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The Political Development of Russia in the 21st Century: Challenges of Demographic Factor and the Role of Educational System

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Abstract

The article is devoted to Russia's political development in the 21st century. The author marks out demographic and migratory processes as one of the leading factors of political development in the Russian Federation. The article considers the influence of eventual consequences of the demographic and migration factors on the socio-political processes in the country, including the issues of the socio-political stability, ethno-political, social development, and the national security.

Keywords: *Russian Federation, twenty-first century, political development, demographic and migratory processes, educational system.*

The political processes taking place in Russia are caused by various groups of factors: economic, social, spiritual, legal, *etc.* All these groups of factors are permanent, but the significance of a particular group of factors at each historical stage is different. At the current stage of development, in the short-term and long-term perspective, the political processes in the Russian society will be considerably influenced by the demographic factors and migration. This article considers these factors and analyses their impact on the country's political sphere.

The demographic factor manifests in a number of aspects or vectors of influence. The principal meaning of the demographic factor in contemporary Russia consists in the consequences of depopulation and related change in the age-sex structure of the population. The migration factor is caused first of all by demographic processes whose negative consequences are to be corrected by migration, but the migration flows themselves become an essential and independent factor of political development.

The population decline in Russia will become one of the most important manifestations of the demographic factor in the 21st century. In 1960, Russia

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(without any relation to the other Soviet republics) was the fourth most populous nation in the world. According to the Russian Census of 2002, the Russian Federation took the 7th place and in 2010 – only the 8th place in the world in terms of population number. In particular, Russia lags behind such countries as China (1,325 million people), India (1,150 million people), the USA (304 million people), Indonesia (229 million people), Brazil (190 million people), Pakistan (162 million people) and Bangladesh (145 million people). According to the results of the Russian Census of 2010, the population of the country has shrunk by 2261.5 thousand people to 142,905.2 thousand people, or by 1.6 % compared to 2002. The trend of population decline will continue during the 21st century. So, according to the UN forecasts, the Russian population in 2025 may amount to 139 million people, in 2050 – 126.2 million people, in 2075 – 114.6 million people and by the end of the century will drop to 111.1 million people (see Table 1).

Table 1. The projections of Russia's population number in 2010–2111 (thousand people)

Alternative forecasts of population size (thousand people)	2010	2025	2050	2075	2100
Average	142,958	139,034	126,188	114,585	111,057
Optimistic	142,958	144,454	145,257	156,263	183,928
Pessimistic	142,958	133,615	108,941	81,613	61,653
The forecast with the current birth rate	142,958	136,031	114,125	87,960	66,692

Notes: Based on data from the Department of Economic and Social Affairs, the UN.
URL: http://esa.un.org/unpd/wpp/unpp/panel_population.htm.

In what way can this demographic trend affect the political processes in the country and its position in the world? First, as a result of a ‘galloping’ demographic decline Russia will drop from the list of ten most populous nations in the world by the middle of the century. By 2050, our country will lag behind such countries as Nigeria, Ethiopia, the Philippines, Egypt, Mexico, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo and by the end of the century – also behind Kenya and Niger. And one should make a reservation here that in this expert assessment an average variant was assumed as the basis. The population decline will become one of the factors leading to Russia's definite loss of the ‘great-power’ status in the current century. The reducing population size also deprives the Russian society of dynamism and energy, which is typical of growing populations. Second, according to the pessimistic variant, the population density in the Russian Federation will drop from 8 to 4 people per sq km by 2100 and a large part of the country may virtually become an unpopulated

(unpeopled) territory. The population decline is particularly undesirable and dangerous for Russia with its vast territories whose overwhelming part has been sparsely inhabited and weakly developed. Thereby, the other countries' geopolitical claims to the Russian territories and resources are objectively becoming stronger. Third, a dramatic drop in the population number will undoubtedly change the geopolitical stereotypes inherited from the Soviet past. The population will have to put up with the loss of imperial ambitions and in the long run – with the probable loss of some territories. Already now, in consequence of the country's reduced demographic potential, the neighbors' territorial claims are ambiguously appraised within the Russian society. The recent example here is an aggravation of the South-Kuril Islands dispute in the early 2011 which has provoked a number of opinions in Russian society in favor of the concession of these territories to Japan.

