

The Depopulated Superpower

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The 20th century saw an explosion of the world population; the 21st century is likely to be a time of a great new resettlement of peoples. This rather limited perspective is becoming apparent today, although it is little understood by the policymakers and analysts who are shaping the strategies for the new century. Russia is now in the capacity of generals making preparations for a war of the past as it attempts to enter the third millennium with traditional stratagems, concepts and legal notions established in the 20th or even the 19th century. Meanwhile, even if the world were now as it used to be, demographic changes alone would be enough to make the most advanced contemporary stratagems and concepts into relics of some museum of history.

The new demographic situation is challenging all countries as never before. This article is not intended to address all of the in-depth aspects of such a challenge. Rather, this challenge will be considered in the way that it affects Russia. Nevertheless, we will see that the new demographic situation that seems to be specifically Russian, will be largely typical of the situation now existing in other countries.

IS OUR SITUATION COMPARABLE WITH THE YEAR 1913?

The successes of many generations of Russian people who grew up in the Soviet Union have been traditionally compared with the achievements gained by 1913. This was the last peaceful year of the Russian Empire before the tremendous upheavals of WWI and the Bolshevik revolution, and has become a reference point for a large number of analyses, especially that many of these comparisons attempted to demonstrate the advances of the state. However, the demographic changes embracing the period between 1913 and 2003 have been very discordant. The full decade that is left to us before the year 2013 promises a further reduction in Russia's population. This will make any comparison to the year 1913 increasingly less encouraging.

The 20th century was a time of demographic modernization for Russia, which resulted in new approaches toward reproductive rates; these have become widespread in the industrially developed countries, but were delayed from being introduced into Russia. Today, Russia is confronted with conditions of low birth and death rates. In the early 20th century the reproductive pattern in Russia was considered to be 'medieval': the birth and death rates were equally high. Today, to have the same end result, fewer children are to be born, so the reproduction process has become more efficient and "less energy consuming" than in 1913.

This fundamental modification has brought about many changes that are generally considered to be positive attributes of modernization: the near elimination of infant mortality, longer lifetime expectancies, the emancipation of women and the fulfillment of their self-realization, democratization of family relations, the growing social investment in children, the growth of education, and so forth. However, this modification has placed some very serious challenges before Russia that will need to be answered within the present century.

HIGH MORTALITY CHALLENGE

Today, one of the most obvious and perilous challenges confronting Russia is a high and continuously increasing mortality rate.

True, the demographic modernization processes have brought drastic changes to mortality rates in Russia and elsewhere: the mid 1960s saw a sharp decline in mortality rates in comparison with 1913, whereas life expectancy actually doubled for males and even more so for females (Table 1).

Table 1. Life expectancy in Russia in 1913, 1964 and 2001

Year	Life expectancy		Growth since 1913	
	Males	Females	Males	Females
1913	33,6	36,2		
1964	65,1	73,6	31,5	37,4
2001	59,0	72,3	25,4	36,1

However, the successes have proven short-lived. The highest life expectancy figures were achieved in 1964, while in the following decades mortality rates in Russia, unlike other countries, showed stagnation and even growth. By the beginning of the new century, life expectancy had markedly declined, particularly for males, and the gap between this country and other nations where this indicator had been continuously increasing – widened and eventually exceeded that of 1913.

Table 2. Life expectancy in other countries in 1913, 1964 and 2001

(compare with Russia above)

Country	Males			Females		
	1913	1964	2001	1913	1964	2001 г.
U.S.A.	18,1	1,7	15,2	19,2	0,2	7,6
France	15,8	2,6	16,5	17,3	1,3	10,7
Sweden	23,6	6,5	18,5	23,8	2,4	9,8
Japan	10,6	2,5	18,8	8,5	-0,8	12,3

Let historians analyze the developments in the USSR after 1964 that account for these figures; for a demographer it is apparent that a decline in the mortality rate was not among the priorities which Russian society sought to resolve in the late 20th century. Those developments that involved the reduction of the mortality rate no longer existed; the result was that the country suffered a tremendous loss of life. According to estimates, failure to arrest the high mortality rate cost Russia some 14 million premature deaths between 1966 and 2000; of these, over 5 million were people below the age of 65. Remarkably, over 80 percent of these numbers were males. Not every war is capable of inflicting such damage.

