

CHAPTER 4

The Politicization of Labour Migration in Post-Soviet Russia

Competing Projects of Post- Socialist Development

Julia Glathe
University of Tübingen

Abstract

Like liberal democracies, Russia, as one of the world's largest immigration destinations, must manage numerous political conflicts related to immigration to ensure political stability. The majority of migration scholarship characterizes Russia's political response to immigration as contradictory and interprets this as an expression of the authoritarian, patrimonial, and populist Russian state. To complement this literature, the chapter shows how Russian migration policy is linked to broader problems and conflicts of post-socialist change. Based on an analysis of the Russian expert discourse on labour migration, it argues that the competing political projects of labour migration are an expression of a

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society that is renegotiating its post-socialist coordinates in economic, cultural, and global terms.

Keywords: labour migration, post-Soviet Russia, political rationalities, migration policy

Introduction

For most international observers, it comes as no surprise that Russia, along with India and Mexico, is one of the countries with the highest number of emigrants (UN 2020b, 16). Likewise, it is widely known that this trend has further intensified since the Russian invasion of Ukraine, which has already caused more than 300,000 people to leave the country (OK Russians 2022). At the same time, and often unacknowledged by international migration scholarship, Russia ranks among the world's largest immigration destinations, with 11.6 million international migrants (UN 2020a) and an annual influx of more than 500,000 people. Despite a sharp drop in immigration due to the COVID-19 pandemic, 594,146 migrants officially entered Russia in 2020 (Rosstat 2020). Russia's migration history is closely linked to the collapse of the Soviet Union into 15 separate states, which 'transformed yesterday's internal migrants, secure in their Soviet citizenship, into today's international migrants of contested legitimacy and uncertain membership' (Brubaker 1992, 269). In addition, the dramatic economic, political, and social restructuring of the post-socialist transformation fuelled an intensive and complex mobility dynamic in the post-Soviet space, which is of ongoing relevance.

Whereas emigration has not yet received much political attention in Russia, immigration flows have been a political issue for decades. Like liberal democracies, Russia, as an illiberal state, must manage numerous political conflicts related to immigration to ensure political stability. Migration scholarship often describes Russia's political response to these large-scale immigration flows as 'messy and paradoxical' (Light, 2016, 2), 'full of inconsistent and conflicting tendencies' (Heusala 2018, 431), and shaped by 'high levels of corruption' (Round and Kuznetsova 2016, 3). For

most of the literature, the contradictory character is an expression of an authoritarian, patrimonial, and populist state. From such a perspective, migration policy appears as a tool of political power within an informalized authoritarian system (Light 2016; Malakhov and Simon 2018; Schenk 2018).

However, this focus on the Russian state does not place migration policy in the context of broader societal dynamics of post-socialist change. Particularly noteworthy are those works that have shed light on the entanglement of migration policy and Russia's political economy (Filin and Paraskeva 2011; Krasinets 2012; Cook 2017; Heusala and Aitarmurto 2017), migration policy and the question of membership and belonging in the post-imperial multi-ethnic state (e.g., Shevel 2011; Rudenko 2014; Malakhov 2016; Kangaspuro and Heusala 2017; Myhre 2017), and migration policy and geopolitical constellations and agendas (e.g., Ivakhnyuk 2007; Laruelle 2015; Grigas 2016; Ryazantsev 2016; Schenk 2016; Gulina 2019; Kuznetsova 2020). Moreover, research on the Soviet legacy is crucial to understanding the societal condition and historical specificities of Russian migration policy (Bahovadinova and Scarborough 2018; Heusala 2018).

One key message that I take from this body of literature is that migration processes and conflicts cannot be understood in isolation from the broader social context but are an integral part of social change. To complement this literature, this chapter analyses the social construction of labour migration policy within the Russian expert discourse between 2010 and 2021 and answers the question of how labour migration is politicized in post-Soviet Russia.¹ It argues that the identified expert rationalities on migration can be understood as competing projects of 'post-socialist development'. Each rationality, when constructing migration, draws different conclusions about how to overcome the challenges of post-socialist change in the context of migration policy and thus attempts to justify different models of political regulation. The identified projects address questions of Russia's economic development path, issues of national boundaries and belonging, and problems of Russia's global positioning as a post-empire. Thus,

the chapter broadens the understanding of Russian migration policy by illuminating its social embeddedness, and shows how contested, dynamic, and broad the frontiers of labour migration policy in Russia are.

