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Migration situation in Primorskiy Kray: in a search of stability.

Regional aspects of the migration issues are essential to understand a government strategy to respond the emerging migration problems, and how that strategy was implemented in reality. Regional communities are closer to the real problems than central authorities. Here positive and negative consequences of the migration streams are felt pointed. Here it is able to find ways to cope with the emerging difficulties faster. And if the regional authorities are aware of those processes in the territory, understand development of modern world and have actual instruments of the effective interaction with the federal government, only then the productive realization of migration policy is possible on the regional as well as on the national stage.

This paper is about the migration situation in Primorskiy Kray that has specific trends. First, here are concentrated the biggest and the most influential universities in the region and there is the Russian Academy of Sciences Institute of history, archeology and ethnography of the people of the Far East. That is why regional population has been forming of the migration of those who wish to enter Far Eastern universities mainly from the whole region and graduates of Leningrad and Moscow universities. Many of local enterprises and organizations leaders, employees of the executive and legislative branches of power of Primorye and Vladivostok came to study at Far Eastern universities from other territories and stayed in the region after graduation.

Second, Primorye is the most populated territory of the Far Eastern Federal district – about 2 million residents. However, the Russian Far East has more than a third of Russia's territory, but just 5% of its population – about 7 million people. There is the stark contrast between China's enormous population and Russia's steep demographic decline. Across the border are China's three northeastern provinces – Heilongjiang, Jilin and Liaoning – with a combined population of more than 100

million. About tens of thousands of Chinese migrants are already crossing over to fill the void, some of them settling down and acquiring Russian citizenship. Visiting Blagoveshchensk in 2000, President Vladimir Putin warned that if the authorities failed to develop the region, "even the indigenous Russian population will mainly be speaking Japanese, Korean and Chinese in a few decades." Some Russian academics say Chinese could become the predominant ethnic group in the Russian Far East by the year 2025.

Third, during the last 15 years, Primorye has become increasingly reliant upon trade with its regional partners in Northeast Asia, rather than with the rest of the Russian economy. Trade with China, Japan, and Republic of Korea is increasingly important to Primorskii Kray. Unlike in the 1990-s when much of the commerce was "shuttle trade", since 2000 legal trade and investment is more important than illegal or quasi-legal trade.

And the last, Primorye has an ambivalent reputation. Political development during the last 15 years was full of events as the governor Evgeniy Nazdratenko battles with "Chinese invasion". And the current governor Sergey Darkin plans to shape Vladivostok as the host city of APEC Summit in 2012 in spite of depressing realities. Moreover, Primorye is well-known because of corruption cases, non-democratic change of power, and it creates a certain element of uncertainty in future, connected with the way of transformation of the affairs after the election the Vladivostok mayor in May 2008 and the possible change of the governor.

The main thesis of this paper is that Primorye has formed such migration picture that represents ambivalent consequences of the federal government's migration policy.

Primorskii Krai has lost 9.2 % of its population since 1989 to 2004.¹ According to 2002 Census, the population of Primorskii Krai was 2 071 210 people, or about 30% of the total population of the RFE.²

The ethnic structure of the Primorskiy Kray is very multinational. There are more than 120 registered nationalities in Primorye. Russians predominate.

According to 2002 Census, there were 94 058 of Ukrainians, 17 899 of Koreans, 14 549 of Tatar.

The number of Armenians and Azerbaijanis has increased since 1989 due to migration from CIS countries.³

There were three waves of immigration in Primorye. The first, in the early 1990s, consisted of immigrants who had been forced to run away from war and conflict zones, as well as returnees who had emigrated from Primorye and were to leave the Central Asian republics. A significant proportion of these immigrants were given refugee status. There were 3135 in 1995, 4258 in 1999 people with that status in Primorye. The significant parts of immigrants were Russian Koreans.

The big challenges for Primorye were Chinese workers. The local population was struggling to get hold of the most basic necessities in this remote region. The Chinese opened giant markets in Vladivostok and Ussuriysk, where even the poorest could buy what they needed. But during the 1990s, fear of invasion gave way to an acceptance of immigration.

In the late of the 1990s the number of immigrants gradually declined. Russia experienced economic difficulties in the late 1990s, which made it less attractive as a destination for migrants. Among the immigrants of the second wave, the number of social and economic refugees increased.

