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# ***Migration and Migration Policy in the Russian Mass Media***

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## **Summary**

This text presents the results of an analysis on the coverage of migration issues by the Russian mass media. The author comes to the conclusion that migration policy is examined by the Russian mass media within the context of domestic political confrontation, and that the political orientation of a publication predetermines its approach to the coverage of migration issues. In the majority of articles, an emotional description of migration issues and the construction of a negative perception of migrants by public opinion are prevalent. Mass media relay stereotypes of the public conscience with its rooted xenophobic moods. In the Russian information space, alarmist moods are dominant, transforming the discussion of migration issues into a discourse of crisis and a discourse of trauma.

## Migration and migration policy in the Russian mass media

Each month in Russia, between 11,000 and 18,000 articles and news links are published that address migration issues (Rezinkova and Zonkhoeva 2011). The overwhelming majority of central and regional mass media are present in the internet. Among them: print media, network agencies, internet media and electronic (radio and TV) media.<sup>1</sup>

Below is an analysis of the coverage of migration issues in the Russian mass media space in summer and autumn 2011. The method for selecting information included: a selection of publications in which all articles on migration had been monitored (this referred to official publications, major internet agencies, and the most influential mass media); monitoring of the coverage of the biggest newsbreaks of mass media present in the internet (primarily, print versions with large circulations).

The method for studying the articles included: content analysis, titles, sub-headings and the article's visual formation; analysis of metaphors, comparisons, and examples were used to evaluate the way in which the material was presented; and the internal political context of the time when the articles were published was taken into account.

## Russia's mass media: political orientations and influence

Semi-official media is represented by the newspapers *Rossiiskaya gazeta* (an organ of the Russian Government), and *Parlamentskaya gazeta* (an organ of the Russian Federal sobranie/council). The major network agencies (RIA-Novosti, Interfaks, ITAR-TASS) and almost all electronic media are controlled by the central or regional authorities. The central TV channels are completely controlled by the state.

Print media is poorly controlled by the authorities. Right-centrist and liberal oppositionist media include: *Novaya gazeta*, *Moskovskie novosti*, *Vedomosti*, and the radio station 'Echo Moskvi'. Extreme left (pro-communist) and extreme right (nationalist) influential media include: *Pravda*, *Sovetskaya Rossiya*, and *Zavtra*. Nationalist media is broadly present in the internet.

Both the mainstream media (*Vedomosti*, *Kommersant*, *Nezavisimaya gazeta*, *Ekspert*, *Profil*, *Vremia novostei*, *Moskovskie novosti*, *Novie Izvestia*) as well as tabloids, intermediary publications (among which are the large-scale *Komsomolskaya Pravda*, *Argumenty i fakti*, *Moskovskii komsomolets*, *Ekspress-gazeta*, and *Zhizn*) regularly cover migration issues. The difference in the coverage of migration issues by respectable and tabloid media lies in the way the material is presented, the rhetoric, and factual reliability.

A mainstream discourse is absent. Two alternative points of view are present. The first: the future of Russia – in support of the Russian/orthodox cultural nucleus, immigration is contradictory. This position is held by the extreme left and extreme right publications, calling for, correspondingly, the restoration of the USSR (*Pravda*, *Sovetskaya Rossiya*) or the Russian empire (*Zavtra*). The second point of view: demographic, economic and social challenges are too serious, we will not manage without immigrants. This position is held by the right-centrists and liberals, for which *Novaya gazeta* and *Ekho Moskvi* have become the main advocates.

The political orientation of the publication forms the evaluation of challenges and approach to covering migration issues.

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<sup>1</sup> For a list and the circulation of main media see: (Mass media in the internet. 2011)

## Article topics and coverage in the mass media

Topics that regularly occur in articles:

- migration policy.
- surveys by leading sociological centres, regarding widespread xenophobia, the attitude of Russians to immigrants and emigration.
- migrant crime rate.
- public speeches by leading politicians: President Medvedev, Prime Minister Putin, and vice-speaker Zhirinovski.

But, most often, articles on the migrant issue are based on specific newsbreaks.

At the end of June and beginning of July, the following appeared in the media:

- discussion of the project Concept for State Migration Policy;
- sociological surveys regarding the emigration moods of Russians;
- ‘dialogue on migration: Russia and the EU’;
- speeches by representatives of law enforcement agencies;
- discovery of places of illegal settling of migrants;
- ratification of the Agreement within the framework of the Customs Union, other official speeches and events, legislative initiatives in the regions.