The Social Construction of Migration in the Post-Socialist Context

Referring to ‘political rationality’² as an overarching concept, I build an analytical framework to study how migration is generated as a political object within the Russian expert discourse. According to Rose and Miller (1992), political rationalities can be understood as a particular knowledge of the object over which power should be exercised. This knowledge is the precondition for conceiving the object as something that ‘can be governed and managed, evaluated and programmed, in order to increase wealth, profit and the like’ (Rose and Miller 1992, 182). It is a way of thinking and interpreting social reality to generate definitions of problems, constitute political objects, and conceptualize possible solutions. In the context of migration, three dominant forms of problem construction have been identified, the ‘economization’, ‘securitization’, and ‘humanitarization’ of migration, each based on specific hierarchical classifications that guide and justify certain logics of political regulation (Amelina and Horvath 2020).

The process of ‘economization’ addresses migration as an economic issue that must be regulated according to the logic of cost–benefit analysis (Amelina 2020; Carmel 2011; Horvath 2014; Schierup, Hansen, and Castles 2006). As such, migration is primarily discussed as labour migration, the legitimacy of which is evaluated according to its expected economic value for the societies involved. Linked to such reasoning are political attempts that aim to maximize and optimize the economic benefits of migration flows and minimize the costs of immigration (Faist 2008: 38). The securitization of migration qualifies migration primarily as an unwanted and dangerous phenomenon that represents a question of security for the receiving society. It defines migration as

an existential threat to the autonomy and freedom of the receiving political community in terms of its independent identity and functional integrity (Huysmans 2006, 61). This concerns the socio-economic level, where migration is associated with unemployment, the informal economy, and strains on the welfare state, but also issues of national identity and cultural cohesion, as well as the public policy area, where migration is associated with organized crime, human trafficking, and terrorism (Boswell 2007; Ceyhan and Tsoukala 2002). Accordingly, migration is linked mainly to the categories of ‘uncontrolled’, ‘illegal’, and ‘unwanted’ migration, which is opposed to that of ‘desirable migration’ or simply those groups whose mobility is normalized, such as businesspeople or wealthy tourists. The differentiation between ‘wanted’ and ‘unwanted migration’ often goes along with essentializing constructions of ‘cultural’ and ‘racialized difference’ and intersects with notions of gender and class, based on which hierarchized social boundaries are created (Amelina and Horvath 2020). Political agendas following this problem construction typically imply the logic of control and surveillance but can also inform integration policies (Bigo 2014; Horvath 2014). Finally, the ‘humanitization’ of migration frames migration as a moral question in relation to suffering subjects and distinguishes refugees who are in need of protection from those who are not (Fassin 2011). Linked to this are logics of governance in terms of protection, based on the notion of compassion and moral sentiments.

Importantly, political rationalities of migration do not occur in a vacuum. To understand the rationalities of Russian migration policy, its social construction must be examined against the background of a post-socialist condition. This does not necessarily mean that Russia represents an exceptional case in comparison with Western cases of migration policy. Yet it does mean that questions of migration are considered and debated from a different global and historical perspective than in Western European immigration countries. Focusing on Russia’s post-socialist condition, let us pay attention to the temporal and global dimensions of political negotiations. The temporal dimension of the

post-socialist context encourages us to ask how the social construction of migration as a political object relates to the socialist past, the post-socialist present, and the future. The global dimension points to Russia's specific position within a globalized world—often labelled East European—and integration into the post-Cold War capitalist world order, marked by the structural hierarchies of global capitalism (Gagyi 2016). It concerns the new global interdependencies and power relationships that have unfolded since the fall of the Soviet Union and informs questions of how the social construction of migration policy is linked to Russia's self-positioning as a post-empire within post-Cold War constellations.

In summary, the social construction of migration as a political object takes place in a historically specific social context that is tied to a specific historical and global position. Against this background, Russian migration policy represents a fascinating case that contributes to a better understanding of how migration discourse is connected with broader questions of development and social change and demonstrates how context-specific constructions of migration are embedded in global power regimes. This brings forward a more nuanced answer to the question of why migration becomes a 'political problem' and how societies respond to the phenomena of mobility in a specific way. Thus, we can come to a better understanding of the politics of opening and closing and the contradictory dynamics characterized by both the inclusion of some people and the exclusion of others.

Analysing the Russian Expert Discourse

Following a broad understanding of experts that goes beyond the academic milieu and includes any actor that accumulates special knowledge in their daily routines (Stehr and Grundmann 2011), the field of migration expertise in Russia appears to comprise a very diverse spectrum of non-state actors. Apart from traditional types of actors such as academics or representatives of international organizations, the expert discourse is also constituted by

human rights activists, lawyers, trade unionists, cultural professionals, social workers, and diaspora representatives. To reveal how migration is linked to broader societal negotiations of social change, this chapter studies how labour migration is problematized and discussed within this expert field.

