In: IFSH (ed.), OSCE Yearbook 2006, Baden-Baden 2007, pp. 289-299.

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Destination Russia: Migration Policy Reform and Reality

Introduction

> Russia currently finds itself in a unique historical period in which migration policy can become an important means of providing economic and demographic security and helping to sustain its development.[1]

Such were the concluding words at a conference on labour migration held in St. Petersburg on 1-2 July 2004. Two years later, on 30 June 2006, the State Duma approved the draft law "On Migration Registration of Foreign Citizens and Stateless Persons in the Russian Federation". Following the Federation Council's approval on 6 July 2006 and President Vladimir Putin's endorsement on 18 July 2006, it will come into force on 15 January 2007. Migration has, in the meantime, become one of the most hotly debated issues in the political arena. President Putin, in his annual speech to the Federal Assembly on 11 May 2006, pointed out that the country was facing a demographic crisis and stressed the urgent need to introduce reforms in migration legislation to reverse current demographic trends.[2] His advisor, Viktor Ivanov, said that he was concerned by "the African death rate and the European birth rate"[3] in Russia.

Indeed, the Russian population has been in constant decline since 1986 with a natural loss of 0.7 to 0.9 million since 1993. Besides creating the necessary social conditions for improving the birth rate, the policy paper of the Russian Federation for the time period from the present until 2015, welcomes legislative measures that would facilitate registration and employment of foreign citizens.[4] The Social-Patriotic Party *Rodina* ("Motherland") and the Communist Party of the Russian Federation (CPRF) voted against the draft law in March. *Rodina* criticized it as "an effective instrument to supplant the

1 Irina Ivakhnyuk, *Zaklyuchitelnyi otchet mezhdunarodnogo seminara "Perspektivy trudovoi migratsii v Rossii i ee regionakh: prava migrantov v kontekste ekonomicheskogo i demograficheskogo razvitiya"* [Concluding report on the international seminar "Perspectives on Labour Migration in Russia and Its Regions: Migrants' Rights in the Context of Economic and Demographic Development"], p. 3, available online at http://www.uef.ru/rus/chairs/stat/seminar2004.doc (author's translation).

2 Cf. Putin's State-of-the-Nation Address, at: http://www.fond-opk.orthodoxy.ru/publ/publ_view.php?publid=39 (in Russian).

3 Excerpts of Viktor Ivanov's statements at the round table organized by the State Duma in April 2006. Material provided by Stringer Information Agency, at http://www.stringer.ru (in Russian; author's translation).

4 See the Demographic Policy Paper of the Russian Federation for the time period until 2015, presented on 15 February 2001 at the meeting of the government of the Russian Federation, at: http://www.akdi.ru/ECONOM/akdi.HTM (in Russian).

indigenous population".[5] However, the opposition between pro-Putin forces, who supported the adoption of liberalization measures, and the group known as the Faction of Opposition Parties (i.e. Communists and Patriots), reflects only one side of a much larger picture. Beyond domestic politics there is indeed an entire web of disputes relating to the management of migration in Russia. These range from violations of labour migrants' rights by their employers and the police, via the growing racist and xenophobic sentiments of the indigenous population, to recent foreign policy trends that have contributed to the revision of legislation concerning migrants. The Russian Federation has indeed acknowledged that it needs to carry out a significant reform of migration law to solve the economic, demographic, and social problems it now faces. With the new law on migration possibly on the way to coming into force, policy makers, international organizations, local analysts, and the media have raised the issue of Russia becoming no less an immigration country than the United States. Yet quite apart from the controversial reasons behind these reforms, to what extent are indigenous Russians willing to accept foreigners? Can the legalization of a foreign labour force really benefit employers that are focused on maximizing profit? This paper takes a closer look at the mechanisms behind the Russian government's intention to implement measures to facilitate the regulation of migration. In doing so, it considers the realities of migration management and the repercussions that current policy reforms might have. The case of labour migrants from Central Asia will be the main focus.

