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THE DEMOGRAPHIC FACTOR IN RUSSIA'S EASTERN TERRITORIES

Contemporary Russia is enjoying a relative economic growth due to the increase of oil and gas prices, as well as the wave of stabilization, which is a customary phenomenon after a time of trouble. However, as some analyst realize, there are fewer and fewer beneficiaries of the boom. The census of 2002 as well as the data of the next years show a significant fall of the birth rate and a very high death rate simultaneously. In the first year of our millenium the number of permanent inhabitants of the Russian Federation decreased by 678 thousand whereas in 2001 – by 781,8 thousand, which makes the demographic situation of contemporary Russia quite dramatic:

POPULATION OF RUSSIA

Year	Popula- tion in total			Percentage of the total population	
		Urban	Rural	Urban	Rural
1897					
Within the borders of the Russian Empire	128,2	20,1	108,1	16	84
Within the present borders	67,5	9,9	57,6	15	85
1914					
Within the borders of the Russian Empire	165,7	30,6	135,1	18	82
Within the present borders	89,9	15,7	74,2	17	83
1917	91,0	15,5	75,5	17	83
1926	92,7	16,4	76,3	18	82

1939	108,4	36,3	72,1	33	67
1959	117,2	61,1	56,1	52	48
1970	129,9	80,6	49,3	62	38
1979	137,4	94,9	42,5	69	31
1989	147,0	108,0	39,0	73	27
1991	148,3	109,4	38,9	74	26
1996	148,3	108,3	40,0	73	27
2001	146,3	107,1	39,2	73	27
2002	145,2	106,4	38,8	73	27
2003	145,0	106,3	38,7	73	27
2004	144,2	105,8	38,4	73	27
2005	143,5	104,7	38,8	73	27
2006	142,8	104,1	38,7	73	27
2007	142,2	103,8	38,4	73	27
2008	142,0	103,8	38,2	73	27

Source: Федеральная служба государственной статистики, [on-line],
http://www.gks.ru/wps/portal/!ut/p/cmd/cs/ce/7_0_A/s/7_0_2V5/th/J_0_H/_s.7_0_A/7_0_FL/_s.7_0_A/7_0_2V5-10V2007;11VII2008.

The course of demographic changes in Russia is now estimated by Russian analysts from Russian Federal Office of Statistics (*Госкомстат*) in terms of three variants. The low option for the year 2021 predicts nearly 123 million, the middle one – over 134 million, and the highest – 145 million. Even the last and the highest prediction assumes a decrease by about 1 mln compared to the year 2007 anyway.¹ This calculation, prepared in 1999, assumed that Russia's population in 2007 will count about 139.5 million people in the most pessimistic version, 143.2 in the moderate one and 146.3 in the “high” option. As we can see above in the RFOS table illustrating the population in 2007, it is rather the middle variant that reflects the real tendencies although it turned out to be slightly too optimistic. The authors of the UN prospects for the year 2050 state that:

The population of more developed regions, currently 1.2 billion, is anticipated to change little during the next 50 years because fertility levels are expected to remain below replacement level. However, by mid-century the populations of 39 countries are projected to be smaller than today (e.g., Japan and Germany 14 per cent smaller; Italy and Hungary 25 per cent smaller; and the Russian Federation, Georgia and Ukraine between 28 to 40 per cent smaller).²

¹ See: *Население России 1999*, Москва 2000, p. 173 nn.

² *World Population Prospects. The 2000 Revision*, New York 2001, p. 5.

The most optimistic UN studies optimists say that the year 2050 will be met within the borders of Russia by 121 million permanent residents. These estimates place Russia among the most regressive societies in the world. The most pessimistic option taken into consideration by Russian specialists in demography is that in 2015 Russia will be inhabited by not more than 130 million people, and by only 93 (or 86 million even) in 2050. Such Cassandric visions come from well-known analysts like Yevgenii Andreev or Anatolii Vishnevskii.³

After 2005 the process of continuous decrease in Russia's labor force became quite visible and in the coming years it is going to be more and more significant – statistically Russia loses about 1 million of workers yearly, states Zhanna Zajonchkovskaya, President of the Center of Studies on the Compulsory Immigration into the CIS.⁴ These facts bring up the problem of unavoidable immigration, which might become a condition of the economic growth in Russia in the future.

Many analysts emphasize the fact that the demographic situation in Russia would have become much worse if it were not for about 11 million immigrants who permeated into the borders of Russian Federation after 1991. Many of them are Russians whose situation became quite uneasy in former Soviet republics, especially in Central Asia, in the Caucasus, and, to some degree only, in the Baltic countries.