Such a serious failure could not be the result of individual factors, whatever their importance. The analysis requires a systemic, critical approach to the principal objectives of society, its priorities and, eventually, their fundamental revision. However, this has not been accomplished to date, and the situation is only deteriorating.

Currently, many people tend to explain the high mortality rate by the momentous events that took place in Russia in the 1990s. However, the pitifully low life expectancy of Russian males – less than 59 years in 2001 – is in line with the trend that took shape in 1963 and continued through 1983. That trend continues to persist.

Russia would be grateful to have the mortality gap with the West reduced at least by half by the year 2013. Unfortunately, there are no signs of improvement any time soon: the mortality crisis in the country has remained stubbornly persistent for the last four decades.

A very real mortal challenge has been sent to Russia, but nobody so far has dared take it up.

LOW FERTILITY CHALLENGE

Being one of the most critical demographic challenges facing Russia today, high mortality rates are not necessarily a condition caused by modernization. It is rather the effect of various factors that promote this condition. All other challenges are initiated through the effects of modernization, which are not rooted in the past, but in the present and the future. Therefore, they could be considered more dangerous. The low fertility problem is one of them.

In 2000, fertility rates in Russia fell to their lowest levels in its history – 1.21 births per woman. Combined with a high mortality rate, these fertility rates

could only ensure the replacement of the present generation by 57 percent. The last few years have witnessed a slightly higher fertility rate, but this fact cannot give us much optimism. Fertility fluctuations under the influence of momentary factors, both demographic and non-demographic, are possible. However, there is little ground to expect fertility rates to climb so high as to reach the level necessary for the replacement of generations – 2.1 - 2.2 births per woman (fertility rates in Russia have remained below this level since the mid 1960s).

In 1964, for the first time in its history, fertility rates in Russia went down below simple reproduction of the population — earlier than in most industrialized nations. Today, most urbanized industrialized countries have typically low or very low birth rates. During the concluding year of the past century, fertility rates were less than two children per woman in all advanced countries, except the U.S.A. and New Zealand, and many countries ranked very close to Russia (Germany and Poland – 1.34; Bulgaria and Italy – 1.25; Spain and Slovenia – 1.22, Romania – 1.20; the Czech Republic – 1.14, etc.)¹. Furthermore, fertility rates decreased below the level of a simple replacement of generations in some less industrialized countries, particularly in China.

The very fact that low fertility rates are characteristic of all industrialized and urbanized societies demonstrates that the demographic crisis is not specifically a Russian phenomenon. Instead, it may be more appropriate to speak of a general crisis confronting modern civilization.

But is it actually a crisis? Would it be better, taking into account the changes in people's procreative behavior (together with their consequences), to speak not about the catastrophically low birth rates but rather about the opportunities that this reorganization of the "public body" offers, that is, a possible shift toward a better-quality life? The appealing nature of the low fertility pattern in the majority of populations appears to be deeply implanted in the lifestyles and the overall value system of modern urban societies.

Moreover, if globalization – which is now so much talked about – is not a mere phrase, the worldwide tendency for declining fertility should be considered globally, in a much broader context than just within an individual country. In fact, this tendency is a clear manifestation of a systemic response to the global population explosion and the increase of the load on the planet's limited resources.

Today, the main demographic problem confronting mankind is the burgeoning global population, as opposed to its deficiency. Therefore, from the viewpoint of universal interests, fertility rates remaining below the level of simple reproduction on a global scale should not be considered a negative development, but a boon. Low fertility is the sole factor for stopping the global demographic explosion and reducing the world population to a size that is in proportion to the limited life-support opportunities available on the planet. Accordingly, decreasing fertility in Russia, as well as in the West, can

be considered as an episode in the commencing global transition from growth to reduction of the world population. Then the low modern fertility pattern should be understood as a proof of modern civilization's tremendous adaptability, rather than its decline and fall, as too many people argue today. Having opened up new opportunities for an unprecedented reduction of the mortality rate on a global scale, Western civilization is now paving the way for low birth rates. To achieve the latter without the former would become one of the greatest hazards for mankind.