"Russia is Not a Way Station" – Attempts to Manage Undocumented Migration

Labour migration from Central Asia to Russia has increased since the end of the 1990s as the Russian economy started to recover. As a result of the economic transition process, the infrastructure and education and health systems in the states of Central Asia deteriorated, causing labourers from the agricultural and construction sectors as well as professionals to migrate to Russia in search of work. Russia, now the second most popular destination for migrants following the United States, has an estimated 10.2 million undocumented migrants.[6] There is no reliable information on the composition of the migrant population by ethnic origin, however, Caucasian and Central Asian citizens are believed to constitute the bulk of the immigrants to Russia, while Ukrainians, Moldovans, and Belarusians also represent a considerable seg-

5 Andrei Arkhipov, *Pomoshchnik prezidenta Viktor Ivanov podvel chertu pod migrantami* [Presidential Advisor Viktor Ivanov Draws the Bottom Line for Migrants], at: http.//www.stringer.ru/publication.mhtml?Part=37&PubID=5607 (author's translation).

6 Assessment of the Federal Migration Service. Cf. *V Rossii nakhodyatsya bolee 10 millionov nelegalnykh migrantov* [More than ten million illegal migrants in Russia], Ria Novosti, 11 December 2006, at: http://www.rian.ru/society/20061211/56770101.html.

ment of Russia's labour market. The demand for cheap labour in sectors such as construction, wholesale and retail trade, municipal and personal services, catering, and public transportation is considered to be the principal factor drawing migrants to Russia. With average economic growth of 6.4 per cent over the past several years, the Russian Federation has attracted millions of migrants from other parts the former Soviet Union.

Despite emigration and depopulation, Russia's policy makers are divided about allowing more migration to the country. The Communists and the Social-Patriotic Party raise doubts about the alleged economic benefits. They are anxious that the job market may marginalize Russian citizens and frightened by current levels of foreigners, let alone the continuing influx of migrants from the former USSR. *"Prokhodnoi dvor"* the Russian word for "way station" has the negative connotation of a terrain with no law or order. *"My – ne prokhodnoi dvor"* ("We are not a way station"), or *"Rossiya – ne prokhodnoi dvor"* ("Russia is not a way station") are among the statements constantly reiterated by politicians, NGOs, the media, and a disgruntled population. The notion that the country could be turned into a lawless place of this kind by illegal migrants and incompetent politicians is also discernable in the mainstream media. Far right groups such as the Russian Movement against Illegal Migrants and Immigrants use anti-migration propaganda to increase support for their nationalist ideologies.[7]

When considered in the context of the debate on "Fortress Europe", i.e. the restrictive migration policies of the newly enlarged European Union, Russia's *not-a-way-station* discourse might sound relatively welcoming at first.[8] As Tatiana Yudina rightly argues, Russia's demand for foreign labour is similar to that of European countries in the 1960-1970s.[9] The current migration legislation has not produced any positive results, and Russia, with heavy dependence on migrant labour to sustain its economy, cannot afford to adopt the same strict migration laws that some Western European states have. Russia is thus unlikely to close its doors to migrants completely. The labour deficit notwithstanding, Russia is still doing too little to adopt appropriate migration policies. In their policy paper to the World Bank, Yuri Andrienko and Sergei Guriev note that Russia still seems to be orienting itself towards the policy designs of the OECD countries that allow limited quota-based migration, which might have a negative impact on the economy. The two

7 See, for example, the newspaper *Sovetskaya Rossiya*, at: http://www.sovross.ru/ 2006/06/06_4_1.htm, or at: http://www.rednews.ru/article.phtml?id=5222. The Russian National Union party (Russki Obshenatsionalni Soyuz, RONS) has been spreading the same anti-migrant messages. In May 2006, anti-migrant flyers with the words "Duma to Vote for Anti-Russian Law" were distributed in the metro stations of Moscow.

8 Cf. among others Hans-Joachim Albrecht, Fortress Europe? – Controlling Illegal Immigration, in: *European Journal of Crime Criminal Law and Justice* 1/2002, pp. 1-22, and Stefan Alsher, Knocking at the Doors of "Fortress Europe". Migration and Border Control in Southern Spain and Eastern Poland, in: CCIS Working Paper Series, *Working Paper 126*, November 2005, at: http://www.ccis-ucsd.org/PUBLICATIONS/wrkg126.pdf.