In August-October, the following issues were added:

- marches of the ultra-right.
- use of anti-migrant rhetoric in the imminent parliamentary elections;
- riots in the London suburbs.

The discussion of the project Concept for State Migration Policy of the Russian Federation was led within the framework of the revised ‘Strategia-2020’, steered by Prime Minister Putin (Transcript of the meeting...2011) and in the Public Chamber of the Russian Federation (Who will come...(2011). The media focused attention not on the ideological newness of the document, which virtually stated that Russia is becoming an immigrant country, but on particular innovations such as the abolition of the quota of work permits for migrants and a point system for the selection of immigrants (Gritsiuk 2011).

For the mass media, this became a point for harsh criticism. The title of one of the articles reflects a dominating viewpoint ‘Abolition of migration quotas will kill the Russian economy’ (Martiniuk 2011). In the ordinary consciousness, the proposed abolition of the quota of work permits for migrants without visas is perceived as the opening of borders, while specialists admit the inefficacy and corruptionism of the existing instrument (Transcript of a meeting...2011).

The article ‘Medvedev’s experts prepare Russia to receive 16 million migrants’ gives an impression of the discourse dominant in public opinion (Gladilin 2011 a), as do commentaries on relatively neutral articles, for example: ‘I even see human-beings among people from the Caucasus, be they violent. But these wild, dirty animal-migrants (in large quantities from Central Asia) all need to be deported and I don’t care how they will feed their children, who they have given birth to in numbers’ (Gashkov 2011).

Since August the issue of teaching migrants Russian has been actively discussed (Grizlov 2011; Gerasimov 2011; They want to forbid migrants...2011). A nationalist site published the following article under the provocative heading ‘The authorities are concerned about the exploding growth in the amount of wild animals in ‘Moskvabade’’ (The authorities are concerned...2011).

**Sociological surveys on attitudes toward emigration** among Russians are led by Levada-Tsentrom (Emigration moods...2011) and the Russian Centre for the Study of Social Opinion – VTsIOM (Russia, America...2011; Shchipanov, Maevskaya, Artemev 2011). In the Russian discourse, the fixed rise in Russians' emigration attitudes and, especially, young people and middle class representatives, is regarded as a testament to the failure of the authorities' domestic policy, lack of trust toward social and political institutes, and the absence of social mobility (Gudkov 2011; Emigration...2011; Koritina and Zhermeleva 2011; Time to get out...2011). In social networks, harsher opinions are expressed: 'Our answer is run. Emigration could become the national idea of Russians' (Petukhova 2011).

**'Dialogue on migration: Russia and the EU'** sparked an outburst of articles and discussion in the media, not corresponding with the significance of the event itself. The reason for coverage was the speech by the chairman of the Committee on International Affairs, Kosachev, who announced the presence in Russia of 10 million foreigners, which did not correspond with reality (Consensus-evaluation 2010) and suggested that by 2050 migrants could make up one third of the country's population. The state channels and broadsheet publications gave information about the Dialogue under alarmist but fairly neutral headlines: 'In Russia there is already an entire "Portugal of guestworkers"', *Rossiiskaya gazeta* (Falaleev 2011), 'By 2050 every third resident in Russia will be a migrant; *Novie Izvestiya* (By 2050 every...2011). The gutter press used titles: 'Uninvited migrants' (Stotskii and Nadezhkina 2011), 'Russia is becoming an immigrant dump (Russia is becoming...2011).

Communists openly criticised the authorities – 'Russia is overpopulated with migrants' (Russia is overpopulated...2011), nationalist-leaning publications: 'There are people within the authorities for whom the less Russian Russia will be, the better' (Mikheev 2011), 'Who benefits from the growth in the number of migrants' (Who benefits ...2011), "'Ethnic" weapons: Russians in Russia are do not constitute 80, but 60%' (Gladilin 2011 b). For these publications, the newsbreak gave the opportunity to articulate xenophobic attacks on migrants and accuse the authorities of 'selling Russia'. Fears are voiced that a politicized Islam is penetrating Russia along with migrants (Mel'nikov 2011).

