is not equal terroristic and extremist crimes.

If we continue the topic of illegal migration, the opinion of the well-known demographer, Zh.A. Zayonchkovskaya may be quoted. She believes that Russia can attract the necessary number of immigrants and the irregular legal status of the most their part, to the greater extent, affects the flow quality, its legitimacy, but not on its volume [Zh. Zayonchkovskaya,2012]. Unfortunately, until recently, the migration policy in Russia was one of

the factors related to the increasing number of illegal migrants. It is the illegal migrants who are primarily associated with the risks in the economic (dumping in the labour market, "overload of social system") and security (criminality and terroristic attacks) areas. Taking into account the fact that the number of illegal migrants in the country is estimated at 3-5 million persons, the fears of Russians seem to be justified.

As known, the citizens in a vulnerable socio-economic position are more likely to feel threatened by the presence of immigrant workers and as a result are more likely to express exclusionary attitudes and less educated people [P. Scheepers, M. Gijsberts and M. Coenders, 2002] and those with lower incomes are more likely to express anti-immigrant sentiment than the highly educated and those with high incomes [M. Semyonov, R. Raijman and A. Gorodzeisky, 2008].

Unfortunately, the economic crisis caused an increase in a number of unemployed and underemployed people (who are not fully occupied) along with the increased share of poor people in the Russian society ["Informational materials about incomes of Russian population in 2015", 2008]. Regretfully, the Russian economic reality creates an environment for dissemination of migrant-phobia.

However, one important aspect should be mentioned. It is generally accepted that the fears about the competition in the labour market is shared by most Russians. At the same time, our study has shown that only 14.7% feel competition in the labour market from the side of migrants. Similarly is the answer to the question "Are you ready to take the jobs of migrants that are now hold by migrants", only 16.9% answered positively. It actually means the competition takes place only in very specific areas (e.g., construction, trade, catering) and not all Russians are ready to compete with immigrants for jobs. Moreover, WCIOM indicates that Russians generally approve of the presence of immigrants in some labour market segments, recognizing that it is impossible to manage without them .

The interesting data were obtained from our study with regard to assessment of migration importance. It has demonstrated that only 10% believe they only gain benefit from migration or it causes nothing but harm to

them. The 60% of respondents do not feel themselves to harm or to benefit from migration, and 16% believe the migration benefits compensate its costs. Meanwhile, the respondents' opinions regarding their own region and the country as a whole become significantly polarized (about 20% consider that there is only benefit or nothing but harm from migration), the number of those who expressed a neutral position on migration issues is considerably reduced (from 60% to 10%) and the proportion of those who believe the migration benefits will compensate its costs increases (46%). Thus, the main migration risks for respondents are associated not with the threat to personal interests, but with the fear for collective interests, for the interests of the Russia and regional community. So, the fears can be classified as a form of anti-immigrant prejudices rather than the consequences of personal experience.

The other factors affecting the rise of concerns about migration are the high level of xenophobia and corruption by public officials and law enforcement officers, also caused by migration processes. The researchers, as a rule, focus on "push-out" effect of these problems for migration [Gorodzeisky A., Glikman A., Maskileyson, D., 2015]. It is equally important, that the mentioned factors contribute to the migrant segregation and the formation of parallel social structures (often semi-criminal) in the Russia. Thus, it is easy to explain the mechanism leading to the formation of these aspects of migrant-phobia in the society. Migrants' enclaves pose potential risks of conflicts and that cause partly justified fears in the Russia. Our research revealed that every tenth respondent believed there is a potential for a wide inter-ethnic conflict in their region and 60% admit the possibility of local inter-ethnic conflicts.

The study of A. Gorodzeisky shows that the economic competition and conservative values are not the main drivers of anti-immigrant attitudes in the Russia (as is the case in western societies) and the anti-immigrants views find their origin to a greater extent in the Orthodox religiosity [16]. This statement has certain grounds, because Orthodoxy traditionally expressed the isolationist and conservative ideas.

5. SUMMARY

Thus, there are a number of various case scenarios in the Russian discourse, reflected in the Russians' concerns about migration. We made sure, that a part of them have objective grounds, e.g. issues regarding the economic competition or ethnic and religious and socio-cultural transformation of Russian population. A part of the risks was officially recognized at the state level and was indicated in the official documents (e.g. related to the isolation processes, segregation and creating of enclaves of migrants and rise of xenophobia among Russians). Such an official recognition seems to emphasize the grounds of these fears. At the same time, a series of scenarios was a result of stereotypes and prejudices existing in the public consciousness.

6. CONCLUSIONS

The migration is a process completely independent from a government wish and Russia lures migrants. At present, migrants are mainly natives from Asian countries, both close and far abroad. Further, except the traditional countries of migration, Russia can get additional ones such as Afghanistan, Bangladesh, and countries of Africa. Thus, the environment for potential rise of anti-migrant opinions in Russia will remain. Conventionally, Russia was an emigration country. So, Russian society had not a complex and comprehensive experience of immigrants' integration. However, in 21st century Russia is to become a country of mass migration. It is Russia's destiny.

Mass migration harbors both advantages and threats that should be forecast and minimized. Risks and incidents under mass migration, unfortunately, are inevitable. The government and society tasks are timely to define threats, prevent and minimize dangers. The approach to immigration processes regulation on government and society side must not be of alarming or gung-ho character but constructive and reasonable.

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