In the industrialized countries, low fertility rates which are accompanied by a slowly growing or even a shrinking population can prove to be dangerous, especially when we consider the population surge in many developing countries. There exists a particular danger when the population of the globe is moving in two directions at the same time. Nevertheless, a due account of the demographic component of global development makes futile all the speculations about increasing birth rates and returning to a simple reproduction of the population in industrialized countries, including Russia. The main priority in terms of global development is slowing down the growth of the world population. It is more probable that the birth rate in Russia will continue to be low and the reproduction of the population will follow a reduced pattern for a long period of time, which means that the country will have to face at least two more serious challenges – demographic ageing and depopulation.

CHALLENGE OF DEMOGRAPHIC AGEING

The share of elderly (60 years and older) people in Russia has grown from 6.7 percent in 1939 to 11.9 percent in 1970. In 2001, this number stood at 18.7 percent and continues to go up. In many countries the elderly citizens exceed 20 percent of the population; in the European Union they account for 21.5 percent, in Japan – 23.7 percent.² A similar future is awaiting Russia. The age pyramid is irreversibly changing because declining death rates radically change the time structure within the life of generations: the years lived in the middle and old age brackets expand as does the share of these age brackets in the aggregate lifetime of each generation.

The economic and social consequences of demographic ageing have been discussed for more than a decade. Of special concern is the economic stress this places on the working population. This is due to the fast growth rates of the older population who now qualify to receive their pensions. Other consequences are also mentioned: the ageing of the employable population, a decrease in the renewal of knowledge and ideas, less vitality in generations, gerontocracy, and so forth. The negative effect of this "growing debilitation" on the dynamic development of a society seems apparent and is usually perceived as a factor that devalues many of the gains attributed to demographic modernization. It is not unlikely, however, that such a perception is one-sided, being caused by the "novelty shock" that usually accompanies change. This jaundiced outlook hinders any appreciable understanding of the potential positive outcomes.

There should be nothing unexpected or undesirable in the fact that a longer life expectancy demands a responsible allocation of the cumulative resources consumed by a generation. Until recently, this was the privilege of the minority, but it is now enjoyed by the many. Is it then reasonable for a society that has achieved outstanding successes in prolonging the life of its people to a very old age to express anxiety that these people will continue to be consumers till the end of their lives?

True, transition to a new time structure within the life of generations, as with any other change, creates many problems; many of these concern the various social institutions adapting themselves to the new demographic realities. The development of a pension system is one of the main responses to the fast-growing numbers of elderly people in the 20th century. The present-day growth of the pension load is indisputable, but we need not view this burden so dramatically, especially when it is considered that these demographic changes, in and of themselves, can actually stimulate new economic opportunities for working out a solution. The decreasing mortality rate leads not only to the growth of the aggregate number of consumption, but also of production. Moreover, these parameters are proportional. So the time ratio between a person's "period of dependence" and "the period of production" remains practically unchanged. This fact alone gives us sufficient reason not to overexaggerate the negative effects of population ageing. Child dependents start to consume before they are able to produce; society, so to speak, subsidizes them in advance. Elderly people fall into the category of dependents after their working life ends, thus we may say that their consumption has been paid for by their labor.

In Russia, many people subscribe to the notion that population ageing is detrimental for the pensioners and to the general economic situation in the country. However, up until the end of the 20th century Russia has not seen any profound changes in the age structure of the population. Of course, the population was ageing, but one should not forget that the "productive period" supports both periods of dependence – in old age and in childhood – while the aggregate load on the working population changes in a way that differs from that characteristic of the load produced by elderly dependents alone.

In postwar Russia, the aggregate load of children and the elderly varied wavelike. That was the result of the peculiarities of the Russian age pyramid, which was influenced by both the evolutionary processes and the upheavals of the first half of the 20th century. The general ageing tendency does not significantly affect the aggregate load but mainly involves the replacement of child dependents with elderly dependents.

As a result, at the end of the 20th century, Russia was in a relatively favorable position in terms of its population age structure; in fact, it was probably in its best position in all of its postwar years. Of course, the load produced by the elderly continued to grow, but the aggregate load produced by the dependents in the young and old age brackets was decreasing at the same time, and by the end of the century was unusually low (see Table 3).

