

# DEMOGRAPHIC CRISIS: RUSSIA'S MIGRATION DEBATE

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In 2007 the governor of the Uljanovsk region declared September 12 to be a non-working day. The initiative was called "Give birth to a patriot". The idea was that young couples should take advantage of the day off and become future parents, ideally on June 12, Russia's most important national public holiday.<sup>1</sup> In the end, 78 newborn babies were delivered in Uljanovsk's hospitals on the big day.<sup>2</sup> However, in terms of the country as a whole, these 78 "little patriots" alone were not able to turn the tide as total population numbers continue to fall. Demographic trends are becoming more and more of a problem for Russia and, as a result, migration is fast becoming a key issue.

Russia's population has been declining rapidly for years now. According to recent estimates, the current population of 142 million people could drop to 100 million by the year 2050.<sup>3</sup> The Russian state is experiencing a demographic crisis on such a scale that it poses a significant threat to the economic future and security of the country. As a result, the issue of migration has become an important item on the internal political agenda, as it is seen by many experts as key to combating population decline and a growing shortage of skilled labour. Just how controversial a topic this currently is in Russia can be seen in the example



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1 | Cf. Daniel Brössler, "Die Russen sterben aus", *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, October 18, 2007, <http://sueddeutsche.de/leben/demographie-die-russen-sterben-aus-1.352579-2> (accessed November 21, 2011).

2 | Cf. Kerstin Holm, "Gebär einen Patrioten", *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, August 13, 2007, 33.

3 | Cf. Rainer Lindner, "Russlands defekte Demographie. Zukunftsrisiken als Kooperationschance", Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik (SWP) (ed.), Berlin 2008, 7, [http://swp-berlin.org/fileadmin/contents/products/studien/2008\\_S11\\_ldr\\_ks.pdf](http://swp-berlin.org/fileadmin/contents/products/studien/2008_S11_ldr_ks.pdf) (accessed December 15, 2011).

of Konstantin Poltoranin, chief spokesman of the Russian Federal Migration Service (Federalnaja Migracionnaja Sluschnba / FMS). He was sacked in April 2011 after he expressed his concern in an interview with the *BBC* that "the very survival of the white race" in Russia was under threat.

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He also suggested that Russians should be very careful about "mixing blood".<sup>4</sup> In January, the head of the service, Konstantin Romodanovsky, had already warned against stirring up a populist debate on migration in such a multicultural country.<sup>5</sup> At least 37

people were killed in racist attacks in Russia in 2010. After foreigners from Central Asia and the Caucasus were badly injured by what were supposedly football fans in December 2010, the Russian President Dmitri Medvedev warned of the "deadly dangers" that ethnic conflicts posed for the country. Medvedev's statement served to underline the urgency and intensity with which the issue of integration is currently being discussed within Russia. But what are the actual demographic trends in Russia? What part does migration have to play? What are the underlying causes of the racist attacks in Russia? And how are the issues of demographics and migration reflected in the country's policies?

### CURRENT DEMOGRAPHIC TRENDS

At the moment, there are around 142 million people living in Russia. The country's population density is, therefore, around 8.3 people per square kilometre, compared to a figure in Germany of 229 people per square kilometre. A comparison of the different regions in Russia highlights significant differences in population density: in Chuvashia there are around 74.4 inhabitants per square kilometre, while in the Evenki Autonomous Area in Eastern Siberia

4 | Cf. Alissa de Carbonnel, "Russian migration official fired in racism row, *Reuters* (ed.), April 20, 2011, <http://uk.reuters.com/article/2011/04/20/uk-russia-race-idUKTRE73J5CW20110420> (accessed November 21, 2011).

5 | Cf. Eduard Steiner, "Russland zieht Bauarbeiter und Straßeneifer an", *Welt Online*, January 5, 2011, <http://welt.de/wirtschaft/article11990337/Russland-zieht-Bauarbeiter-und-Straessenfegeran.html> (accessed November 21, 2011).

the figure stands at only 0.03.<sup>6</sup> Today, around two-thirds of the Russian population (73 per cent) live in cities or urban settlements. This distribution is in part due to the country's efforts to industrialise during the Soviet era. But it is also due to an ongoing rural exodus that has led to huge population growth in Central Russia.