9 Cf. Tatiana N. Yudina, Labour Migration into Russia: The Response of State and Society, in: *Current Sociology* 4/2005, p. 1.

scholars are concerned at the direction being taken by Russian migration policy and note that, since 2002, Russia has had in place migration regulations based on those in effect in Germany, Austria, and the Netherlands during the 1990s. They argue that despite an improved system of border control, deportation procedures, and amnesties for undocumented migrants, even the OECD countries have not fully managed to regulate migration. They point out that foreign labour has turned out to be effective in underpinning long-term economic growth in the EU and the USA, and Russia, not being part of the OECD or the EU, should be considering a migration policy independently of other countries.[10]

If we consider some of the arguments of the migration policy makers, it becomes clear what Andrienko and Guriev are referring to. According to Mikhail Tyurkin, Deputy Head of the Federal Migration Service (FMS), stricter control of migration and better migration management could be of major benefit to the state, since "illegal migration has up to now deprived the state of a profit of 200 million US dollars per year".[11] Further, he says that by hiring migrants as cheap labour, employers circumvent legal procedures and all the fiscal requirements they have to fulfill to employ foreign citizens. With legal employment, migrants, too, would have to pay tax and accept employment and temporary residence regulations in accordance with Russian law.

As far as legal employment of foreign citizens and the competition in the Russian job market are concerned, Tyurkin commented that Russian employers think only about their own profit. The Russian construction industry, for instance, attracts most of the foreign labour force but neglects migration regulations. Migrants have serious and often fatal accidents on construction sites. "Their rights", Tyurkin argues further, "are constantly violated by their employers and nobody bears responsibility. These illegal actions are at variance with what the FMS is undertaking. Before hiring a foreign citizen, the employer must bear in mind that a Russian citizen has absolute priority. Only when the Russian job market cannot provide qualified manpower for specific jobs, can an employer consider hiring a foreign citizen."[12] Although Russia's desperate need for foreign labour is obvious, it becomes clear from Tyurkin's arguments that further legislative reform on the status of undocumented migrants and work and residency permits is unlikely to benefit Central Asian labour migrants. A senior official from the FMS in Moscow said at a press conference in January 2006 that the FMS was distancing itself from a punitive migration policy and was considering the creation of labour exchange services as a more civilized way to deal with labour migration. He assured his listeners, that the FMS intended to legalize up to one million undocumented

10 Cf. Yuri Andrienko/Sergei Guriev, *Understanding Migration in Russia. A Policy Note for the World Bank*, June 2005, pp. 22-23, at: http://www.cefir.ru/download.php?id=216.

11 *Sprosite Tyurkina* [Ask Tyurkin], interview with Mikhail Tyurkin, at: http://www.gazeta.ru/turkin.shtml (author's translation).

12 Ibid.

migrants in the country. According to some leading Russian experts, however, priority will most probably be given to migrants of Ukrainian and Moldovan origin, because, "due to their command of the Russian language and cultural propinquity to our own population, they are better adapted to Russia and more qualified than migrants from Tajikistan".[13] The so called "mini-amnesty" action that the FMS carried out in 2005 considered the legalization of about 7,000 Ukrainians. It is therefore not surprising that Russia has also been co-operating closely with Belarus in the area of migration regulation. The two countries have recently signed a contract on common migration cards.