Table 3. Load on 1,000 employable persons (males, from 16 to 59, females – from 16 to 54 years of age)

	1950	1960	1970	1980	1990	2000
Load by the elderly	183,0	202,9	269,8	273,6	322,2	346,3
Total load	732,3	741,5	777,6	656,1	750,0	682,0

Changes in the Russian population age structure will continue for quite some time; Russia's population will continue ageing. However, there is no reason to panic over the economic consequences of this demographic ageing: the actual consequences of population ageing, including the economic ones, are not as dangerous as they are sometimes presented by modern demographic mythology. The share of elderly people grows in proportion with the demographics, as well as with the other changes, all of which create opportunities for neutralizing the negative consequences of ageing. We need only to learn how to address the problem. The well-known American demographer and economist Richard A. Easterlin believes that it is necessary, using taxation methods, to draw upon family savings (that are intended for the upkeep of the younger dependents) so that these funds may be used to cover the growing public expenditures on the elderly dependents. The problem surrounding the political acceptability of this measure is serious enough, but not unsolvable, considering that the working citizens who are paying the tax will one day be the potential receivers of these same funds.³

In order to make the redistribution of resources of the elderly within the life of generations politically acceptable, we need a social philosophy and a political economy that would meet the demands of new demographic realities. These are non-existent now. They are most likely to appear and gain recognition after the transition period of continuous fluctuations in the age structure is completed, and a new stable age pyramid with a narrow basis and a broad apex emerges. Until then, people will continue to believe – without sufficient reason – that with every new decade the growing number of the elderly complicates their own position and that of national economies.

However, it would not be prudent to conclude this section with a too pacifying note. First, in the developing nations, a disproportionately young population structure actually produces more economic difficulties and acute problems than does an ageing one in the industrialized economies. To compare: in the rich industrialized countries there are 800 young and elderly people per each thousand employable members of the population (between 20 to 59 years of age); in poor countries with fast-growing population, the figure reaches or exceeds 1,000 (for example, in Nigeria, where the population will soon exceed that of Russia, the demographic load is 1,450 per 1,000)⁴. The main reason is simply the huge proportion of children: in

Nigeria it is 1,339, whereas in Russia it is only 464, in China – 585, in Brazil – 723, in India – 872.⁵

Secondly, being concerned with their own problems, the industrialized countries underestimate the political dangers involved with the high percentage of young people within the population structure of the developing countries. Currently, there is only one person in the industrialized countries per every four representatives of the developing world. But among children and young people under 20 this ratio exceeds 7:1, or 2.1 billion children and teenagers in the countries of the "South" against less than 300 million in the countries of the "North". Therefore, we may conclude that in the 21st century the prosperous, ageing and slumbering "North" will more than once be challenged by a young and vigorous "South" which has nothing to lose but its chains. Is the "North" ready for this challenge, not to mention Russia, which is its integral part?

CHALLENGE OF DEPOPULATION

In 1913, the population of Russia within its present borders was calculated to be 90 million people. In later decades, the country was a stage for active demographic processes, which generally involve an accelerated growth of population. However, the potential demographic explosion was nullified by huge human losses caused by the disastrous events of the first half of the century; Russia missed its chance to markedly increase its population. Yet, despite all the calamities, the population grew due to the natural growth rate, which for a long time remained high and helped to bridge many of the demographic gaps. Owing to this factor, the country overcame the demographic crisis caused by WWII. By 1955, Russia reached its prewar population level, and for the next ten years – until the second half of the 1960s – its natural growth rate was so high that it was able to 'export' citizens to other republics within the vast borders of the U.S.S.R.

