

THE RUSSIAN EMIGRATION AND EUROPE: FROM THE PAST, IN THE PRESENT, AND FOR THE FUTURE

Russia's active foreign policy in the 2010s made this country conspicuous for the wide public in the West. It made Russian expat communities and Russian-speaking population in the Western countries noticeable, too. However, until now, there is no clear comprehension of the role of the Russian expat community in the political life or about what this role may be and what kind of a political subject the Russian expat community is. There are many myths and perils while sober and detailed analysis is still scanty.

Since the 1990s, the Russian authorities constantly speak about the "Russian World" as an object of their protection and a potential tool of influence; however either are specified rarely, if ever. The perception of the "Russian World" itself, as enunciated by Moscow, is more poetical rather than practically and politically oriented.

President Vladimir Putin, upon opening the World Congress of Compatriots in 2001, addressed tens of millions of people living outside the borders of the Russian Federation as those who "speak, think, and, maybe – which is even more important – feel in Russian". What does it mean, "to feel in Russian"? Can one feel like a Russian, while thinking in a different language? Certainly, these questions can be answered – either in a lyrical or in a pseudoscientific way. However, it is rather difficult to project these answers onto a national politics area.

It is therefore not surprising that the same speaker, at that time, was obliged to admit — "The modern Russian diaspora is very diverse in its social, ethnic and religious composition"¹. Indeed – it seems that this is the most diverse expat community in the world according to the three features as named above.

The same happens by many other indicators, it is inhomogeneous and segmental. Actually, the scientists usually refuse to speak about it as an expat community, by simply reserving themselves to a term "Russian-speaking community". However, all these communities, in one or another way, take root in the Russian culture — including the political culture. Their attitude towards Western countries, Europe, and their current home, alongside their self-determination within the European political life, is

¹ Opening Speech of V. Putin at the Congress of Compatriots. — Kremlin.ru, 11 October 2001; <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/21359>

predetermined by relations between Russia and Europe, and by Russia's approach to Europe that has been developing during all our common history.

All the history of the Russian state is a history of a battle between the two identities, the European, and, so to say, the distinctive one. At different times, the latter was identified in various ways – as the Asian, European, or, for example, the “Scythian”. However, the point of it is really in the fact that it is non-European.

Russia had always had its own specifics, both geographically and historically. The state itself and the economical formation has developed in Russia not exactly in a European way — while, here too, we have always had a lot in common with the European institutes. Not to mention the European Russian lifestyle – often rather miserable and backward, but still European. Moreover, not to mention the European Russian culture – that is, in some ways, yes, peripheral, but advanced at times.

It was not always comfortable to govern Russia in a European way. Catherine the Great assumed the throne with “Freedom, the spirit of all in the world, without you all is lifeless... Government without the people's trust is nothingness” written in her compendia. While by the end of the rule, her rhetoric was quite different. “Such a great empire, like Russia, would have died, if there was another regiment established, different from being despotic, because it is the only one to allow aid in due time to remote *guberniyas* (provinces); any other form, with its delay, paralyses the conduct that gives life to all”. However, the non-European management, in the end, did not lead to success either. Compendia of Alexander II were produced during a reactionary period, the time of Nicolay. Yet it did not interfere with him taking leadership of the Great Reforms. Because the need for a European turn was too obvious.

“Is Russia European?” is a question like “What is to be done?” or “To be or not to be?” One can – and should – spend a lifetime trying to answer it — whereas the final answer is not forthcoming. Still, in parallel courses, Russia has always moved along precisely with Europe – sometimes steering away from Europe while, now and then, falling behind it. During the XX century, it became a territory of a colossal experiment, that was pretty much European, in its nature.

Of course, during the times of Ivan the Terrible the peasants from Smolensk did not think about their identity. They simply fled to Lithuania to avoid turning into ultimate serfs on their own dear land. By the way, some hundred years after that, the farmers of Lithuania were fleeing to the East to escape a disaster of the same kind. Later too, during the modern age, Russian natives who were seeking a better life beyond the borders of their

own country, inevitably went to the West. The West, in general, was easily understandable and no-alien to them. In the West, they could look for a paradise, the *Belovodie*. Meanwhile, there was always an earthly alternative to vegetation, personal unfreedom, economic mobilization, or autocracy, in the West.