The declining population number in Russia in the current century will become the main manifestation of the demographic factor. In 1989, in the RSFSR (Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic) there lived 119.9 million Russians and in the rest of the Soviet Republics – 25.1 million people more. Between 1989 and 2004, according to the estimate, 5.43 million Russians returned to their Motherland, but over 2 million of them departed back, being unable to adapt to their historical homeland. At the same time between 1989 and 2002, the number of the Russians shrank by nearly 4 million people and their percentage decreased from 81.5 % to 79.8 %. But the decline in the Russian population in Russia is in fact much larger. According to data of the 2002 Census, more than 1.5 million Ukrainians, Byelorussians and representatives of some other kindred nations or people born from mixed-national parents called themselves Russians. This can be confirmed by the decreased number of the Ukrainians in Russia by 1.4 million and of the Byelorussians by about 400 thousand people between 1989 and 2002. Without these 'investments' the number of the Russian population would have shrunk by 8.5–9.0 million and the percentage of the Russians could have dropped to 75 %. The results of the 2010 Census are most likely to record a further reduction in the number of the Russians, taking into account higher mortality indices and relatively low birth-rate indices compared to the other indigenous peoples of the Russian Federation. Taking into consideration that Russian nation makes the core of the Russian statehood, these demographic processes cannot but find political expression. Thus, in the sphere of political identity, this trend is reinforced by the action of the so-called 'Russian cross' (*i.e.* when mortality exceeds birth rates), discussed in the media over a long period of time, this contributes to the formation of a stereotype of the Russian nation as depopulating and disappearing. With due account of the leading role of the Russians in the Russian statehood, such a stereotype makes the Russian citizens' political identity defective and the Russian state is considered as 'colossus with feet of clay'.

The political processes in Russia in the near future will be considerably affected by the decreasing population number in the Far Eastern and Siberian regions. In 1989, in the Asian part of the Russian territory there lived 21.8 % of the country's population. According to the 2010 Census, in the Siberian Federal District there live 19.2 million people (13.5 %), in the Far Eastern District – 6.3 million people (4.4 %). In comparison with the data of the All-Union Census of 1989 the population of the regions of the Siberian Federal District has shrunk by more than 7.5 % and that of the Far Eastern regions – by more than 19 %. By 2010, compared to 2002 the population of the Ural Federal District has decreased by 2.4 %, in the Siberian – by 4.0 %, in the Far Eastern – by 6.0 % (see Table 2). So, the process of population decline in these districts still continued in the 2000s. One should note that Russia's total population has declined by only 1.6 %. In other words, the rates of population decline in the Siberian Federal District are twice as large as the total Russian rates, in the Far Eastern District – by 3.5 times.

Table 2. Population size in the districts of the Russian Federation

Territory (Federal district)	Population (thousand people)		The total population size, %	
	in 2002	in 2010	in 2002	in 2010
The Russian Federation	145,166.7	142,905.2	100.0	100.0
Central	38,000.6	38,438.6	26.2	26.9
North Western	13,974.5	13,583.8	9.6	9.5
Southern	13,973.3	13,856.7	9.6	9.7
North Caucasian	8,933.9	9,496.8	6.2	6.6
Volga	31,154.7	29,900.4	21.5	20.9
Urals	12,373.9	12,082.7	8.5	8.5
Siberian	20,062.9	19,254.3	13.8	13.5
Far Eastern	6,692.9	6,291.9	4.6	4.4

Notes: based on the results of Russian Census 2010, Federal service of state statistics.
URL: http://www.gks.ru/free_doc/new_site/perepis2010/perepis_itogi1404.htm

This trend of the Russian demographic development will increase the possibility of losing the mentioned regions in future, on the one hand, and of the Europe-centric perception of Russia, on the other. The forming stereotype that the loss of the Far Eastern region in the 21st century is almost inevitable will impact the Russians' political identity. Particularly, they will stop considering themselves as the Eurasians who combine both the European and Asian principles. The double-headed eagle on the Russian Federation national emblem will lose

its sacral sense. In demographic terms, the Russians will start identifying themselves with ageing Europe which has similar problems (population decline, falling birth rates, population ageing, foreign culture and language migration, *etc.*). With regards to the foreign policy, this will bring a weakening interest in the Asian vector of the Russian geostrategy, whereas the domestic policy will demonstrate considerable socio-political and economical discrepancy in the development of the Western and the Eastern parts of the country.