However, later, due to the fertility decline, a halt in the mortality decline and the beginning of population ageing, the natural growth rates began to quickly slide. In 1964, the natural growth rate of the population fell to its lowest level – below ten births per every thousand of population. In 1967, it dropped further to seven births per every thousand. Ever since, the figure has stubbornly remained, varying between 5.5 and 6.5 per thousand, and only occasionally departing from these boundaries. In the late 1980s, these fluctuations gave way to a quickly declining fertility rate. Thus, since 1992, when the population of Russia reached its maximum number ever (148.7 million people), natural growth rates became negative, and initiated a population decline. By the beginning of 2003, the loss exceeded 5.2 million people, or 3.5 percent (of 143.1-million population according to current estimates of the State Statistics Committee. According to the latest all-Russia census preliminary results, Russia's population as of October 9, 2002 amounted to 145.3 million people). Over the past decade, the population grew by 8.7 million people, or 6.2 percent.

The present population decline in Russia, its fourth since 1913, greatly differs from the three previous ones. Those declines were caused by the most dramatic social upheavals – WWI and the civil war, famine, repressions of the 1930s and WWII; the current population decline is caused by consistent changes in Russia's mass demographic behavior. Therefore, one cannot expect natural population growth rates to become positive in the near future, or to bring about an increase in the population.

Population decline in Russia is most likely to be long lasting, as most demographers believe. Specifically, according to the median scenario of the latest (2002) UN forecast, by 2050 the population of Russia will decrease by 30 percent in comparison with 2000, to reach 101.5 million people.⁶ Similar figures are presented in Russian forecasts.

In general, one can find many arguments against the perception that population growth is always beneficial and population decline is always detrimental. However, as concerns Russia, it would be difficult to argue that a population reduction is a favorable scenario.

Although Russia ranks with the most populated countries, there is an obvious discrepancy between its population and the size of its territory, the length of its borders, the scale of areas requiring economic development, its poor settlement network, etc. Russia has always been a country with vastly underdeveloped, underpopulated areas. These features became particularly acute after the breakup of the Soviet Union when Russia inherited three-fourths of its territory and only half of its population.

The European part of Russia is comparable by population density with the U.S.A. (in European Russia – 27 and in the U.S.A. – 29 people per 1 square kilometer). On the other hand, the historical core of the country appears to be underpopulated when compared to the industrialized countries of Western Europe. One-fifth of the Russian population lives in the Central Economic Region, which accounts for less than three percent of its territory. However, even in this region, population density (slightly more than 62 people per 1 sq. km) is twice as low as that in the European Union (119 people per 1 sq. km). As for the Asian part of Russia, it makes up 75 percent of the country's territory, but is home to only 22 percent of its population with a density of 2.5 people per one sq. km. The demographic potential of Siberia and the Far East is apparently insufficient for the development of the local natural resources, as well as for creating a ramified, relatively continuous economic and settlement network.

Russia's limited demographic potential affects not only the distribution of its population over regions but also the development of the structure of populated areas. Although by the share of its urban population (73 percent) Russia stands at an average European level and differs little from such countries as the U.S.A. (75 percent) or Japan (77 percent), its urban population is "smeared" over a large number of settlements, whereas the network of large cities is underdeveloped. After the breakup of the U.S.S.R., Russia inherited 13 of the 24 Soviet cities having over one million

inhabitants (the latest available data show that by the year 2002, it has only ten such cities), including only two cities eastward of the Urals. (According to preliminary 2002 census data, currently Russia has again 13 million-strong cities, but in some cases their population is so close on a million that it immediately suggests some wishful thinking. For instance, according to the census, there are 1,000,100 people in the city of Perm.) Only two Russian cities have a population exceeding two million residents (in the U.S.A., 14 cities have a population over two million people, including eight with more than 3 million). True, "underdevelopment" of large cities is evidence of Russia's inadequate regional development and its inability to give birth to many powerful regional and interregional capitals. However, this process is not without feedback: urban population gravitates to only several large centers, which, in conditions of limited demographic resources, prevents the emergence of large regional cities capable of giving an impetus to the development of the entire regions.

These are but few internal difficulties which Russia faces already now owing to its underpopulation, and these difficulties will aggravate as its population continues to decline. However, there are also external difficulties concerning the country's place in the world community.

Russia is quickly losing its position in the world demographic hierarchy. In 1913, the Russian Empire accounted for approximately 8 percent of the world population, and Russia proper – 4.4 percent. Even in 1950, the share of the Russian Federation, which had not yet restored its pre-WWII population, was more than 4 percent, and the U.S.S.R. accounted for 7.1 percent of the planet's population.