Low fertility rates are often cited during discussions on Russia's population trends. In 1990 the birth rate was 13.4 per 1,000 inhabitants, while in 2011 it was only 11.05. This puts Russia in 173<sup>rd</sup> place out of 221 countries worldwide, according to the *CIA World Factbook*.<sup>7</sup> A high rate of abortion also contributes to the low birth rate. According to the Russian newspaper *Izvestia*, there were 58.7 abortions for every 100 births in 2010. However, these figures also show that there has been a reversal in the trend of the relative number of abortions. Five years earlier the number of abortions actually exceeded the number of births, with 104.6 abortions for every 100 births.<sup>8</sup>

Regional and ethnic aspects of population trends are also interesting, as the number of actual ethnic Russians is declining. Russia is divided federally into 83 regions (federal subjects). In only 18 of these, death rates are balanced out by birth rates. And in only one of these do ethnic Russians represent the majority of the population. A woman in predominantly Muslim Dagestan has on average 4.9 children, while women in Moscow have only 1.4.<sup>9</sup> Ethnic Russians now represent only 79.8 per cent of the total population, a proportion that dropped by 3.2 per cent between 1996 and 2006 alone. The largest ethnic groups amongst the

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6 | Cf. Jörg Stadelbauer, "Raum, Ressourcen und Bevölkerung", *Informationen zur politischen Bildung*, No. 281, Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung (bpb) (ed.), 2003.

7 | Cf. Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) (ed.), "The World Factbook – Country Comparison: Birth Rate", October 2011, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/rs.html> (accessed December 25, 2011).

8 | Cf. Aleksandra Sopova, "Церковь призывает депутатов бороться с абортами" (The Church urges a battle against abortions), *Izvestia*, July 12, 2011, <http://izvestia.ru/news/494166> (accessed November 21, 2011).

9 | Cf. Rainer Lindner, *Russlands defekte Demographie*, SWP (ed.), Berlin 2008, 7.

rest of the population include the Tartars (3.8 per cent), the Ukrainians (2 per cent), the Bashkirs (1.2 per cent), the Chuvash (1.1 per cent) and a further 12.1 per cent made up of other or unspecified ethnic groups.<sup>10</sup>

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The main problem for Russia's long-term population growth lies in the fact that low birth rates are accompanied by rising death rates and a relatively short life expectancy.

While the death rate in 1990 was 11.2 deaths per 1,000 inhabitants, this has gone up to 16.04 in 2011.<sup>11</sup> Therefore Russia has one of the highest death rates in the world – higher death rates have only been recorded in Angola, Afghanistan, South Africa and Nigeria.<sup>12</sup> A lack of adequate medical care and an unhealthy lifestyle, especially excessive consumption of alcohol and tobacco, have been blamed for the high death rates and low life expectancy. Every year, around 30,000 Russians die from drinking home-distilled vodka, which is twice as many as the total number of Russians who died during the USSR's ten-year occupation of Afghanistan.<sup>13</sup> The average life expectancy of a Russian man is 59.8 years, while for women it is 73.17 years. For Germany, the figures are 77.82 (men) and 82.44 (women)<sup>14</sup>. What is striking is that in recent decades the life expectancy of Russian men has drastically reduced. In 1964 it was over 65 years, but by 2006 it had gone down by 4.75 years.<sup>15</sup>

According to figures from the United Nations, the Russian population went down by 240,000 people in 2009 alone.<sup>16</sup> Russia has lost around six million people in the last twenty years. So the question of how Russia can overcome this

10 | Cf. CIA (ed.) "The World Factbook: Russia", October 4, 2011, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/rs.html> (accessed November 21, 2011).

11 | Ibid.

12 | Ibid.

13 | Cf. Dmitri Stachow, "'Kalaschnikow' und 'starke Katja'", in: *Russland – Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte*, bpb (ed.), November 2006, 4.

14 | Cf. CIA, n. 10.

15 | Cf. United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), *National Human Development Report Russian Federation 2008*, 51.

16 | Cf. UNDP, *National Human Development Report in the Russian Federation 2009*, 63.

demographic crisis is becoming increasingly urgent. Immigration as a means of combating population decline has become a fixed item on the agenda of politicians and the media.

### **THE BEGINNINGS OF THE COUNTRY'S MIGRATION POLICY**

In order to fully understand migration in Russia today, we need to take a look back at the country's history. The resettlement and relocation of people following the collapse of the Soviet Union need to be understood as consequences of historical developments, and more especially as a reaction to border changes and settlement programmes. The same applies to the majority of legal immigrants from former Soviet Union countries today. The origins of the country's active immigration policies actually date back to the time of the Tsars.

The population of the Tsardom of Muscovy, which at the time was the largest territorial state in Europe, was estimated to be around six million in the 16<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>17</sup> By the beginning of the 18<sup>th</sup> century the population had grown to around 15 million, while the state's territory increased threefold. Following the opening up of Siberia and the Russian Far East in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, there was a second phase of expansion, during which the Russian heartland was expanded to include the Baltic States, Belarus and parts of Poland and the Ottoman Empire. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century the North Caucasus, Armenia and Georgia were also added.