Federal Migration Service

To better understand Russian migration policy, it seems appropriate to take a look at the history of the state institution that is in charge of managing migration. In 1993, at the dawn of its independence, the Russian Federation under President Boris Yeltsin created an executive organ entitled the Federal Migration Service (FMS). Its functions were soon taken over by the Ministry of Federative Affairs and National and Migration Policies. This ministry was then abolished in 2001 and its tasks were allocated to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Economic Development and Trade. At the same time, functions related to migration, such as the regulation of undocumented migration and issues related to refugees and forced migration, were transferred to the Ministry of Internal Affairs (MIA). In a decree of 9 March 2004, President Putin re-established the FMS as an organ under direct executive control. While passport, citizenship, registration, entry permission, and visa issues have, since then, been the responsibility of the FMS, migration policy measures, their implementation, and the legal framework of migration regulation have remained the remit of the MIA. The MIA, as Tyurkin explains, "draws up the rules of the game and provides instructions and the FMS implements them. This increases the independence of the FMS and expands its functions. It puts into practice the migration laws which are authorized by the president, the government, the Federal Council, and the MIA."[14]

These statements seem controversial in two ways. First, the FMS is an organ of the MIA and it might take several years for the employees of this state institution to exert an influence equivalent to that of their law enforcement counterparts. Hence, the successful implementation of new regulations

13 Interview conducted by a TRIBUNE-uz journalist with Yevgeny Gontmakher, Director of Research of the Centre for Social Research and Innovation of the Russian Federation, at: http://www.tribune-uz.info/society/?id1=7064 (in Russian; author's translation. "Adapted" is the word taken over directly from comments in Russian).

14 Mikhail Tyurkin, Inogda my namerenno idem na uzhestochenie nakazanii. Intervyu [Sometimes We Toughen Punishments Intentionally. Interview], in: *Otechestvennye Zapiski* 4/2004, at: http://www.strana-oz.ru/?numid=19&article=906 (author's translation).

is not only a matter of distribution of power and resources between the FMS and the police, but will also take considerable time. Analyses carried out by both Russian and foreign scholars provide evidence on the everyday practices of police officers (i.e. the MIA) *vis-à-vis* migrants. In 2001, in the course of a research project focussing on shady practices in the sphere of law and order, the Institute of Social and Economic Studies of Population at the Russian Academy of Sciences surveyed 2,200 policemen. The scholars drew remarkable conclusions about the extent of corruption in Russian law enforcement institutions.[15] One should bear in mind that the average monthly pay of a policeman is 7,400 roubles (ca. 260 US dollars). A migrant worker employed at a construction company receives, on average, twice as much as a Russian police sergeant. It is just as much an everyday occurrence for a migrant to offer a bribe to the police in order to avoid deportation as it is for the police to extort cash from migrants. This being said, lawsuits against police officers who accept bribes from undocumented migrants are also regularly reported in the Russian media. Most policemen demand their "share" openly. The usual identity control procedure starts with the police informing the migrant of the invalidity and/or inauthenticity of his or her documents and demanding payment of "fines". Very few policemen report the fines paid by undocumented migrants to their superiors. In Moscow's large Cherkizovsky market, which is famous for its great number of Tajik migrants, police officers show up on a regular basis to "carry out controls".[16] The extent to which FMS can gain independence is a question that remains open in this context, since Putin's government is still struggling with corruption. Suffice it to mention the results of a study on corruption carried out by the Moscow-based NGO Information Science for Democracy (INDEM). INDEM discovered that compared to 2001, the market volume for corruption connected with getting registration at one's place of residence (along with issuing domestic and foreign passports) increased by 33 per cent in 2005.[17]

The second controversial issue concerns the functioning of the FMS, specifically with regard to the implementation of the new migration legislation. The new law replaces the requirement on foreign nationals to seek permission to reside in the Russian Federation with a requirement to notify the

15 For more information, see the website of *Laboratoriya ekonomicheskoi Sotsiologii*, at: http://www.isesp-ras.ru/labryvk.htm. For further results of this project see also Olga Kollennikova *Deformatsiya trudovoi deyatelnosti rabotnikov militsii kak faktor oslableniya bezopasnosti naseleniya* [The Distortion of Police Services as a Weakening Factor of the Security of the Population], Dissertation Abstract, at: http://www.transparency.org.ru/CENTER/DOC/book_20_Referat.doc.

16 Having successfully picked up a few Tajik words, they meanwhile make their demands in the native language of the migrants.