The Western direction was the only historical course of migration, until the beginning of the XIX century. Environments in the South and the East were hostile. There – by engulfing them – moved the Russian state itself.

It is a widespread opinion that emigration is a relatively new phenomenon for Russia. Harsh restrictions introduced by the regime, along with vast opportunities of local migration in an ever-expanding low-populated state, made any mass-scale move abroad difficult.

Nevertheless, emigration has always been in place – economic, religious, and the emigration of the elites. The latter was mostly political, in search of security or material possessions; however, there was also a “value-based” migration. Everybody knows the story of *Knyaz* (Duke) Kurbsky, but during those times, printing pioneer Ivan Fyodorov left Russia, too, decided that Moscow with its “envy and hate of the masters and the hierarchy” was uncomfortable for his work and spent the last twenty years of his life in Lviv.

The state has always countered the emigration, perceiving it as a challenge to security (with regard to the elites’ escape and the religious emigration), as well as a loss, through mass emigration, of human resources that were the most valued assets for extensive development.

M.V. Lomonosov, in his note “About retaining and propagation of the Russian population”, placed the “living dead” (the emigrants) on the same line with the victims of “disease, misfortune and murder”. “People cross border areas to go to foreign countries, and especially to Poland, the Russian crown thus losing its patrials”². It is true, meanwhile, that Lomonosov called for retention of the human resource without direct violence, “with a carrot”. However, by tradition, the authorities preferred a stick. Sometimes they even used the military expeditions aiming to move the farmers back to Russia, or to destroy “Old Believer” centres.

The Russian noblemen were in no better position, in that respect. GeorgAdam Schlesinger, observing Moscow during the times of *Czarevna* (Princess) Sofia (that were, in fact, the Western-inspired times) wrote: “If there were some people, desiring to visit foreign countries, they would not be allowed, and, most probably they would be threatened with a whip if they insisted on leaving, wishing to see the world a little bit. There are even

² M. V. Lomonosov. Selected Works. V. II. M., 1986, p. 143.

examples when those who constantly persisted on leaving and had no intention to refuse their wish were beaten up and deported to Siberia”³. Of course, in the XVII century situation for the noblemen changed remarkably.

However, during the last century before the revolution, whole Russia began gradually opening up to departing. The state used emigration as a valve through which – no matter how lightly – social tension was released. As a result, four and a half million citizens left the country for good, by 1917. At that, hardly more than one per cent of them were political refugees. Mainly representatives of ethnic minorities, like Jewish and Polish ones, were leaving Russia. From the Caucasus, during its “pacification”, entire nations fled. Farmers were moving across the empire’s boundaries, too — Russians, Ukrainians, Byelorussians, Lithuanians; and they mostly went to America.

Meanwhile, Europe could not ignore the Russian emigration either – be it the political emigrants who, like Bakunin, escaped to the West to devote their “youth and energy” to Europe or those, for example, who provided seasonal labour. In Germany, on the eve of WW I, almost 300 000 Russian citizens were employed on annual basis (70% of all foreign workers employed in the German agriculture)⁴.

However, from 1917 until 1922, Russia splashed out the so-called “first wave of emigration” – no less than a million people, fleeing from the civil war, the red terror and the social experiments. In fact, “the first wave” was not the first one. Besides, it did not outnumber emigration of the pre-revolutionary period. Although the compressed time frame that it took to happen made it a significant event for both Russia and the West.

In addition, the post-revolutionary emigrants excelled at their moral cohesion and at perception of their proper historical mission in the European states that were accepting Russian refugees. By the words of Ivan Bunin, “there exists something that confers some kind of assignment on us” — “we are, truly, some formidable sign to the world and commensurable fighters for the eternal spiritual basis of the human existence, currently not only in Russia, but staggering everywhere else”⁵. Russia, according to Bunin, in such way not only gave a new “lesson to the world”, Russia also delegated “teachers” for it.

³ Witness Report about the Life in Muscovia at the End of XVII century. — “History Questions”, 1970, No.1.

⁴ Ref.: V. A. Iontsev, N. M. Lebedeva, M. V. Nazarov, A. V. Okorokov. Emigration and Repatriation in Russia. M., 2001, p. 319.