Some experts believe that Russia was the first country in the world to have its own migration service. The main task of this service, set-up in 1763, was to attract potential immigrants from Western Europe. This policy was very successful, and thousands of highly-qualified immigrants settled in Russia.<sup>18</sup>

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17 | Cf. Andreas Kappeler, *Russische Geschichte*, C.H. Beck, Munich, 2008, 75.

18 | Cf. Maria Nozhenko, "Focus Migration, Länderprofil Russische Föderation", bpb, Netzwerk Migration in Europa, Hamburgisches Weltwirtschaftsinstitut (ed.), Hamburg, 2010, 2.

A high death rate due to epidemics, wars and poor hygiene was the main reason why population levels continued to stagnate, despite the arrival of new immigrants. The population started to grow strongly during the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, however, as these factors became less significant. High birth rates and lower death rates resulted in huge population growth. In 1850, 74 million people lived on Russian territory; by 1914 the figure had gone up to 170 million.<sup>19</sup>

### THE SOVIET UNION AND THE COLD WAR

During the Soviet era, the communist leadership tried to bring migration movements within the Union under control. Limiting freedom of movement through the issuing of residency permits by the state (*propiska* / прописка) was as much a part of this policy as the compulsory resettlement of whole sections of the population. Voluntary migration to less populated regions was also an important tool for population control. This policy of control by the communist state and party leadership was called a “redistribution of the labour force in harmony with the housing and development plans for production workers.”<sup>20</sup>

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The Soviet leadership was convinced from the very beginning that the key to the country's industrialisation lay in its natural resources. The rapid transition from an agrarian to an industrial state would require more workers in the northern regions. In 1933, an incentive was created to encourage people to move – the Northern Wage Increment.<sup>21</sup> Academics were also needed in these sparsely-populated areas, so university graduates were compelled to work in specific areas for a period of three-to-four years. Forcing people to settle in other Soviet Republics was also common practice at that time.<sup>22</sup> As part of the drive to industrialise the country, around 29 million people were relocated within the space of 10 years.

19 | Cf. Kappeler, n. 17, 76.

20 | RIA Novosti (ed.), “Rein und raus: Migration in Russland”, April 20, 2011, <http://de.rian.ru/opinion/20110420/258896635.html> (accessed November 21, 2011).

21 | Cf. Nozhenko, n. 18, 2.

22 | Cf. RIA Novosti, n. 20.

Compulsory resettlement remains one of the darkest chapters in the Soviet Union's history. Sections of Russia's rural population, especially wealthy farmers, were the first victims of this policy. Expulsions and deportations were increasingly used as a form of punishment. Even suspected disloyalty towards the regime was considered sufficient grounds for banishment. In 1933, over 300,000 people were forced to leave Moscow and had their ID and food cards confiscated.<sup>23</sup> During the Second World War, members of ethnic minorities were suspected of collaboration en bloc. In 1941 80 per cent of Germans who lived within the Soviet Union were deported to Kazakhstan. Other minorities were also victims of deportation, mostly to Central Asia, including Crimean Tartars, Chechens, the Ingush, Karachaevans, Balkars, Kalmykians and Meskhetians as well as Greeks, Armenians, Bulgarians from the Crimea and Turks and Kurds from the Caucasus. Over three million people were deported as a result of this policy, of which over half a million were Germans and 470,000 were Chechen or Ingush people.<sup>24</sup>

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The prison camps for political opponents that the Soviet security forces (the Cheka) had been setting up in former prisons and convents since 1918 also served the country's industrialisation and migration policies. The state prison authorities (Gulag) extended the prison camp system right across the north and east of the Union. The camps served the regime as a means of industrialising areas where the climatic conditions were not conducive to voluntary relocation.<sup>25</sup> It is estimated that around 12 million people were imprisoned in the Gulags. In 1949 alone, the number of prisoners was put at around 3.5 million.<sup>26</sup>

After the Soviet victory in the Second World War, resettlement and deportation remained the order of the day. They were actively used as instruments for the Russification of satellite states. Between 1944 and 1953, more than

23 | Cf. Jörg Baberowski, *Der Rote Terror*, Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, Munich, 2003, 127.

24 | Cf. *ibid.*, 237

25 | Cf. Hans-Heinrich Nolte, *Kleine Geschichte Russlands*, bpb (ed.), Bonn, 2003, 227.

26 | Cf. *ibid.*, 227 et seq.

150,000 dissidents were murdered in Western Ukraine, while 200,000 people were deported to Central Asia. During the same period, almost a quarter of a million people in Lithuania were sent to prison or deported to Siberia. This equated to more than ten per cent of Lithuania's total population. At the same time, the Soviet Union's influence in different areas was to be strengthened by the influx of Russian immigrants. In the four years after the War, 180,000 Russians settled in Estonia alone, whose population at that time stood at around one million.