17 Cf. Diana Schmidt, CPI, INDEM Studie und andere: Korruption in Russland 2005. Kommentar [Commentary on the Survey by CPI, INDEM, et.al.: Corruption in Russia 2005], in: *Russlandanalysen* 78/05, at: http://www.russlandanalysen.de/content/media/Russlandanalysen78.pdf.

authorities.[18] As of 15 January 2007, foreign nationals in Russia will no longer be required to register their place of residence, although this will remain mandatory for foreign nationals seeking temporary or permanent residence permits.

Under the new law, all foreign nationals arriving in Russia shall be required to fill out a notification form and inform the FMS of their entry into the country within three days of arrival. Key FMS officials are highly optimistic about this aspect of the new regulation. In order to simplify things for both FMS officers and the migrants themselves, the new law gives foreign nationals the possibility of notifying the authorities of their arrival in person at an FMS office or a post office; post offices will stock official migration cards with the FMS holographic strips and post office employees will be able to register newly arrived foreigners. Any person who has visited Russia, however, may have noticed the rigorous police controls, particularly as far as foreigners with a Caucasian or a Central Asian background are concerned. It would therefore be no exaggeration to argue that a migrant from a country such as Tajikistan and with little knowledge of Russian might not even make it to the post office, as mistreatment, arrest and the extortion of bribes by the police are known to be common. In addition, while Russia probably has the most reliable postal system of all the former Soviet republics, post offices are still struggling with deficiencies ranging from short-staffing and a lack of stamps, to problems with the electricity supply and customer service.

Many migrants to the Russian Federation might also still consider making use of services offered by informal networks to gain registration documents. Depending on what the migrant can afford, these permits vary as to their authenticity. Visitors to Russian cities will soon observe the many advertisements, posted by a variety of dubious mediating agencies, offering to facilitate registration (often within a day). The FMS is pinning its hopes on new regulations aimed at strengthening control over the "grey economy" as a whole, but the greatest challenge of all is that the implementation of the new regulations will only succeed if it goes hand-in-hand with anti-corruption measures. In the coming months, Russia's undocumented migrants will find themselves forced underground. They are left with more fear of being deported and more uncertain questions about their future: Can they trust FMS agents more than policemen? Or would they be better off continuing to rely on informal services to get registration documents of dubious authenticity? Will the current series of FMS raids be as short-lived as the previous one? Or is it the start of a government crackdown?

18 Cf. Federal Law On Migration Registration of Foreign Citizens and Stateless Persons in the Russian Federation, Article 2, para. 4 (in Russian).

Increasing Hostility towards Migrants

The changes in migration policy notwithstanding, the Russian population's hostility towards the presence of foreigners is not likely to change in the near future. The Levada Analytical Center, which carried out sample surveys in 2005, discovered that 57 per cent of respondents had voted in favour of a residency prohibition for people of Caucasian background in their own district or city, and 53 per cent for similar measures for Central Asians. The majority of the respondents would not like to see migrants in their families or among their neighbours.[19] It is therefore surprising that Andrienko and Guriev, whose aim is to promote more liberal migration policies, claim that the average Russian is fairly tolerant towards the immigrant population.[20] In addition to quantitative surveys, ethnographic interviews have often shown that the Russian population has an attitude towards migrants of non-Slavic origin that is at best indifferent, and more generally intolerant.[21]

The growing hostility results in discrimination against migrants. *Chernye*, the Russian word for "blacks", is a common term for migrants, used because of the colour of their skin and/or hair. The law enforcement agents' treatment of migrants often includes verbal abuse and threats, ridicule, and the use of physical force. A common practice is the confiscation of valid identity documents by employers and police. Consequently, migrants are left without any rights. Although human rights NGOs such as Memorial and *Migratsiya i pravo* ("Migration and Law") offer migrants legislative support, the majority leave their homelands with little knowledge of their rights and rely on various informal networks rather than taking advantage of such support as is offered. In addition, hundreds of migrants are currently detained in prisons on remand primarily because they have given fictitious names and choose not to provide the police with their authentic identity documents. In such cases, the police, whose task it is to inform the relevant consulates, are unable to find out the true identities of the detainees, who therefore remain in detention and are unable to notify their families, let alone contact a lawyer. Lack of knowledge about migration legislation in Russia and, frequently, a poor command of the Russian language thus make migrants even more vulnerable to discrimination.[22]