**Speeches by representatives of law enforcement agencies on the migrant crime rate.** Speeches given by the head of the Investigative Committee in Moscow and the head of the Moscow police on the crime rate in Moscow sparked an outburst of articles. The media focused its attention on the fact that a significant proportion of rapes were committed by migrants. ITAR-TASS gave relatively restrained news ('In Moscow the number of murders and rapes are dropping, but the crime rate continues to grow among migrants') and Echo Moskvi ('The Investigative Committee announces that every seventh murder and almost half of rapes in Moscow in the past six months were committed by migrants'. Other publications and agencies, including semi-official ones, came out with the headlines 'Every second rape in Moscow is committed by migrants', 'Half of the rapists in Moscow are migrants', 'Migrants gathered together in a criminal campaign on Russia' (Gladilin 2011 c).

The tabloid press and nationalist organizations willingly publish information about crimes committed or attributed to migrants and representatives of the 'visible minorities'. (Migrants 2011; *Etnokriminal'naya chronika* 2011).

**The discovery of places of illegal migrant settlements** in Moscow and near Moscow provoked articles in which the emphasis was placed on the sanitary conditions in migrant 'shantytowns', and the illegality of the construction. An impression of the way in which the material was presented is given by articles in official publications of the Russian Government: 'Guestworkers came out of the forest' (Bogdanov 2011 a), 'Workers' huts in the shade' (Ivanova 2011), 'Small town' in the shade. The capital's migration agencies do not allow guestworkers to settle in parks' (Pulya 2011), 'Pizza with rotten meat' (Bogdanov 2011 b).

**Public speeches by leading politicians** who had started their pre-election campaigns attracted the ritual attention of the mass media. If in July, President Medvedev had urged Muslims to engage in the adaption of migrants (Medvedev...2011), then in September he drew attention to the role of migration

in the escalation of inter-ethnic contractions: 'In places traditionally inhabited by Russians, large numbers of our citizens appear, who have arrived from the Caucasus... this leads to ethnic, ethno-cultural isolations of some regions and to the emergence of inter-ethnic tensions in other regions' (Pchelkin 2011).

A speech by Putin at a meeting with religious representatives and national-cultural and social organizations was interpreted by the media as a challenge: 'Migrants need to be respected, they should do the same' (Putin...2011).

The flamboyant speeches by vice-speaker Zhirnovsky attracted greater media attention, who called for the introduction of a ban on labour migration from states where the birth rate is not legislatively limited (LDPR proposes...2011) and to repeal article 282 of the Criminal Code, which foresees punishment for actions 'aimed at the arousal of hatred or enmity, and also the humiliation of the dignity of a person or a group of individuals for reasons of gender, race, nationality, language, origins, attitude toward religion, as well as membership of any kind of social group' (LDPR...2011).

**The ratification of the Agreement within the framework of the Customs Union** did not attract a large amount of media attention. The media ignored an important thesis voiced by the deputy Bagdasarov, who proposed introducing a visa regime with Central Asian states (State Duma of the Russian Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation 2011). The initiative of the Legislative Assembly of St Petersburg attracted more attention, which proposed not to allow sick migrants into Russia (Legislative Assembly...2011).

A plethora of articles was devoted to the **coverage of events abroad**, and in a specifically Russian alarmist discourse, for example, in connection with the massacre in Norway and 'the collapse of multiculturalism' (Expert: in Norway...2011) or the pogroms in Great Britain. The concluding sentences of the latter article were as follows: '...it seems that the bell tolls for us all'.

**Domestic political tension.** In the autumn, tension connected to the 4<sup>th</sup> November usually rises, which is used by nationalists for holding the 'Russian March'. Even in early October, some rehearsals already took place (March against...2011). This year, tension escalated in connection with the anniversary of the murder provoked by pogroms on Manezhnaya Ploshchad in the centre of Moscow, the trials of the person accused of the murder and one other person accused of murdering a football fan 'from the Caucasus' was broadly reported on in the media.

The imminent parliamentary elections in December provoke the use of anti-migrant rhetoric. It is impossible not to agree with Zhirinovski, whose party is going into the elections under the slogan 'For Russians', that for the ruling party 'The only possible slogan is strengthening control over migration' (Glikin and Birkyuva 2011).

Among the articles which are not tied to a particular newsbreak, some speeches should be highlighted which focus attention on the need to attract migrants (Potemkin 2011; Loriya 2011), the counteraction of migrant-phobia (Vyzhitovich 2011), the need for legislation, and the regulation of leased labour (Tupova 2011).

## Conclusion

In the Russian mass media, it is rare to see articles that present migrants and migration issues in a neutral manner. An emotional description of migration issues and the construction of a negative perception of migrants by public opinion are prevalent. In the information space, alarmist moods are dominant, transforming the discussion of migration issues (interpreted within an ethnic context) into a discourse of crisis and a discourse of trauma.

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