Even if non-state experts cannot directly influence migration policy decisions, there are various formal and informal institutions of interaction which show that experts play an important role in the conceptualization, implementation, and legitimization of migration policy (Volokh 2015). Expert knowledge plays an important role in migration policy not because experts can directly influence policy, but because they produce much of the knowledge that establishes the link between migration and social development in the first place. Moreover, expert knowledge creates spaces of possibility and legitimation for certain policies, even if these may follow other power calculations.

The analysis³ is based on more than a hundred publications produced by the various expert types mentioned above. Thus, the text corpus represents a unique collection of diverse expert positions that provides new insights into the social construction and negotiation of migration as a political object. In addition, the analysis draws on 48 qualitative interviews with leading migration policy experts to complement and deepen the understanding of political rationalities gained from expert publications. The interviews were conducted in the period between September 2017 and March 2019 during four fieldwork stays in Moscow and St Petersburg. They were conducted and transcribed in Russian and anonymized by using pseudonyms. The quotes cited in this chapter were translated into English.

Political Rationalities of Labour Migration

In the following section, I will present the three prevailing political rationalities of immigration identified in the expert debate. I will show how each rationality assigns a specific role to labour migration in achieving economic development and strengthening

Russia's global competitiveness, thereby justifying different policy attempts to regulate migration. The first rationality, *global competitiveness through selective recruitment*, views large-scale labour migration as a condition for economic growth and global competitiveness and promotes political efforts to stimulate and integrate migrants selectively. The second rationality, *technological modernization without guest workers*, presents labour migration as a substantial threat to the Russian economy and national security and advocates a migration policy that closes the doors to immigrants who are labelled as culturally alien. Lastly, the third rationality, *mutual benefits through Eurasian integration*, views labour circulation as a powerful instrument for regional development and strives for further integration of the post-Soviet space.

Global Competitiveness through Selective Recruitment

The first political rationality of labour migration identified in the Russian expert discourse is promoted by a diverse strategic alliance of expert organizations and represents the most dynamic approach. Representatives include think tanks, business interest groups, scholars from various research institutes, social NGOs, and diaspora organizations. Overall, the political rationality presents large-scale labour migration to Russia as a substantial component of Russia's economic development and an inevitable alternative under the condition of rapid demographic decline. The core argument brought forward by experts of this rationality is that a continuing decline in the working-age population due to low birth rates threatens Russia's economic development, causing labour shortages in various sectors of the economy (Demintseva, Mkrtchyan, and Florinskaya 2018). Labour migration is promoted because it seems to be the only way to cope with depopulation and the related economic problems resulting from the demand for labour exceeding the domestic supply (Tyuryukanova 2013, 313). Experts point particularly to the high demand for workers in labour-intensive sectors, which was generated through the economic growth of the 2000s and is still of continuing relevance

due to the low degree of automation in many production areas. Against this background, labour migrants are seen as an essential part of the labour force and in some sectors even as an indispensable component of the national economy:

It [immigration] plays a huge role. How many migrant workers do we have? Officially, 11 million migrants are in Russia. About 6–10 per cent of the GDP is created by migrants. There are entire economic activities where exclusively migrants are employed. Without them, we would not have made the Olympics in Sochi, or the APEC [the meeting of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation in 2012] in Vladivostok, or the World Cup, or our biggest projects. Even in Moscow—who builds all these streets? Pay attention, and you will see who is building. I am not even talking about the infrastructure of gas and oil pipelines. Construction, market trade, housing and utilities, domestic work—these are the activities where they work. Almost everywhere. (Expert interview with Romanov, September 2017)

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the related closure of borders with post-Soviet republics, the situation even worsened, as the All-Russian Non-Governmental Organization of Small and Medium Business—Opora—notes in a recent publication:

The shortage of labour may slow down construction, which, although it has not recovered, is considered to be the engine of economic growth: at least in the public sector in the next three years it is planned to invest 2.7 trillion rubles in the construction of federal facilities ... and in the private sector demand for real estate is strongly heated by the program of preferential mortgages—in this situation delaying the commissioning of facilities may restrict demand and lead to the development of a ‘bubble’ in the market. Given that the industry accounts for more than half of all capital investment, this problem becomes particularly acute against the background of government plans to launch a new investment cycle and increase the role of private investors in the economy. (Opora 2020)

Apart from its compensatory role, experts see labour migration as an essential prerequisite for Russia's global economic competitiveness due to its 'low cost'. Aleksandr Grebenyuk, an economist at the Lomonosov Moscow State University, evaluates the impact of labour migration on Russian socioeconomic development in a government-funded research project. He concludes that—among other 'positive effects'—the recruitment of 'foreign labour' ('legal' and 'illegal migration') leads to a reduction in labour costs, thus increasing the profitability of organizations that are subject to high levels of internal and external competition (Grebenyuk 2017, 7). Moreover, he praises the effect that the availability of 'cheap labour' has of driving the growth of foreign direct investments (Grebenyuk 2017, 8).