Currently, the share of Russia in the world population does not exceed 2.4 percent and is shrinking fast. According to the UN forecast mentioned above, by 2050 its share will have reduced to 1.1 percent. In 1913 and 1950, the Russian Empire and the U.S.S.R., respectively, were the third most populated nations after China and India. In 1950, Russia in its present borders stood fourth after China, India and the U.S.A; now it is placed only seventh, being overtaken by Indonesia, Brazil and Pakistan. By 2050 Russia will be placed 18th in the world, yielding to several African countries, as well as Bangladesh, Mexico, Egypt, the Philippines, Vietnam, Japan, and Iran.

It is worth noting that Russia occupies almost 13 percent of the world's land – the biggest and rich in natural resources, but extremely scarcely populated territory. It borders on several densely populated states, with some of them making claims on Russian soil.

Thus, by both internal (economic) and external (geopolitical) considerations Russia's shrinking population runs contrary to its national interests. Is it possible to halt the process?

The main reasons for Russia's losing its high place in the world demographic hierarchy lie both inside the country and outside it. The internal factors affecting demographic changes in general and its Soviet pattern, in

particular, have been discussed above. The external factor – the world demographic explosion which has sharply sped up the growth of the population in developing countries overtaking Russia – is also attributable to demographic modernization, but in global dimensions. How can Russia respond to this and other demographic challenges of the 21st century – fertility decline, population ageing and negative natural growth rate? And even if a solution is found, can we guarantee that it will not produce new and more hazardous challenges?

CHALLENGE OF IMMIGRATION

All of the above questions are not idle. Presently, there seems to be only one possibility for responding to the demographic challenges, and that is through large-scale immigration policies. It is primarily through immigration that Russia, as well as the other “post-transitional” industrialized and urbanized countries, is capable, at least partially, of counteracting the debilitating effects of population decline and ageing. Yet, immigration is fraught with new dangers.

The estimates suggest that in order to keep Russia’s population at its early 21st century level (146 million people), it will be necessary to receive annually (beginning from the first year of the new century) some 700 thousand people (net migration); this annual number of migrants would gradually increase to 1.2-1.3 million people in 2030-2035 (these are not exact figures but rather levels showing the order of magnitude)⁷.

However, the present realities are far from achieving these estimates. In the last quarter of the past century, the annual increase of the immigrant population was 232,000 people. Today, most immigrants come from the CIS and Baltic countries: the population growth due to migration from these countries amounted to 4.3 million people in 1990-1999 and was much higher than in 1980-1989 (1.6 million). However, this growth was not so much due to more people coming to Russia, as to fewer people leaving the country. Immigration per se actually showed a tendency for reduction: during the decade of 1981-1990, 8.9 million people immigrated to Russia from the former Soviet Republics, whereas during the next decade this figure amounted to 6.9 million people. Furthermore, Russia has lost part of its population due to the emigration of its citizens to the ‘far abroad’ countries, so that the overall population growth in 1991-2000 due to migration came to only 3.3 million people – less than in Germany over the same period (3.8 million people).

If a decision is taken to recover the demographic situation with the help of migration, much effort should be made to increase the inflow of migrants. However, the very acceptance of such strategy is rather problematic, as it is not overly supported by society. Anti-immigration sentiments exist in many European countries, but they have arisen as a reaction from a part of their society to the real presence of a significant number of immigrants. In Russia, the malevolent attitude of the population to immigrants had emerged long before their numbers had reached any remarkable level. The country has

developed a demographic mythology that exaggerates both the number of immigrants (while migration flows, at least those officially registered have been continuously decreasing) and the negative consequences of their presence. It is politically risky at this time to propose any increase in the numbers of immigrants to Russia.

However, to avoid using the immigration resource is also impossible; Russia cannot be too late in making this sound decision, as has often been the case in the past. To close its doors to immigrants would mean the continuous reduction of its population, increased ageing, losing a place in the world demographic hierarchy and the continuous deterioration of its already unfavorable population/territory ratio. The experience of the most industrialized countries indicates that other options are possible.

