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Emigration and diaspora in Belarus

Anastacia Bobrova

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A number of new laws and acts were adopted in the field of migration after Belarus became independent. However, one can only talk about proper migration policy starting from 1998, when the 1998-2000 State Migration Program was adopted. One of its main achievements was implementation of the Law “On migrants” all over the country. The program for 2001-2005 that followed can be seen as fundamental for regularization of migration legislation and protection of migrants’ rights. And only starting from 2006 a breakthrough started in Belarusian migration policy. Due to the growing natural decline of population, migration started to be regarded as a possible substitution. Migration management as part of the social policy became one of the main directions of Belarusian socio-economic development in 2006-2010. As a result migration policy is not limited to the 2006-2010 State Migration Program, but is also supported by subprogram “Optimization of Migration” of the 2006-2010 National Demographic Security Program.

Implementation of the former was entrusted to the Ministry of Interior of the Republic of Belarus. The program aimed to enhance efficiency of migration management, which was especially important in the context of drain of highly educated individuals, as well as young people from the country. Despite the fact that migration balance was generally positive in the course of 1990-2005, the loss of highly qualified individuals was compensated by low-qualified workforce. Moreover, emigration resulted in the loss of funds earlier invested into education and social protection of citizens (in Belarus every citizen has a right to free of charge secondary education, free of charge higher education in case of successful entry exams, and free of charge medical services). Concern was also caused by growing natural decline of population and low birth rate, which despite the currently high share of employable population (over 60%) will lead to the workforce shortage in the future. That is why the State Migration Program focused, on the one hand, on creation of conditions to reduce the emigration of research, engineering and creative personnel, as well as young professionals from Belarus, and on the other hand, on encouragement of temporary labor migration of Belarusian citizens to developed countries. The latter was considered as a means to improve qualification, stabilize domestic market, and increase investment into Belarusian economy.

The main task of the subprogram “Optimization of Migration” was also to create economic conditions for reduction of emigration and retaining of research, engineering, intellectual and creative potential of the country, as well as for stimulation of return labor flows. Implementation of the program was entrusted to the Ministry of Interior and Ministry of Labor and Social Protection.

Both programs were to a large extent implemented. However in terms of emigration they were basically reduced to the following main results. Owing to the measures under the State Migration Program, the study of potential, structure and main directions of external labor migration in Belarus was carried out. One should note the efficiency of the program with regards to improvement of migration statistics. As for the tasks of the subprogram “Optimization of Migration”, to a large extent they were reduced to monitoring of migration processes. A crucial result of studies within the 2006-2010 State Migration Program and subprogram “Optimization of Migration” was a complex of measures to attract and bring back to Belarus highly qualified professionals and promising researchers who for a long time worked abroad under the labor contracts. These measures aimed at regulating external migration were taken within the 2011-2015 National Demographic Security Program. Monetary aid offered to those who move to Belarus can to a certain extent be seen as part of those measures. In 2011 each family entering Belarus received up to 1000 dollars from the government for adaptation and accommodation. These measures were aimed at increasing the incoming flow of migrants. According to the subprogram “Optimization of Migration” opportunities offered by diasporas and communities abroad and in Belarus will be used to attract immigrants and repatriates.

In May 1993 the state program “Belarusians in the World” was adopted. It aims to strengthen spiritual ties of Belarusian citizens with compatriots living abroad, and in July 1993 the first Congress of Belarusians of the World took place. It was the first and only instance in Belarusian history when Belarusians residing overseas got an opportunity to take part in determining the vectors of Belarusian statehood evolution. The government, in its turn, demonstrated its interest in development of ties with

Belarusian diasporas. However, in practice capabilities of diaspora were and are still underestimated. In total there have been 5 congresses of Belarusians in the world, the latest one was held in 2009.

In conclusion one can say that emigration policy, unlike policy with regards to immigration, still needs refinement. Policy with regards to emigrants, just as in case of diaspora, is still to large extent theory-, rather than practice-oriented. The same is not true for the current immigration policy. Unlike previous programs, the current one implies not only assistance in settlement of immigrants and their integration into Belarusian society, but also a differentiated approach to migrants' categories, based on national interests. This means that, first of all, one of the measures is to develop target-oriented regional programs, aimed at migrant influx to the geographic areas experiencing workforce deficit. Second, preference is given to persons under the age of 40 and having higher or secondary education. Besides, the Department of Citizenship and Migration of the Ministry of Interior identified countries from where migration is desirable: Ukraine, Russia, Baltic and CIS countries with Russian-speaking population, as well as undesirable donor countries: Africa and most of South East Asia¹.

Overall, the objectives of 2011-2015 subprogram "Optimization of Migration" will be considered achieved, if the balance of external migration increases to 60 thousand over those five years. According to A. Begun, head of Department of Citizenship and Migration, Ministry of Interior, "economy itself, rather than authorities, should place a more precise order"². Nevertheless, if the current demographic trends persist, the task of population stabilization will remain relevant for a long time. In this context positive balance of external migration can serve as compensating factor, and it can be ensured by increased immigration and preservation of national potential. As for the main task of emigration policy, namely reducing the drain of highly qualified and highly educated individuals from the country, its successful implementation to a large extent depends on implementation of measures under the Program of Socio-Economic Development of Belarus for 2011-2015, as far as this program aims to improve the well-being of citizens and increase the efficiency of country's economy.

¹ <http://emigrant.name/novosti-immigracii/migracionnaya-programma-belarusi.html> Date of access: 13.03.2012

² <http://www.respublika.info/5317/society/article49211/> Date of access: 13.03.2012