The changing ethnic-confessional structure of the Russian population, namely, the increasing number of Muslims as a result of the high birth rate and migration will be another manifestation of the demographic factor in the 21st century.

According to a prominent orientalist Vyacheslav Belokrenitsky, the number of the Muslim population in Russia increased from 11.8 million in 1989 to 14.5 million in 2002, the percentage of the Muslims in the Russian Federation – from 8 % to 10 % respectively, that is one in tenth Russian citizens profess Islam (Belokrenitsky 2008: 19). Belokrenitsky points out that about 1.5 million Russians did not define their nationality during the Russian Census in 2002, and there could have been more than 0.5 million Muslims. Moreover, the experts estimate that there are 4–5 million Muslims living legally and illegally in the country's territory who are not the citizens of Russia (*Ibid.*: 20). On the whole, the number of Muslim population in the country can amount up to 20 million people.

The results of the 2010 Census are more than likely to prove the dynamic of the number and percentage increase of the Muslim population in Russia. During the 21st century, the number of the Muslim population will, probably, increase due to the high birth rate in some districts with predominantly Muslim population and also the necessary migration gain will be ensured by the migrants from the Central Asia (see Table 3).

Table 3. The Muslim Population in Russia (long-term estimates, in million people, A – for average estimate of population of Russia, B – for optimistic estimate of population of Russia)

Years	Population, average estimate	Population, optimistic estimate	Muslim residents	% of Muslims, estimate A	% of Muslims, estimate B
1990	147.7	147.7	12.0	8.1	8.1
2000	147.4	147.4	14.1	9.6	9.6
2005	144.0	144.0	15.2	10.6	10.6
2015	136.5	140.0	17.8	13.0	12.7
2025	128.2	135.6	20.9	16.3	15.4
2050	107.8	130.0	31.1	28.9	23.9

Source: Belokrenitsky 2008.

Moreover, the calculations made by Belokrenitsky seem rather optimistic in comparison with other experts' estimates. For instance, according to Jeffrey Simon, the senior research assistant in the National Defense University (USA), the number of the Russian population will reduce to 104.3 million by 2050, whereas the Muslims will come up to become the majority in the country (Simon 2010: 40–54).

Taking into account the above described trends, the ethnic-confessional composition of Russia will change during the 21st century. Therefore, the component that characterizes the Russian population as multi-ethnic and multi-confessional will grow in Russians' national identity, in other words, 'the Russian basis of the nation' will vanish in the 21st century. Simultaneously, the changes in the national-demographic structure will lead to the transformation of Russian Muslims' identification. They will stop considering themselves as the minority group, a droplet in the huge Russian ethnos and will take themselves as the second-in-size national group, the one at the basis of the Russian ethnos. As a consequence, the Muslim factor will gradually increase its influence on the foreign and domestic policy. Particularly, there is a possibility that they will redouble the orientation towards the Islamic civilization and Europe, which is forecasted to have the percentage increase of Muslims in the population in the current century.