In Germany for instance, the negative natural population growth rate appeared much earlier than in Russia, and continued with this trend for more than 30 years. However, Germany's population has been increasing ever since 1985, due to the constant inflow of immigrants that adequately covers the natural loss of its population. In the European Union as a whole, the population growth due to migration between 1990 and 1999 reached a level of 8.7 million people; the overall growth of the population over that period stood at 12.7 million people.⁸ The annual population gain due to migration is estimated to be more than 700 thousand people over the next 20 years.⁹

The U.S. experience is particularly useful. While Russia saw a 5.2-million reduction of its population over the past decade, the U.S. experienced an unprecedented population growth. Its population surged by 32.7 million people between the 1990 and 2000 censuses – the biggest increase of the U.S. population in its history between two censuses. Its population will continue to grow. According to the UN forecast, the U.S.A., which in 1950 was the third most populated country (if we do not take into account the Soviet Union), will retain this ranking in 2050, whereas Russia will fall from fourth place to eighteenth over this one-hundred year period. The demographic situation of the U.S. fares much better than that of Russia and Europe: fertility rates are higher, mortality is lower, and the natural growth rate is positive. Furthermore, the U.S. receives a high level of immigrants (8.7 million people between 1990-1999, or as much as the European Union, although the U.S. population amounts to less than 60 percent of the population of the EU). According to a long-term demographic forecast, the growth of the U.S. population will reach some 45 million people in the first half of the century due to migration.¹⁰

But all of this growth is not without its problems. The recipient countries believe that they control the migration flows, and can channel them to serve their interests. The Russian authorities also seem to believe that they hold the keys to all of their problems: things will proceed the way they decide; the only matter to be argued is what decision will best suit the national interests of Russia.

Such logic was characteristic of the past stage of migration interaction between the industrialized and the developing world. At that time, the main locomotive force of migration flows remained – for quite some time – with the recipient countries. However, once these flows matured, they acquired their own locomotive forces. Now, their continual increase adequately reflects the situation in the countries that supply migrants. “The golden billion” is becoming a world minority, while its capability for withstanding the pressure of the billions of inhabitants of the Third World has been weakening: not so long ago there were only two billion people in the Third World countries, its population has now swelled to five billion. This number is likely to grow still further.

When legal migration channels provided by the recipient countries appear to be too narrow, illegal channels immediately begin to open up. According to estimates, in the mid-1990s, the number of illegal immigrants to the U.S.A. was close to five million people, while Europe experienced a surge of some three million illegal arrivals.¹¹ It is believed that millions of illegal migrants are flowing into Russia as well. The agenda of illegal migration is becoming increasingly pressing and presents a major concern for politicians and public opinion in the recipient countries.

The demographic pressure of the overpopulated Third World upon the rich countries, which represent “the golden billion”, explains all this. This pressure will be definitely growing and increasingly difficult to control. Improvement in migration controls usually means that new ways and means of illegally penetrating national borders are getting more sophisticated. There is no doubt that the redistribution of the population between the overpopulated and depopulated countries is a response to the many challenges caused by the demographic changes of the 20th century. However, this response rather unwittingly becomes a challenge, and it seems inevitable that it will soon turn into the main challenge of our century.

The current migration pressure seems to be the remote roar of the coming thunderstorm. The demographic pressure of the “South” upon the “North” is capable of acquiring the most varied forms; under certain critical circumstances it can combine with a military-political pressure and lead to large-scale political re-mapping of the world. Against such threats, the trivial economic migration which permits to “let out the steam” from the overheated boiler of the “South,” thereby preventing a real explosion, appears to be a less dangerous solution. However, this solution should not be considered as an entirely safe one.

The demographic masses of both “worlds” are incommensurable. The potential supply of cheap labor from the developing countries is practically unlimited, while the requirements of the industrialized countries appear to be finite. There are other limits to the migration capacity related to the limited social adaptation capabilities of the immigrants who are confronted with new cultural traditions, stereotypes, etc. When the number of immigrants is fairly small, the local cultural environment quickly assimilates them, dissolves them, without creating any serious problems of intercultural

interaction. However, if the number of immigrants grows rapidly and becomes significant, they start forming compact socio-cultural enclaves; at this point, the assimilation process slows down. There will arise intercultural tensions aggravated by objectively existing economic and social inequalities between the local population and the new arrivals.