⁵ Mission of Russian Emigration. Speech in Paris on 16 February 1924. In: I. A. Bunin. Publicity 1918—1953 M., 2000, p. 148.

Most of these people were prepared for adaptation to foreign countries, due to the high level of education and proficiency in foreign languages. They shared the European values, rooted in European culture, and their previous life linked with these values and this culture. As irreversibility of the Russian regime change was shaping, their integration with the European community accelerated.

During the first years after the revolution, the new authorities themselves were attempting to expel their enemies (and “dubious elements”, in general) out of their country. By mid-1920s, the traditional attitude towards emigration as something almost unacceptable re-emerged. Border crossing was severely limited, and control in this domain became tougher than ever.

Meanwhile, mobility was only increasing, inside the country. Radical reconstruction of the society and economy forced people to adapt to new conditions. Some were searching for a better lot while the others were being chased away forcefully from their old locations. Sociologists assert that “during the first three quarters of the XX century, Russians were the USSR’s most mobile ethnicity in migration terms and a most agile one in the world»⁶.

As the state borders were being “unsealed” by external factors, new “waves” of migration followed. “The Second wave” consisted of the so called “DPs”, “displaced persons”, who were deported to Germany during WW II for slave labour, also those who got there as prisoners of war or joined the retreating Hitlerite troops and avoided forced return afterwards. The wave was rather massive — according to the most widespread assessment, approximately 700 000 people, however there were few Russians among them. They were overwhelmingly habitants of the Baltic States, Western Ukraine and Western Belarus, who became Soviet citizens only recently as a result of the Eastern Europe’s repartition between Hitler and Stalin. It was significantly more difficult for the rest to obtain legal asylum in the West.

“The Second wave”, as compared to the preceding one, was looking for accommodation on the American continent. The post-war Europe could not offer these people neither welfare nor, most importantly, security under the increased Soviet influence.

During the 1960s-1980s, Moscow used opening or closing of any paths for migration as elements for external policy bargaining. This is why mainly repatriation kept going; those were leaving whom the West could and wanted to solicit from Moscow. “The Third wave” was mostly ethnic, and that is why the “de-Europeanization” continued — in favour of the United

⁶ A. Susokolov, Y. Arutyunian, L. Drobizheva. *Ethno-Sociology*. M., 1998, p. 96.

States and Israel. As for Europe, this setup allowed for the return of Russian Germans to Germany only, however it became truly mass by the end of the 1980s only.

Two milestone events marked the end of the 1980s and beginning of the 1990s of the previous century, forming thus the modern Russian-speaking expat community. They were, first, the demise of the USSR, and, second, the opening of the Russian borders. The right to leave the country freely was secured by the law while dramatic change of attitude towards emigrants served as a background. No longer were they perceived by Russia as traitors, “free-wheeling persons”, or strangers.

The fear in view of a multi-million invasion of refugees from the collapsing Soviet Union did not justify itself. The number of border-crossers increased substantially, however the potential of continuous emigration turned out to be low. Currently, approximately 2.7 million people from Russia reside abroad on a permanent basis (and about 1.5 million of them still keep their Russian citizenship)⁷. These indicators are tangible for the country, but they are not too significant for the rest of the world. Among the European countries, it was only in Germany where repatriates and their close relatives were accepted that a sizeable Russian-speaking minority was set up. (Not to mention, of course, the post-Soviet European states.)

The Russian Germans of that time, on one hand, integrated sufficiently well with their new country due to their education and language skills and acquired new interests (including political interests), on the other hand — they preserved the Soviet baseline and values. History of the current success of an “Alternative for Germany” is based overwhelmingly on this phenomenon.

Until recently, eight out of ten Russian Germans voted for CDU, because it was to this party that they were expressing their gratitude for the warm welcome to the historical motherland. As awareness of their proper political interests grew (and with the advent of expressers of these interests), large proportion of the Russian Germans came to support the right-wing populists.