Speaking of the Russian population, one cannot help mentioning the gender and age changes resulting from the so called 'demographic transition'. It will manifest in the changing age structure of population, namely, in the reduction of labor forces and mobilization resource. According to 'Rosstat', by 2030 the number of the working age population of the Russian Federation will decrease by 6,9 million people. This tendency is caused by the fact that after 2010 the large post-war 'baby-boom' generation will start reaching age 60. The rapid increase of the share of the aged people in the society (it is expected that the proportion of retirement-age persons will increase from 21.6 % in 2010 to 27.7 % in 2026) will entail serious socio-economic transformations. Moreover, it will affect the electoral policy of Russia, because the elder generation is usually more conservative and has strong pro-communist leanings. Some liberal politicians hopes' that the electorate of the Communist Party of the Russian Federation will disappear naturally are groundless. For instance, according to some sociological studies in Russia, the respondents aged from 18 to 24 make up the largest share (44.0 %) of those who stand for the extension of the local authorities' power (Social Policy in Modern Russia 2011: 386). The reduction of the youth rate will objectively contribute to intensified centralistic tendencies in the Russian society. Simultaneously, according to demographic experts, by the mid-2010s the country will face the deficit of recruits necessary for maintaining the existing number of Military Forces. The outcome will be either the reduction of the number of the Russian army, that will immediately have an

impact on the defensive power of the country, or the increase of the number of contract soldiers (mostly non-citizens of the Russian Federation), in this case the army will become expensive and, actually, hired.

In the 21st century the ‘demographic load’ on the working age population will increase in the Russian Federation. Under the age dependence ratio one understands the measure numerically characterizing the ratio of three age groups, namely: the working-age population (from 15 to 64), children (aged 0–14) and persons over the age of 65. The child dependency ratio is the ratio of population ages 0–14 to the population ages 15–64. The aged dependency ratio is the ratio of older persons (65 years or over) to the working-age population (15–64). The total dependency ratio is the ratio combining child dependency ratio and aged dependency ratio; it is expressed as the number of ‘dependents’ per every 100 people of working age. According to some forecasts, the total dependency ratio in Russia will increase from the current level of 38.6 to 53.7 in 2030, and by 2060 it will be the highest – 70.9. And the child dependency ratio will increase from the current index of 20.8 to 24.3 in 2030 and to 28.5 in 2060, whereas the aged dependency ratio – from 17.7 to 29.4 and 42.4 respectively (Proceedings of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of UN) (see Table 4).

Table 4. The dependency ratio in Russia from 2010 to 2100 (according to the UN medium-variant projection)*

Depend- ency ratio	Years									
	2010	2020	2030	2040	2050	2060	2070	2080	2090	2100
Child	20.8	25.6	24.3	23.9	28.2	28.5	27.8	30.0	29.8	29.5
Aged people	17.7	22.5	29.4	31.2	38.5	42.4	36.9	38.4	39.6	38.5
Total	38.6	48.1	53.7	55.1	66.7	70.9	64.7	68.4	69.4	68.0

Source: URL: http://demoscope.ru/weekly/app/app_40der.php.

Thus, by the middle of the 21st century the dependence ratio will double due to the aged dependency ratio increase. What socio-political consequences will this tendency bring? Eventually, it will lead either to a large reduction of the military expenditures that will affect the defensive capacity, or to the reduction of the state social payments including pensions that can provoke social protest. Immigration could somehow compensate the scarce labor force. The Russian 2010 Census showed that 2939.2 thousand migrants arrived to the country within the period from 2002 till 2010, that is in average more than 360 thousand per year.¹ ‘Concept of the demographic policy of the Russian Federation for the period up to 2025’ in force approved by the President Decree № 1351,

¹ URL: http://www.gks.ru/free_doc/new_site/perepis2010/perepis_itogi_1404.htm.

September 9, 2007 supposes ensuring the annual migratory gains of more than 200,000 people for the period up to 2015, and of more than 300,000 per year for the period between 2016 and 2025.² However, this could be not enough. According to Leonid L. Rybakovsky, to maintain the population number Russia needs to accept on average 490,000 migrants per year till 2025 (Kuznetsov and Rybakovsky 2005: 123).

According to the World Bank, to compensate for the scarce labor force, in the next two decades Russia will need 12 million migrants (600,000 per year) while according to the UNFPA, the proportion of migrants among the economically active population is currently 10 % (Kommersant – Vlast' 2010).