The situation can become more conflict-prone due to the very process of adaptation; the people of the traditional Third World rural cultures will have to adapt themselves to the modern urban culture of the industrialized countries. They cannot avoid – at least temporarily – the crisis of cultural identity. A similar crisis is also taking place within the Third World countries that are gradually moving along the road toward modernization. All of these countries are entering a basically new, painful stage of inner cultural conflict; they are experiencing a struggle between their traditional values and the dynamics of modernism.

This conflict has been developing against the background of growing claims voiced by the new social strata caused by modernization, as well as of stubborn (and even increasing) economic and social inequality, overall poverty, and so forth. The conflict eventually affects the majority of the rural population who also find themselves under the growing pressure of the consequences of modernization, including such demographic changes as fast mortality decrease and population growth. The people who remain in their traditional lifestyles are unprepared to accept these changes. Hence, a massive rejection of all novelties; this would also include an aggressive opposition to all “urban” or “Western” innovations. These sentiments pave the way for social discontent, which creates an ideal soil for political, ideological and religious extremism to grow.

Immigrant enclaves inside the industrialized countries, which often appear to be near replicas of the societies from which they left and with which they keep close contact, are torn by the contradictions of their cultural identity. They are therefore very receptive to oversimplified “fundamentalist” ideas. They think these will help them overcome their cultural split, while helping them to regain their identity. Under the circumstances, the assimilation of immigrants does not occur and many of them (although not all) find themselves in opposition to the recipient society.

Industrialized countries that are now dependent on their foreign workforce are becoming increasingly aware of the limited nature of their immigration capacity; they become a scene for competition between the “domestic” and “alien” workers. Society more resolutely expresses its anti-immigrant sentiments, while the debates on immigration problems become an important card in political gambling and a respective mythology begins to take shape. Often this mythology involves the intellectual elite, although it often differs very little from other mythologies that are popular with the poorly educated, increasingly marginalized, immigrants.

The above said is equally valid for Russia. Like all other countries where the demographic transition is complete, Russia is now under migration pressure

from the outside; it cannot but realize the objective limits of its migration capacity. Here, as elsewhere, there are acute problems associated with the position on the labor markets, together with the peculiar problems of adapting to a new culture. These include the vast, underpopulated areas rich in mineral resources, which include some very important assets such as arable lands, fresh water and energy fuels. This factor increases Russia's requirements for human resources and its attractiveness for immigrants from the overpopulated "South". However, Russia's immigration opportunities are not very promising from the viewpoint of its geopolitical position. Specifically, the massive inflow of the Chinese to the Russian Far East – should such a scenario occur – would never result in any profound cultural assimilation (since there is already a powerful cultural entity nearby), but would provoke more intensive territorial claims by the Chinese.

True, the limitations of Russia's migration capacity, and that of other countries, cannot be considered to be very rigid; it can be increased if dedicated policies that are aimed at removing the various impediments to immigration are pursued. However, such policies, no matter how aggressive, are only capable of widening the migration borders, but not totally removing them.

Regrettably, the results of the present analysis are not very encouraging. The demographic challenges that Russia will have to meet are very serious. A search for solutions, although very slow-moving at the present time, is a must, and it is apparent that Russia's internal and global realities leave almost no choice. There is nothing more dangerous than new "concepts" mushrooming inside the bureaucratic agencies, promising quick solutions to formidable problems. What Russia requires is not the sowing of more illusions, but plainly seeing the painful truth. This is the only way to find realistic solutions to the present-day challenges. To offer simplistic answers to these perplexing questions of history would mean to confront a very serious danger while being fully unarmed.

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3 Easterlin R. The Birth Dearth, Ageing, and the Economy. In: Sisay Asefa and Wei-Chiao Huang (eds). Human Capital and Economic Development. Kalamazoo, Michigan: W.E. Upjohn Institute for Employment Research, 1994, p. 22.

4 Statistiques sociales européennes..., p. 43.

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<http://www.un.org/News/Press/docs/2003/pop850.doc.htm>

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