In May 2006 Moscow public TV news channel (Vesti) put some attention to the problem of new building constructions in the growing city. The population of Moscow, which was about 8 million in the 1980-s, now reached 11 million but at least three or four million of illegal residents, if not more, must be added to this number.

The constructions are sometimes controlled by official inspections, which discover that in many cases only one in ten workers is a legal resident of the city. Moreover, most of them are not even citizens of Russia. They usually come from Central Asia or from Southern Caucasus. Repressions against the management and the illegal workers result in the rise of prices in building industry and delays in the development of the capital city.

On the other hand, its growth in a country with a drastically decreasing population seems a ridiculous paradox. The worst situation is in the eastern territories, where the latest decades showed a significant difference in demographic tendencies, compared to the ones in 1960s and 1970s. In total, the population of the Far East has decreased by 10% since 1989. The vector of internal migration is sharply directed toward the West. Western Siberia's loss is filled by the migration from the East, whereas Central Russia by people from Western Siberia or from the North Caucasus. The federal authorities trying to overcome the negative tendencies in the eastern regions counted on the immigrants from previous Soviet republics but it turned out that most of them preferred to settle down in the central regions or in the warm South rather than in the Far East or Eastern Siberia. In the years 1994-1999 only 114 thousand

³ See: Olviya Press, *Россия: между политикой и демографией*, <http://www.olviya.idknet.com/ol61-07-02.htm> – 09 VII 2008.

⁴ Ж. Зайончковская, президент Центра изучения проблем вынужденной миграции в СНГ, *Сибирь и Дальний Восток в XXI веке*, <http://www.osnovnoe.ru/index.php?expid=117> – 09 VII 2008.

out if 510 thousand Russian immigrants from the CIS settled down east of the Ural choosing Eastern Siberia or the Far East.

These phenomena raise the question of Chinese labor, which is perceived either as an inevitable tool to save the economy in these regions or as a threat to Russia's integrity in the East. Even if the stream of native immigrants from the CIS countries makes up a number comparable to the one of Russians, the loss will still be very far from being made up for. In other words, to fill at least the half of the population gap, Russia will need immigrants from Asian countries.

The authorities are at cross purposes with business at the moment. The immigration policy is still very strict. Both the federal and the local executives do not think seriously about the legalization of Chinese immigration even in moderate forms such as the green card, permission to purchase or rent real estate, running their own businesses. Even though the rural areas are being abandoned, the Russian population looks reluctantly at the idea of building temporary Chinese settlements in the Eastern territories. The situation seems to have led to the dead end: on the one hand Russians leave the Far East and Siberia because of the lack of economic perspectives but they do not accept the only possible way to revitalize these areas either.

However, if we allow for the pure data which describe the situation, there are serious and rational reasons for anxiety. The population of Heilongjiang region, which borders to Russian Far East counts 35 million people, whereas the analogical subject of the Federation, Primorskij Kraj – only 2 million. Theoretically, according to some experts, what seems a positive solution to the problem is the distribution of Chinese laborers all over Russia instead of concentrating them in the East. If we assume that in the nearest 50 years the Federation will need about 10 million of Asian immigrants to solve the problems of its own economy, we understand that the question which in the US was asked first after seizing North Mexican territories in 1848 and which is still being asked more and more intensively, proportionally to the growth of the Latin American population: „Are we going to remain the same nation?“, is quite essential.

Some political experts emphasize the “Chinese threat”, suggesting that the government make some more radical steps to protect Russia against unavoidable disaster in the East. Most political scientists, followed by the Kremlin, seek internal solutions such as economic support for Russian settlers, investment plans but it seems hardly possible that Russian Federation can afford to take such costs and that it is institutionally and mentally capable of solving the question. So far, as the whole country could hear during President Vladimir Putin's last press conference in 2008, Russian Far East is still being significantly depopulated. Very few analysts prompt that Russia should combine very substantial support from the western countries into its own programs. Makarenko (2000) warns that even in the mid-eighties four combined Russian territories, which border to Russia, counted about 6.5 million inhabitants whereas the Chinese counterpart areas – over 112 million. Nowadays the situation is much worse so he proposes cooperation with the West to colonize the Far East and Siberia before it becomes entirely Chinese.⁵

⁵ В. Макаренко, *Кто союзники России*, Москва 2000.

The demographic situation of Russia's eastern territories could probably be solved within the framework of market economy only by intensifying cooperation with the western business. This is, however, extremely unlikely since the Kremlin camp presents the West as the basic threat to world stability. The negative experience of Sakhalin II investment successfully discouraged foreign IGs from making risky financial steps. That is why Putin suggesting more serious encouragement for settling down in the East resorts to non-market support devices, such as low prices of fuels or special tax regulations. Spectacular achievement within the framework of this kind of policy does not seem to be realistic; we can expect that the present trend will be continued.