Furthermore, as Mukomel points out, discrimination also exists in the form of limits to migrants' access to the housing market.[23] He analysed the contents of more than 20,000 rental notices published in free advertising

19 Cf. Wladimir Mukomel, Immigration und Russlands Migrationspolitik: Streit um die Zukunft [Immigration and Russian Migration Policy: Struggle for the Future], in: *Russland-analysen* 102/06, p. 4, at: http://www.russlandanalysen.de.

20 Cf. Andrienko/Guriev, cited above (Note 10), p. 36.

21 Cf. Saodat Olimova/Igor Bosc, Labour Migration from Tajikistan. IOM and Research Centre "Sharq", 2003.

22 These views were expressed by lawyers from the Moscow-based NGO *Migratsiya i pravo* in interviews with the author.

23 Cf. Mukomel, cited above (Note 19), p. 6.

newspapers between 2002 and 2004 and found that an astounding number (every third rental notice in some Russian cities) of advertisements contain the sentence "Will rent only to Russians". Such advertisements can readily be found on electricity masts, in metro stations, and at bus stops, as I have seen.

Nationalism, racism, and xenophobia are of particular concern with regard to the emergence of skinhead groups and informal youth groups committed to racially motivated violence. For instance, in March 2006, the Tajik population in and beyond the borders of Tajikistan and anti-racist NGOs in Russia were deeply disappointed by the decision of a St. Petersburg court to charge seven skinhead youths suspected of murdering a nine-year-old Tajik girl in 2004 merely with hooliganism. One of the suspects was even acquitted.[24] During my field trip to Moscow in September 2005, the Tajik diaspora organizations *Migratsiya i pravo* and *Tojik Diaspor* emphasized that crimes committed by neo-Nazi youths on migrants had become a serious issue. Moreover, international human rights watchdogs such as Amnesty International together with the local NGOs Memorial and *Sova* ("owl") accuse the Russian authorities of neglecting the growing criminal behaviour of neo-Nazi groups. Sociologists predict that the ghettoization of Russian towns in the near future is inevitable.[25]

The Importance of Economic Migration from Central Asia

It would be no exaggeration to say that the economies of sending countries would not survive without labour migrants. This is as true of the Slavic countries of the former Soviet Union, Ukraine, Moldova, and Belarus, as it is of Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Uzbekistan. Particularly in Tajikistan, an impoverished country that was devastated by civil war in the 1990s, there are probably few extended families that have no member living and working in Russia. In 2003, remittances from Russia constituted some 20 per cent of Tajikistan's GDP. While this is an official indicator based on the statistical data provided by the banks, the real amount could be as high as 40-50 per cent, as it is still more advantageous for migrants to transfer their money privately in cash or through unofficial couriers. These remittances, worth 280 million US dollars in 2003, exceeded the state budget of 250 million US dollars by twelve per cent. In neighbouring Kyrgyzstan, which is equally impoverished, remittances constituted around 55 per cent of the state budget. In Uzbekistan, around 500 million US dollars was received from migrants working in Rus-

24 Cf. *Moscow News*, 26 March 2003, at: http://www.mn.ru.

25 For more on neo-Nazi and far right groups in Russia see Andreas Umland, Alexander Dugin, die Faschismusfrage und der russische politische Diskurs [Alexander Dugin, the Question of Fascism, and Russian Political Discourse], in: *Russlandanalysen* 105/06, at: http://www.russlandanalysen.de/content/media/Russlandanalysen105.pdf.

sia, equivalent to ca. 5.7 per cent of annual GDP.[26] More recent information provided by the Central Bank of the Russian Federation states that by the end of the second quarter of 2006, Uzbekistan was at the very top of the list of Central Asian countries in terms of transfers received through official banking systems and the Russian postal services. Approximately 220 million US dollars was transferred to Uzbekistan during that period, 204 million to Tajikistan, and 114 million to the Kyrgyz Republic.[27]