Similar stories come from a range of post-Soviet states where, over a quarter of the century, the Russian-speaking minority had its rights thwarted and was looked upon as the “bitter legacy from the Soviet times”. This minority manages to defend its rights, this way or another, and tries to integrate as much as it can; nevertheless, it maintains mental bonds with

⁷ Ref. N. Mkrchan, Y. Florinskaya. Qualified Migration in Russia: Balance of Loss and Gain. — “Economic Climate Monitoring in Russia: Tendencies and Challenges of the Socio-economic Development”, No.1 (62), January 2018, p. 16.

the Soviet era, because nobody cares to release it from this mental ghetto while it is treated as something extraneous and alien.

Russia attracts attention and hopes of those people particularly when it tries to take upon itself a role of the USSR phantom in the evolving world order. However, their political agenda is not imposed by Moscow. In fact, it cannot be imposed, it is a genuine local agenda.

It is indicative that *die aussiedler* (the repatriated Germans) do not have and never had their own political party – they do not want an even more intense insulation from the rest of the German citizens.

Emigration of the 2000s is drastically different from that of the 1990s. They are those people who like journalist Leonid Bershidsky, “for many years were waiting for Russia to join Europe, and finally decided to enter it individually”. One can now find a consumers’ paradise within the Moscow *MKAD* Ring Road. Still, Moscow cannot provide its citizens with the quality of life in a broader sense — a law-bound state, social guarantees, medicine and education, inviolability of property, democracy, and social lifts, and so on. Thus, if the emigration in early 1990s (even emigration to the ancestors’ birthplace) was mostly economically driven, the current is value-conscious.

It was not very visible up to 2012; while afterwards the number of those leaving abroad for permanent residence habitancy grew rather rapidly. The highly educated leave along with those who already attained success at home and see the possibility to develop it further. Proportion of emigrants from Russia with higher education rose from 31%, as at the beginning of this century, to 47%, by 2012⁸. Young specialists are leaving; according to various polls, from one third to a half of Russian students see their future abroad. Scientists and entrepreneurs are leaving. Political and economy elites take their families out of Russia.

They are rigorously preparing for the move and they know well where they are going. Contrary to the emigrants of the 1990s, they maintain their well-established links with Russia – and they have a clear vision of the internal situation in Russia (not from the Russian TV, as was the case of those who were leaving in the 1990s). They are not trapped in the world of the Russian-speaking ghettos; they solve their political tasks in their host countries, usually at the local government level, as these tasks are strictly of local character.

Political views of these people vary; many of them, until today, owe their well-being to the current regime: for example, they live off their Russian

⁸ Ref. V. A. Iontsev, S. V. Ryazantsev. New Tendencies and Forms of Emigration from Russia. — “Economy of the Region”, 2016, t. XII, no. 2, p. 499.

real estate or corruption income. Yet, their choice in favour of Europe is conscious and value-based. They need Europe as it is (or strives to become) — united, open, stable, rightful, democratic.

Moscow recalls these same people in particular when it speaks not about resources, but about threats to the “Russian world”. As Sergey Naryshkin, Director of Russia’s Foreign Intelligence Service, was inviting his colleagues from the CIS to bond together in the face of an “undeclared hybrid war” that is probably led by the West against the post-Soviet states, he defined this threat in the following way: “the Great Britain, Poland, Switzerland ... are at the forefront of all efforts to turn migrants’ structures into the so called revolutionary capsules”⁹.

This way, two “Russian worlds” co-exist today in Europe — the SovietRussian world of the 1990s and the post-Soviet Russian world of the 2000s. Their cultural roots are mostly in common; their political features are totally divers. The first one is indeed some challenge for political stability. However, the nature of the challenge is historical and intra-European, it is not Kremlin-inspired. Populism, Euro scepticism and xenophobia are induced by the clash of Soviet values (in the format brought along by the emigrants of 1990s and the Russian-speaking people who were cut off from Russia in the aftermath of the breakup of the USSR) and modern European realias. This sentiment does not originate out of nowhere; it emerges from the flaws in the existing political and socio-economic setup. Dissatisfaction over these flaws can be stoked from Moscow but it would be impossible to solve the problem by closing the channels of influence. An internal decision is needed.

Emigration of the 2000s is “Europe leaving Russia”. It is a serious challenge to the future of Russia. Whereas Europe can only be made stronger thereby — unless it is vigorously opposed.

⁹ “Naryshkin blamed the USA for leading an undeclared hybrid war against the CIS.” — “Interface”, 19 December 2017; <https://www.interfax.ru/world/592442>