Thus, in two decades the number of migrants could amount to 20 % of the population and they will mostly concentrate in the main economical centers of the country (Moscow, St. Petersburg, *etc.*). Moreover, this is not the largest estimated index with respect to migration prospects in Russia. The Chief of the State Duma Committee Konstantin Kosachev declared in the interview to 'Russia 24' channel, that in 40 years there would be 40 million of migrants and they could amount to 30–40 % of the population in Russia. As a result, there will be an essential shift in the ethnic and demographic balance in some regions of the country and, it goes without saying, this will impact the national security and socio-political stability. The migration will become the forming factor of the Russians' political identity, because the representatives of non-Russian and non-Slavic cultures will dominate in the migratory flows. At the same time, under the conditions of long-term population decline and necessity of ensuring the economic development Russia will need the migration flow and open immigration policy.

Since the migration flows to a great extent will be dominated by the representatives of foreign cultures and religions, in the foreground of the political development of Russia there will be the tasks of the migration policy restraining and limiting undesirable migration flows and the measures of national and social policy aimed at successful integration of foreigners in the Russian society. However, the migration flows of the foreign languages and cultures undoubtedly will provoke increasing xenophobia among the Russian population. And this will have a negative effect on the social and political stability and will threaten the Russian statehood.

The demographic characteristics, number and composition of migrants and the age and sex structure of receiving population will have a direct impact on the situation of interethnic relations and interethnic tension. In this case, the formation of ethno-social stratification (*i.e.* the creation of a social hierarchy based on ethnicity) in the Russian society are dangerous because it will lead to disordered functioning of basic social institutions, including civil services, mili-

² URL: <http://kremlin.ru/acts/bank/26299/page/2>.

tary institutions, law enforcement, judicial system, family institutions and education (Mukomel 2011: 34–50).

Thus, the demographic processes in the 21st century can weaken Russia's geopolitical position as it may lose the position of one of the densely populated countries of the world; the changes in the perceptual stereotypes will occur both within and beyond the country, the demographic situation will, probably, lead even to the territorial compression while the orientation towards the European and Islamic civilization will be enhanced. The demographic processes will lead to changes in the ethnic and demographic balance which will be manifested in the decreasing share of the Russian population combined with a growing number of Muslim population, that will affect both foreign and domestic policy. The changes in the age and sex structure will be manifested in the population ageing and increasing aged dependence ratio that will lead to the revision of the state social commitments, and in the sphere of national defence – to the reduction of military expenditures and deficit of the mobilization recourses. Thus, in the 21st century the migratory processes will play a considerable role in Russia.

On the one hand, large migration flows (consisting mostly of foreign-speakers with different cultural identity) will be almost inevitable and seem the only source to improve the demographic situation in the country and to smooth some negative consequences in the political processes; on the other hand, they could cause internal political instability. Due to demographic and migration processes, the Eurasian foundations of the Russian political identity will weaken while the Eurocentric perception will become stronger. This is also caused by the reduction of population in the Siberian and the Far Eastern regions in the 21st century.

Thus, demographic and migration factors pose serious risks for the development of Russia in the 21st century. So the Russian government should search for new extraordinary solution to this problem. In our opinion, these risks can be eliminated through the development of the educational system.

First, the educational system in Russia will allow a better integration of migrants and their children in Russian society together with overcoming of language and cultural barriers. This refers not only to immigrants, but also it might contribute to reducing of xenophobia among the host population. The acquaintance with culture, religion and traditions of migrants will help reduce tension in the host society.

Second, improvement and priority development of the general and professional educational system in the Siberian and Far Eastern regions will allow reducing the migration of young population from these regions and, accordingly, to strengthen the geopolitical position in the Asian part of the country.

Thirdly, a system of continuous education will preserve the labor potential of older people allowing them to learn a new profession. This will reduce

the aged dependence ratio and positively affect the pension system of the country, preventing its bankruptcy.

Fourthly, the educational system has a priority effect on the formation of a political identity of the country's population. Only within the education process a positive and adequate identity can be formed which will overcome the challenges of identity in the 21st century.

Thus, in this century the overcoming of the negative impact of demographic and migration factors on the Russian Federation development to a large extent depends on the capacity and activity of the educational system, starting with its successful adaptation to the new situation and setting new goals.

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