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On the other hand, international migration from non-Soviet countries during the time of the Cold War was minimal. Freedom of movement between the blocs was severely

limited. Visas for foreign travel were only issued under special circumstances, such as study trips or political projects. Illegal migration was successfully curtailed with stringent controls. "There were no Soviet workers on the international job market. The USSR was also a *terra incognita* for people from capitalist countries."<sup>27</sup> Bilateral agreements between socialist bloc countries regulated the inward and outward movement of foreign workers from other socialist countries. Vietnamese workers, for example, were employed in light industry, while Bulgarian and Korean workers worked in the wood processing industry.<sup>28</sup>

What is particularly interesting is how the various republics differed in the composition of their populations. In Armenia, for example, ethnic Russians made up only 2.5 per cent of the population. The last census taken in the USSR suggested that Ukrainians and Belarusians were the largest ethnic groups in the Russian settlement areas after the ethnic Russians.

Even during the Soviet era, politicians tried to create incentives to raise the birth rate. At the beginning of the 1980s, special legislation was introduced that offered parents one year of maternity leave and a guarantee that their jobs and income would be protected. But the programme was not particularly successful, and the low birth rate

27 | RIA Novosti, n. 20.

28 | Ibid.

continues to be a significant hindrance to stable population growth today.

### MIGRATION TRENDS IN THE POST-SOVIET ERA

The implosion of the Soviet Union was followed by a substantial wave of immigration. In 1989, 25 million Russians were living in the non-Russian republics and more than three million of these had returned to Russia by 1998. They came predominantly from Azerbaijan, Kirgizstan, Georgia, Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan.<sup>29</sup> Between 1998 and 2007, around 75 per cent of immigrants were ethnic Russians, while a further 12 per cent, such as the Tartars, belonged to ethnic groups with Russian origins. At the same time, a significant number of highly-skilled workers left the country, with Norway, Germany and the USA

being the most popular destinations. This labour migration is still underway and every year 45,000 to 50,000 Russians look for work abroad.<sup>30</sup> An estimated 1.5 million Russians now live in the West, mostly in order to profit from relatively higher incomes. Many of them work in the field of natural sciences. It is estimated that in 2005 there were already 30,000 Russian scientists working abroad.<sup>31</sup>

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Internal migration in particular was kick-started by the collapse of the USSR. In the Russian Far East, a long-time focal point of communist migration policy, population figures declined rapidly after the collapse of the Soviet regime. In the space of just three years (1991 to 1995) the Chukotka Autonomous Area lost 39 per cent of its population. The Magadan Region, which is well known for its heavy industry, lost half of its population between 1989 and 2002.<sup>32</sup> The regions that make up the Russian Far East lost around 14 per cent of their populations between 1990 and 2004 alone. At the same time, central cities and regions, especially large cities like Moscow and Saint Petersburg, saw their population numbers grow substantially. However,

29 | Cf. *RIA Novosti*, n. 20.

30 | Cf. Thomas Kunze and Stefan Beutel, "Russland und seine Diaspora", Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung (ed.), Moscow, 2006, 1.

31 | Cf. Nozhenko, n. 18, 4.

32 | Cf. Anton Friesen, "Chinesische Migration im Fernen Osten", *Aussenpolitik.net* (ed.), 2009, 1.

internal migration is not so significant today. In 2007, only 1.4 per cent of the Russians changed location.

## MIGRATION POLICY

The basic principles for current Russian migration policy were established after the breakdown of the Soviet Union. In 1993, the Federal Migration Service (FMS) was set up under Boris Yeltsin, as a reaction to the collapse of the

USSR. One year later, laws covering refugees

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and displaced people were introduced. Unsuccessful attempts to regulate migration led to the temporary shutting-down of the service in 2002. However, its successor, the Ministry for Federal Affairs, Nationalities and Migration Policy,

was also shut down only a year after it was set up. The FMS was subsequently re-established under the auspices of the Ministry of Internal Affairs.

The Russian state loses an estimated 200 million U.S. dollars in tax revenues every year as a result of irregular migration. When in 2002 new legislation covering the legal status of foreign citizens was introduced, experts expected that illegal immigrants would become legalised and that simpler and more transparent migration mechanisms would be developed. Instead, the new law simply added more bureaucratic hurdles, with the rules governing the registration of foreigners becoming even more complicated and a quota system being introduced for workers from non-CIS countries.<sup>33</sup> Stricter immigration criteria and lower quotas each year resulted in a further increase in irregular immigration. Researchers believe that hostility towards foreigners in Russia can be traced back to the failed immigration policies between 2002 and 2006, which actively encouraged the view that illegal immigrants were a national security risk.<sup>34</sup>

In 2006, the dramatic reduction in population numbers resulted in a rethink on migration policies. In particular, it was decided to make it easier for people to immigrate from former Soviet republics. While the influx of Russian immigrants from neighbouring states had for a long time been

33 | Cf. Nozhenko, n. 18. 5.