In the 1990s the attitude of regional cooperation between Russia and China was diverse. Primorye had profitable business with China and did not ask federal authorities for permission. And Governor Nazdratenko used “the Chinese threat” as a motivation in his struggle for more benefits from federal government.

The third wave of migration that arrived in the first years of the XXI century can be divided into two sub-currents that were disparate in terms of size, direction, and composition. The first were immigrants who came to Primorye for permanent residence, and migrant laborers who only intended to stay in the region for a short period. The number of new immigrants subsequently stabilized at the relatively low figure of 24 000 to 26 000 per year. The majority of these are ethnic Russians from the Far Eastern territories, Ukrainians, Russian Koreans, and Tatars.

However, the number of immigrants from indigenous ethnic groups in the CIS countries is increasing. The number of labor migrants with only temporary residence in Russia has increased from 10333 in 1998 to 14 837 in 2001.

According to the Dalnevostochiy capital information, during 1999-2002 only 71 Chinese have become Russian citizens, 701 Chinese got a permanent residence, and 228 families with Chinese members were in the RFE.⁴

The relationship on inter-regional level has been placed under severe federal control. The interests of federal authorities not always coincide with the interests of local authorities. Moreover the Russian government is increasing state control over the “commanding heights” of the national economy and the Asian model of development is becoming better and better visible in Russia. Special economic zone as one of these instruments are broadly used in China and other Asian countries. It also means that the nature of its economic development will resemble the Asian growth based on investments. To be strong and enhance its security, Russia had to re-establish the absolute primacy of politics over business.

In the 1990s, Russian migration policy focused on accepting and integrating refugees and returnees. During this time, the legal foundations for migration policy were laid, creating a basis that was subsequently applied in federal migration programs supported by fairly stable and transparent financing. However, in 2001–2002 Russian migration policy was exposed to an essential transformation. The struggle against illegal migration took center stage, and the government tried to link it to crime and terrorism. The Federal Migration Service was reorganized, transferred to the Interior Ministry, and made directly subordinate to the president’s office.

The main concern of authority was to establish a vertical of power that would be able to appropriately receive the president’s instructions, transmit and implement them. The regional authorities had more chances to imitate migration policy. The legislation on naturalization and the legal status of foreigners was tightened. The cancellation of the federal migration programs meant that migration policy lacked transparency and accountability, while the “power vertical” deprived

the regions of their authority in this area and centralized the decision-making process.

The results of the policies pursued during 2002–2004 were awful. The number of migrants with uncertain legal status has increased continuously. This policy has not only failed to meet expectations in the struggle against illegal migration, but has also given rise to new problems that have hampered the Russian economy. That unsuccessful policy was once again reviewed in March 2005 when the Security Council decided to liberalize in order to make Russia attractive for migrants.

In January 2007 Russia introduced a law aimed at easing stringent procedures for obtaining work and residency permits, but at the same time imposed quotas for foreign labor and prohibited all foreigners from trading at the country's sprawling markets as of April. From April 2007 not a single foreign trader should remain at Russian retail markets, following a government decision. The implementation of the law has led to a reduction in sales outlets in Primorye. At the largest "sports market" in Vladivostok, 50 percent of outlets were closed. There has been an increase in prices for food and mass market goods.

But xenophobia and political considerations have determined some aspects of the new migration policy. The market ban was part of a trend of growing intolerance, a populist move intended to placate elements in society that would rather have immigrants out of sight and mind.

Currently, the basic tents of migration policy are being revised. A program is being developed to support the voluntary resettlement of compatriots from CIS countries. However, there is a vicious circle. First, the legislation states that the primary intention is to attract skilled specialists from abroad – at a time when the Russian economy mainly requires unskilled labor as well as highly qualified experts. Secondly, the intention is to draw on ethnic Russians, even though the migration potential of this group is limited. Third, it is assumed that favorable conditions will be offered to these fellow Russians. Their relocations costs will be

covered, jobs and infrastructure will be created; apartments will be built, etc. The cost of absorbing and integrating one million immigrants is very high.