The extent of the positive economic effect of labour migration can also be illustrated with the following example. At the end of 2005, Tajikistan submitted its final report to the International Monetary Fund (IMF). In it, President Emomali Rakhmonov appealed for the continuation of the country's co-operation with the IMF. More strikingly, he was able to inform the IMF that his country's economy had grown by seven per cent in 2005, underscoring that transfers from abroad, in particular, had contributed to macroeconomic growth. In 2006, Tajikistan was included on the list of the 19 most impoverished countries to which the IMF extended 100 per cent debt relief. To quote the IMF:

> Tajikistan has qualified for IMF debt relief because of its overall satisfactory recent macroeconomic performance, progress in poverty reduction, and improved public expenditure management. In particular, in recent years, Tajikistan has established a track record of satisfactory macroeconomic performance, the government has made significant progress in implementing its Poverty Reduction Strategy, and it has improved public expenditure management systems. Performance in these areas provides assurances that resources made available under the Multilateral Debt Relief Initiative will be used effectively.[28]

More information on the economic impact of labour migration to Russia from Central Asian countries other than Tajikistan is available in UNDP Human Development Reports. The most recent reports of the International Migration Organization (IMO) and the World Bank refer to the significance of labour migration from Central Asia to Russia, but for reasons of time and space their observations will not be discussed here.

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26 Cf. Olimova/Bosc, cited above (Note 21). Additional material was gathered from the website of the UNDP: http://www.undp.org.

27 Cf. Andrei Evplanov, Valyuta na eksport [Currency for Export], in: Rossiiskaya Biznes Gazeta, 5 September 2006, at: http://www.rg.ru/2006/09/05/dengi.html; and Tsentralnyi bank Rossiiskaya Federatsii, at: http://www.cbr.ru.

28 IMF To Extend 100 Percent Debt Relief to Tajikistan Under the Multilateral Debt Relief Initiative, International Monetary Fund, Press Release 05/303, at: http://www.imf.org/external/np/sec/pr/2005/pr05303.htm.

An examination of labour migration provides further evidence confirming Russia's geopolitical and economic interests in Central Asia. The first half of 2006 has brought the Central Asian states and Russia even closer. Meetings of the Eurasian Economic Community, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, and the Collective Security Treaty Organization during this time period indicate Russia's intention to play a key role in the future of Central Asian countries. On 10 May 2006, in his state-of-the-nation address, President Putin mentioned Russia's demographic problems and emphasized the importance of an effective migration policy and the necessity of prioritising the repatriation of Russian-speakers ("compatriots") from abroad and implementing measures to facilitate this. In June 2006, he signed a decree "On the Voluntary Resettlement of Compatriots", which will be effective as of 1 January 2007. A package with social benefits and employment possibilities will be offered to ethnic Russians returning from abroad. The FMS has been instructed to open offices in several countries, including the Baltic States, Germany, the USA, and Israel.[29]

Given Russia's current intensive co-operation with the governments of the sending countries, a number of migration legislation reforms might be on their way to approval. All the work currently being undertaken in this area may be affected by the presidential elections that will take place in Tajikistan and Uzbekistan at the end of 2006 and the start of 2007, respectively. Russia will hold parliamentary elections in 2007, followed by presidential elections in 2008.

In the light of current foreign policy trends and Russia's demographic deficit, a major move towards legalization seems inevitable. Obtaining a work permit will then require the negotiation of administrative hurdles with which Russia's undocumented migrants are not entirely unfamiliar. Many analysts are sceptical as to whether these policies will lead to positive outcomes. Beyond demographic and economic benefits, Russian society seems reluctant to accept legalization measures. The integration of foreign citizens, whatever their status, will therefore require a considerable effort on the part of the indigenous population.

29 Cf. *Putin Decreed Migration into Russia*, REGNUM News Agency, 28 June 2006, at: http://www.regnum.ru/english/663221.html.