34 | Ibid., 5 et seq.

considered something of a problem, these immigrants were now increasingly being recognised as potential contributors to population growth, economic prosperity and political influence. Following the collapse of the Soviet Union, 25 million Russians now live abroad, the majority of them in the Ukraine. A substantial proportion of the populations of the Baltic States, Belarus and Kazakhstan are also made up of Russians. More than three million Russians had returned to Russia by 1998, and yet legislation to make a return to the country easier was not introduced until 2006. Immigrants were offered special incentives to settle in regions with poor infrastructure, but the hoped-for rush of applicants failed to materialise. In 2007, only 682 of 1,271 applicants whose entry into the country had been approved actually returned to Russia under the programme. It had been aimed at 23,000 people to be attracted back into the country.<sup>35</sup> The obvious conclusion is that the potential returnees had not waited 15 years for legislation to help them come home: those who really wanted to return had already done so.

### **HOSTILITY TOWARDS FOREIGNERS**

A 1989 census suggested that there were 10.5 million people living in the Russian Soviet Republic who originally came from other Soviet republics, while one million people were foreigners or gave no exact details about their place of birth. These immigrants represented 7.1 per cent of the overall population. A further census in 2002 confirmed that the percentage of immigrants had gone up slightly and now stood at 8.3 per cent of the overall population. In 2010, the figure had reached 8.7 per cent. Hostility towards foreigners has also increased significantly in recent years, although it is often aimed more at Russian citizens with other ethnic backgrounds, who are not officially immigrants at all.

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Experts believe that the main cause of this xenophobia is a negative perception of the “foreigner” that ethnic Russians believe they are up against. This particular perception is a reaction to the war in Chechnya and repeated terrorist

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attacks on Russian cities. Muslim immigrants in particular, especially those from the Caucasus, are perceived in a negative light. During nationalist demonstrations in Manege Square in Moscow on December 11, 2010, demonstrators called for a restriction on internal migration for ethnic Muslims in southern Russia. Russian citizens from the Northern Caucasus suffer more from discrimination than immigrants from CIS countries.<sup>36</sup> 55 per cent of Russians questioned in surveys said that foreigners and particularly people from the Caucasus and Central Asia should have limited rights or be deported.<sup>37</sup> Because of their skin or hair colour, people from the Caucasus region were often referred to as "chernye" (blacks).

The deaths of 77 people in the extreme right wing attacks on the Norwegian Island of Utøya and the bombing in Oslo in July 2011 led to a great deal of discussion about the issue of integration in the Russian media. There were also a lot of reports that focused on the difficult social position of many immigrants in Russian society and their future prospects. Russia's current "development phase, which is characterised by corruption and theft, needs cheap workers who will keep their mouths shut, and who are not in a position to protest."<sup>38</sup> According to the journalist Kostikov, there is an obvious problem with the current system: immigrants "work for peanuts on our building sites, in our underground stations and on our markets. They live in run-down accommodation, have to bribe inspectors and avoid being caught by the local police. This fuels their anger and depression. The tragedy is that they won't end up hating greedy Russian capitalism or a government that is slow to act, but instead they will end up resenting the Russian world in general. They will start to reject this world."<sup>39</sup> Even immigrants with work permits often end up working in

36 | Emil Plain, "Die Ereignisse in Moskau vom 11. Dezember 2010: Der ethnische Ausdruck der politischen Krise", in: *Russland-Analysen*, No. 218, 2011, 5.

37 | Cf. Erik Albrecht, "Fremdenfeindlichkeit in Russland weiter stark", *Deutsche Welle*, May 27, 2010, <http://dw-world.de/dw/article/0,,5613170,00.html> (accessed October 11, 2011).

38 | Vyacheslav Kostikov, "В лабиринтах миграционной политики" (In the labyrinth of migration politics), *Argumenti i Fakti*, August 3, 2011, <http://aif.ru/society/article/44866> (accessed November 21, 2011).

39 | Ibid.

the black economy and, as a result, many of them find themselves in an environment where they have few, if any, rights. Wages not paid in full or not paid at all, harassment from employers, a lack of social security and even forced labour are all part and parcel of the risks involved in working in the black economy. Immigrants often have to pay bribes to the police in order to avoid going to prison or being deported. According to recent studies, this type of corruption has grown steadily over recent years.