In May 2006 the federal government has introduced a new, desperate policy to attract compatriots from the former Soviet republics and persuade them to go and live along the "strategic border".

Government officials expressed optimism that the project of repatriate ethnic Russians living abroad would progressively squeeze foreign migrant workers out of Russia's labor market. The local authorities find it extremely difficult to achieve the project's objectives. Primorye as one of the 12 pilot regions had drafted its own repatriation program. Although would-be migrants have been promised passports, working permits, low-rate mortgages, and benefits, job opportunities offered potential newcomers look slim. The Primorye administration was ready to accept only those applicants whose professional skills match the needs of their respective job markets as mining plant Vostok, agriculture area near Ussuriysk. According the Primorskii regional program of attracting compatriots, in 2007 Primorye is waiting 1 284 men, in 2011 – about 28 000 or about 1.5 % of the current population.⁵

Economic motives are the dominating factors for immigrants. Russia's dynamically growing economy makes it a popular place to work and live for many foreigners, including Chinese and North Koreans workers in Primorye. The immigrants are ultimately motivated by Russia's relatively better social and economic situation and higher standard of living. Foreigners with a permanent residence permit or a temporary permit have open access to the labor market.

However, the majority of migrants in Russia are disenfranchised. Up to 90 percent have no residence and/or work permits, due to fragmented legislation and a lack of clear procedures defining how to apply the law. There are about 11 000 migrants in Primorye who are waiting for Russian citizenship for several years.

There are no accurate data that could be used to determine the demand for foreign workers in different sectors of the work force. In fact, nobody can cite a figure for the number of foreign workers in Russia today with a margin of error less than 1 million. According to Kamil Iskhakov, presidential envoy in the Far

Eastern federal district in 2006, while 150,000 immigrants arrive every year legally, the inflow of illegal immigrants is estimated at about 350,000.⁶

According to Sergey Pushkarev, director of migration and labor agency, from 175 000 foreigners 128 000 Chinese citizen and 13 000 citizen of CIS were registered in Primorye in 2005.⁷ Officially, nearly 14 000 Chinese have gained the right to work in Primorye so far in 2005 and 71% from 18 403 (13 000) of work permits in nine months of 2006.⁸ But the real figures are higher because of illegal immigration, according to Primorye Federal migration Service. As Vladimir Stegnyy, the head of analytical and information department of ZAO “Primorye”, said that in 2006 there were about 20 000 Chinese workers and businessmen in Primorye.⁹

Primorye has a high demand for labor. Already today, some sectors of the regional economy rely to a large extent on migrant workers, including construction, wholesale and retail trade, food service, and public transportation. Migrants are required for low-paid unskilled, heavy, and seasonal employment that the local population has no interest in. Because they occupy jobs that are unpopular with the local population, migrants create competition for unskilled workers on the job market. This competition is enhanced by migrants’ price-cutting. Because most of them are illegal immigrants, they settle for wages that are unacceptable for the local population. Uzbeks are clearing Vladivostok streets and North Koreans are renovating apartments of local residents. The working conditions of a large majority of migrants are similar to forced labor.

To overcome the labor shortage in Primorye, some Russian analysts have proposed significantly expanding the permissible levels of Chinese immigration. However, these ideas have encountered insurmountable opposition. National security considerations have long made government officials reluctant to relax controls on Chinese immigration into Russia. Under new immigration quotas just 8 thousand foreigners will be legally authorized to work in Primorye, compared to 18 thousand in 2006. The first year of an extended program to repatriate ethnic

Russians living abroad has failed to produce the wave of immigrants that proponents touted ahead of its approval.

Attempts to institutionalize a community of immigrants provoke a nervous reaction from society. In the Russian social consciousness, immigrants appear as some sort of "monster of lobbying," the frontline detachment of invaders bent on grabbing power and accumulating financial resources. Modern diasporas in Primorye are not so threatening. Today successful and powerful diasporas have been created by Azerbaijanis, Armenians, Koreans, Ukrainians, and many other ethnic groups. Among other things, they successfully lobby for their business interests and organize the continuation of their culture. Chechen, Uzbeks, Vietnamese and Chinese have created communities that have only limited economic goals. In the absence of a real diaspora experience, in the wave of crime and corruption that characterized the 1990s some communities grouped themselves around people with dark pasts and not entirely clear presents, out of which grew criminal structures that put the final stamp on how the institutes of the diasporas would be received by the authorities and by ordinary Russians.