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The fact that in the past Russia tended to accept in particular poorly-qualified foreign workers has given immigrants in general a bad image. An inability to speak the local language contributes to feelings of resentment. The newspaper *Rossiiskaya Gazeta* describes the attitude of locals towards these foreign workers like this: "Imagine the reaction of the local unemployed when they see foreigners, who can't speak the [country's] language and who take 'their' jobs. In what way are they better [qualified]?"<sup>40</sup> The fact that immigrants often take jobs with working conditions that most locals would consider unacceptable is all too often overlooked. Human rights campaigners refer to it as "voluntary slavery". The Russian public became more aware of the living conditions, dwellings and hideaways of many illegal immigrants when the police discovered and cleared several underground immigrant settlements in 2011. In April, for instance, a settlement that was home to more than 100 irregular immigrants was found beneath a factory.<sup>41</sup> In June, police cleared out another underground settlement full of illegal immigrants from Central Asia, discovered beneath a park in West Moscow.<sup>42</sup> Irregular immigrants are in a precarious situation because they work in an environment with few, if any, rights and therefore have no real way of defending themselves. At the same time, they are afraid of being deported by the

40 | Mikhail Falaleev, "По-русски говоришь?" (Do you speak Russian?), *Rossiiskaja Gaveta*, August 2, 2011, <http://rg.ru/2011/08/02/migrants.html> (accessed November 21, 2011).

41 | Cf. *RIA Novosti*, 'Underground town' full of illegal migrants uncovered in Moscow", April 14, 2011, <http://en.rian.ru/russia/20110414/163521700.html> (accessed November 21, 2011).

42 | Cf. *RIA Novosti*, "Weitere unterirdische Zuwanderer-Stadt in Moskau entdeckt", June 3, 2011, <http://de.rian.ru/society/20110603/259335695.html> (accessed November 21, 2011).

police. But still they keep on coming. In 2008, money transferred back home by workers in Russia accounted for half of Tadzhikistan's GDP, and in 2009 it was still as high as thirty per cent.<sup>43</sup> Experts reject the suggestion that foreign workers are taking jobs away from local Russians, and this is supported by the unemployment statistics. In May 2011 there were 1.6 million registered unemployed in Russia. It would actually be almost impossible to reduce this figure any further because of the country's structural characteristics.

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It is very difficult to get reliable figures for the number of foreign workers in Russia. The World Bank talks of 12.5 million people, while the Russian migration authorities put the figure at closer to five million, of which only one million are actually in the country legally.<sup>44</sup> However, in June 2011, the official Russian figures were revised upwards to 9.5 million, of which six million are said to have entered the country in 2011.<sup>45</sup>

According to official figures, in 2007 more than half (53 per cent) of all legal foreign workers were employed in the black economy. As irregular immigrants have no rights, they are liable to lose their jobs at any time. "They run the constant risk of being kicked out onto the street as soon as their services are no longer needed," writes Mikhail Falaleev in the *Rossiiskaya Gazeta*. "And when their illusions are finally shattered, they often turn to crime. Almost half of all crimes committed in the capital are carried out by non-residents."<sup>46</sup> These kinds of facts naturally help to promote the negative picture that some of the population have of immigrants. Despite all this, Russia desperately needs immigrants. The United Nations have been saying for some time that, without more immigration, Russian economic growth and the maintenance of its geopolitical position in the world is at serious risk.<sup>47</sup>

43 | Cf. Steiner, n. 5.

44 | Cf. *ibid.*

45 | Cf. *RIA Novosti*, "Russland verbucht rund 10 Millionen Migranten", June 14, 2011, <http://de.rian.ru/business/20110614/259443205.html> (accessed November 21, 2011).

46 | Falaleev, n. 40.

47 | UNDP, n. 15.

## POLITICAL PLANS

In order to combat the demographic crisis in a lasting way, it will be necessary to improve the birth and death rates, increase average life expectancy and introduce targeted migration policies. According to figures provided by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), there has been a positive trend in the birth rate in recent times, and child mortality has gone down. However, the reasons for this trend can be traced back to improved economic conditions rather than to Russian social policies. The number of people living in extreme poverty has dropped particularly sharply: ten years ago 16.7 per cent of people were living on less than half of the minimum living wage, whereas today the figure is just 3.7 per cent.

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Serious efforts of the government are recognizable in the area of alcohol and smoking prevention. The recent measures to reduce the high alcohol consumption have already proven to be successful: Thus, both the Russian authorities and the World Health Organization (WHO) recently reported a reduction in per capita consumption of alcohol. This, however, applies only to urban areas. There have been no measurable changes in the country, where alcohol is more frequently distilled at home.<sup>48</sup> Under Medvedev, the government has declared a war on alcohol abuse: In January 2010, a minimum price of about two Euro (89 rubels) per 0.5 liters of vodka has been introduced. Furthermore, in Moscow, for example, strong alcoholic beverages can no longer be sold between 10 p.m. and 10 a.m. Even the night-time sale of beer could be banned in 2013. Also, the minimum price for cigarettes will be increased. It is expected to double, rising to at least one Euro per packet.

From a political viewpoint, it is worth noting that even in the depths of the financial crisis the Russian government did not try to save money on social security; indeed they actually increased spending in this area. Russia's former

48 | Russland HEUTE, "Alkoholkonsum in russischen Städten sinkt", September 19, 2011, [http://russland-heute.de/articles/2011/09/19/alkoholkonsum\\_in\\_russischen\\_staedten\\_sinkt\\_07010.html](http://russland-heute.de/articles/2011/09/19/alkoholkonsum_in_russischen_staedten_sinkt_07010.html) (accessed December 7, 2011).

Minister of Finance, Alexei Kudrin, was able to finance welfare payments from a reserve fund that was set up using money from Russian energy transactions. Putin summarised the government's policy as follows: "We have decided we would rather increase the deficit than cut back on welfare spending, because this would first and foremost lead to a sharp drop in benefits for the Russian people."<sup>49</sup> In this way, it was possible to cushion the welfare system from the negative effects of the financial crisis. After many years of growth, Russian GDP dropped by almost eight per cent in 2009, but the Russian economy recovered and once again achieved over 4 per cent growth in 2011. But the Russian Federation is far from being an economic miracle. Average monthly earnings are just 375 Euros and more than a third of the population earn less than 150 Euros a month.

In his state of the nation address, Medvedev evoked the ideal of the large family and promised tax breaks to families with children.<sup>50</sup> These measures certainly

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make sense, but the large numbers of street children and orphans in Russia also highlight the need for welfare programmes and government investment in the existing population of children and young people. Only then will they be able to fulfil their potential and add to the academic and human capital that is so urgently needed in Russia. The UN's National Development Report talks of a million children with no legal guardian, and government figures show that 136,000 orphans are awaiting adoption.<sup>51</sup> Further reforms need to be carried out to the welfare system, along with campaigns to explain the risks of drug abuse. However, future social development plans do not only depend on policies. They will only have long-term success if political will and economic prosperity combine in order to make such programmes possible.

49 | Benjamin Bidder, "Kampf gegen die globale Krise", *Spiegel Online*, January 24, 2010, <http://spiegel.de/wirtschaft/soziales/0,1518,672958-5,00.html> (accessed November 21, 2011).

50 | Cf. Johannes Voswinkel, "Medwedew beschwört das Ideal der Großfamilie", *Zeit Online*, November 30, 2010, <http://zeit.de/politik/ausland/2010-11/medwedew-rede-russland-kinder> (accessed November 21, 2011).

51 | Cf. UNDP, n. 16.

Despite slight improvements in the birth rate, in the medium-term Russia will not be in a position to maintain its current population levels. So immigration has become an absolute necessity if the Russian state is to survive in the long run. The politicians are well aware of this fact and over recent times they have made it easier for highly-qualified migrants to obtain work and residency permits. They have also done away with immigration quotas for highly-qualified workers and their applications are now being processed within just two weeks.<sup>52</sup> Highly-qualified foreigners can now travel more easily within the country, as they now only have to register in another location in Russia if they stay there for longer than 30 days. In the first six months of 2010, this new rule led to the issue of 3,000 work permits.

Since February 15, 2011 the entry of highly-qualified immigrants in particular has been made easier in order to counter the ongoing lack of specialists and scientists. The income level for highly-qualified workers has also been lowered. Whereas before it was necessary to earn two million roubles per annum (around 53,000 Euros), the limit was lowered to one million roubles for foreign scientists or teachers working in (government-run) educational institutes and research centres.<sup>53</sup> This also includes workers at the Skolkovo Innovation Centre, set up along the lines of the USA's Silicon Valley to carry out research and development into cutting-edge technologies. Workers here are considered to be highly-qualified, irrespective of their income level. And since summer 2011, the rules have been relaxed for economic migrants from Belarus and Kazakhstan. The three countries have abolished quotas and workers no longer need to obtain a work permit. Having a contract of employment is now deemed sufficient to obtain a residency permit.<sup>54</sup> These changes were made on the basis

52 | Cf. Vista Foreign Business Support, "Changes in Migration law of the Russian Federation", <http://vfbs.ru/news.htm?id=158> (accessed November 21, 2011).