The problem is deepened by the fact that a significant portion of immigrants in no way strive for integration. The reasons for this are many. Integration is opposed by traditional mindsets; by the insularity of the immigrant communities, which can give rise to a microcosm of a single ethnic culture; and by a lack of real economic stimulants.

In Primorye dialogue with the diasporas is being conducted on the level of cultural programs. The Kray administration is supporting various cultural programs and facilitating regular meetings between government officials and representatives of the diasporas.

The attitude towards foreigners in Primorye is complex. First of all, the generation gap is particularly evident here. People of the elder generation brought up in conditions of international isolation are more apt to be suspicious about foreigners. The youths who have seen the world usually display curiosity and interest. However, all age groups feel a certain kind of ethnicism, sometimes

turning into arrogance. Prejudices and xenophobia can be overcome only on the basis of a secure relationship between developed communities and government representatives and civil society. The task is to mobilize the financial and organization potential of the diasporas in the creation of their own positive image. The discussion now should be not only about the traditional strength of the diasporas in terms of preserving and supporting national languages and cultures and developing their business interests, but also about activity in the direction of the adaptation of the members of the immigrant communities to life in Russian society.

Primorye is in a situation where demographic development, replenishing the labor and even simply "filling up the space" are possible only by attracting more immigrants. Some Russian analysts have proposed expanding the permissible levels of Chinese immigration to the region. Thus far, these ideas have encountered remarkable opposition. In the regional social consciousness, immigrants appear as the frontline detachment of invaders bent on grabbing power and accumulating financial resources. In Primorye the influential diasporas have been created by Azerbaijanis, Armenians, and Russian Koreans. They are successfully lobbied for their business interests and organize the continuation of their culture. The Chinese have created communities that have only limited economic goals.

The political debates over perspectives for immigration and migration policy disguise a clash of views over the future of Russia. The advocates of immigration – liberals and pragmatists – have in mind the long-term economic, demographic, and political interests of the country. They say that immigration can play a vital role in balancing the shortfall of working-age Russians, maintaining the potential for economic development, supporting the stability of individual regions, and guaranteeing national security.

The opponents – Communists and “national patriots” – refer to the social, religious and ethnic consequences of immigration. Because they are attuned to socio-cultural aspects, their arguments are the challenges and threats posed by the current situation, and they advocate a hard-line migration policy.

How to find the right balance in Primorye? There is a need to "remove infrastructure restrictions," or "take an integrated view of planning in territorial development". There is no need to set up a special RFE commission. All we need to do is ensure that a state actually has plan to power over those territories and to set a state with the rule of law, an open economy, and an open society.

If the whole economy amounts to nothing more than selling raw materials, the Chinese will simply take it over. If "law" means nothing more than police officers taking bribes, the Chinese do not follow the law and buy it. If "elections" mean nothing more than the Kremlin would takes bribes from the person who will be appointed as governor, then sooner or later it will turn out that the bribes taken in the Kremlin come from the candidate with Chinese sponsors.

Finally, precise coordination between different ministries and departments, between the center and the regions, between the state and business is an indispensable condition. The stable political situation and positive dynamics of social-economic development make employment and adaptation of migrants possible. The successful migration policy in Primorye is still on the way of searching the right way.

¹ Motrich E.L. Naselenie Dalnego Vostoka Rossii. Vladivostok-Khabarovsk, DVO RAN. 2006. P. 20.

² Natsionalniy sostav i vladenie yazikami, grazhdanstvo. Moskva. Statistika Rossii. 2004. Itogi perepisi naseleniya 2002. V 14 tomah. T.4. P. 113,114.

³ Ibidem.

⁴ Dalnevostochniy capital. October. 2007. N 10. P.14.

⁵ Utro Rossii. 12.12.2006.

⁶ Utro Rossii. 23.12.2006.

⁷ Zolotoy Rog. 18.07. 2006. P. 6.

⁸ Vladivostok. 17.10.2006.

⁹ The author's interview with Vladimir Stegnyy. January 15, 2006.