53 | Cf. ibid.; "Changes in the migration legislation of the Russian Federation", January 13, 2011, <http://vfbs.ru/news.htm?id=159> (accessed November 21, 2011).

54 | Cf. ibid.; "Intergovernmental Agreement 'On legal status of Migrant Workers and their family members'", July 20, 2011, <http://vfbs.ru/news.htm?id=161> (accessed November 21, 2011).

of the costumes union between these states, which exists since January 2010 and which, according to Putin's plans should lead to the foundation of a "Eurasian Union". The realization of this project is to create a single economic space, in which labour, capital and services can move freely.

If social harmony is to be maintained in a multi-ethnic state that increasingly needs to encourage immigration, then active steps must be taken to counter

**The issue of migration is still being used by politicians to pander to nationalist sentiments, so the risk of the debate being led by populist feeling should not be underestimated.** xenophobia. However, so far there is a lack of any coherent policy of integration. What is more, the issue of migration is still being used by politicians to pander to nationalist

sentiments, so the risk of the debate being led by populist feeling should not be underestimated. In June 2011, the Kamchatka Governor, Vladimir Ilyukhin, announced that he was planning to build a special camp to house all the peninsula's migrant workers. He claimed it was not a matter of creating a ghetto, but rather a way of combating crime.<sup>55</sup> His plan involved using special buses to transport 500 men to and from their workplace. These kinds of initiatives certainly do nothing to promote more open attitudes in society and greater tolerance towards foreigners.

In the east of Russia, the ever-present topic of Chinese immigration also goes to show how public perceptions distort the realities of migration issues. After talk by politicians and the media of a "peaceful Chinese invasion", a survey in the border region of Primorsky Krai showed that almost half of those asked thought Chinese migration posed a threat to Russia's national sovereignty.<sup>56</sup> However, a second survey showed that the respondents actually estimated the number of Chinese immigrants to be 885 times higher than the true figure.<sup>57</sup> Politicians and the media both have a responsibility to approach the debate on immigration with greater objectivity.

55 | *Russland-News*, "Kamtschatka: Gastarbeiter von Bevölkerung abgesondert", June 10, 2011, [http://russland-news.de/kamtschatka\\_gastarbeiter\\_von\\_bevoelkerung\\_abgesondert\\_29725.html](http://russland-news.de/kamtschatka_gastarbeiter_von_bevoelkerung_abgesondert_29725.html) (accessed November 21, 2011).

56 | Cf. Nozhenko, n. 18, 3.

57 | Cf. *ibid.*

## FUTURE PROSPECTS

Over recent months, many new initiatives and projects have been launched in an effort to improve immigrant integration. In August 2011, the head of the FMS announced that he was planning to introduce language tests for immigrants.<sup>58</sup> This requirement to learn Russian may help with integration and also help protect workers against employer abuses. The head of the Migration Service said that poor knowledge of Russian immigration laws and of the Russian language meant that immigrants often found themselves the victims of discrimination.

**This requirement to learn Russian may help with integration and also help protect workers against employer abuses.**

It is also planned to totally abolish quotas for economic migrants and instead set up short- and long-term programmes for migrant workers. These programmes are being planned by the Migration Service in conjunction with specialists from the Higher School of Economics and will include mechanisms to regulate the selection, entry, stay and working conditions of the migrants. The possibility is also being discussed of issuing highly-qualified workers with an immediate and permanent residency permit. A points system still has to be set up in order to facilitate the selection of desirable migrants. However, according to Jaroslav Kuzminov, Rector of the Higher School of Economics, it should be made more difficult for the families of unskilled migrants to enter the country. He believes that education should be the key to gaining a permit; otherwise the benefits to society as a result of immigration will be cancelled out by new integration problems.<sup>59</sup>

Despite the threat of a negative population growth, there has been a failure to win the Russian population over to the idea of increased immigration. Makers of integration policy need to explain the issues more clearly and hold an objective debate on the pros and cons of a more liberal immigration policy. If Russia is going to heed President Medvedev's calls for modernisation, then it must compete

58 | Cf. Falaleev, n. 40.

59 | Cf. Marina Gritsyuk, "Мигрант желания" (The desired migrant), *Rossiiskaja Gaveta*, August 2, 2011, <http://rg.ru/2011/07/26/migracia.html> (accessed November 21, 2011).

to attract the brightest people, that is to say create incentives to stem the brain drain of Russian academics while at the same time making the country more attractive internationally, in order to encourage the immigration of foreign specialists and academics. If Russia follows policies of restricting immigration and fails to look at the big picture, then it will find itself unable to overcome its acute demographic crisis.