However, the recruitment of 'foreign workers' appears increasingly challenging. In 2018, the Skolkovo Institute for Emerging Market Studies (IEMS) published an extensive report on the role of migration in economic growth. In this report, Vladimir Korovkin describes a scenario in which competitors surround Russia for 'human capital' from all global directions:

Time is running out, though. The rapid development of some economies in Asia, including Kazakhstan, China, and the Persian Gulf countries, coupled with an increasingly liberal admission of migrants by most advanced economies in the West, has put Russia in a challenging competitive position in the international market for human capital. (Korovkin 2018, 90)

Russia's weak position in the global competition for 'human capital' is explained by the country's relatively low pace of economic growth, which creates a vicious circle of diminished attractiveness for migrants and a consequential reduction in the 'human resources available to accelerate the economy and improve the attractiveness' (Korovkin 2018, 90). The only advantage assigned to Russia is its accessibility for migrants from the adjacent post-Soviet republics, which is currently upheld by visa-free entry procedures, an extensive network of transportation links, and the existence of financial instruments for making remittances (Korovkin 2018,

55). However, especially those countries that are considered to be 'culturally close' and migrants from which are therefore particularly easy to 'integrate', such as Ukraine or Moldova, are increasingly attracted to Western immigration countries, which in comparison with Russia offer higher standards of income and quality of living (Korovkin 2018, 72). As a result of the economic hardships beginning in 2014, now even migrant workers from Central Asia are shifting their perspective to other destinations, such as Korea, Türkiye, the Gulf states, and China (Korovkin 2018, 73). In addition, global competition for human capital manifests itself in increased emigration flows of high-skilled labour from Russia to other advanced economies, leading to the dynamics of so-called brain drain (Korovkin 2018, 49).

Despite the positive economic assessment, many experts address the influx of labour migrants as a challenge to social cohesion and stability. According to many experts, the 'fast-growing' and 'noticeable presence' of 'migrants' from Central Asia since the early 2000s has resulted in a rise of 'xenophobic feelings' in parts of the Russian society (Mukomel 2013, 694). 'Negative stereotypes' about labour migrants are seen as a threat to social stability, especially if they are disseminated and instrumentalized by 'extremist groups' that provoke conflicts and inter-ethnic tensions (PSP-Fond 2018, 6). Many experts explain that the negative sentiments among the population particularly concern migrants of a 'different ethnic background' and a 'different social milieu with their traditions and cultures' (Mukomel 2013, 294). Therefore, the dilemma is even exacerbated by the fact that Russia has increasingly poorer chances of recruiting workers in the post-Soviet space and, therefore, actually has to attract labour migrants from 'culturally alien' regions about which the population has the most outstanding reservations (Zaionchkovskaya, 2013, 229).

The interpretation of labour migration as a development resource by Russian experts goes along with social boundaries that distinguish migrants in terms of their economic benefits. These boundaries are primarily based on class-based categories such as qualification, income, and profession. These classifications are

accompanied by hierarchical assessments that draw a line between ‘unskilled labour migrants’ who are in demand for ‘lower-paying and less productive jobs to maximize the overall performance of the economy’ and ‘high-skilled human capital’ that enables innovation and technological progress (Korovkin 2018, 31). Aside from economic classifications, boundaries between migrant groups are also constituted in terms of culture. A distinction of cultural difference based on the categories of language, religion, appearance, and demography is widespread. Based on these categories, the Skolkovo business report distinguishes three groups of migrants within the post-Soviet space (Korovkin 2018, 70). Belarus and Ukraine built a first group, which is considered similar to Russian citizens in all respects. Moldova, Georgia, and Armenia constitute a second group, which differs from the Russian linguistically and somewhat in demographic respects but is considered culturally close in terms of religion and not always recognizable as ‘foreign’. Finally, Central Asia and Azerbaijan built the culturally most distant group, which differs linguistically and demographically in terms of religion and is considered easily identifiable as foreign. Beyond these boundaries, so-called ‘compatriots’ form another group, defined as being ‘committed to Russian culture and speak[ing] Russian’ (Demintseva, Mkrtchyan, and Florinskaya 2018, 20). Finally, ‘migrant resources’ coming from outside the post-Soviet space, such as Iran, Afghanistan, countries of the Middle East, Pakistan, and India, are distinguished as ‘significantly distant in ethnocultural terms’ (Korovkin 2018, 19).

Against the backdrop of this framing within the expert rationality of global competitiveness through selective recruiting, three overarching political positions can be identified with regard to migration regulation. First, based on the economic rationality described above, experts promote permanent recruitment of labour according to labour market needs through selective recruiting. Often, experts proposing such differentiated recruitment strategies refer to ‘point-based systems’, as realized by Canada and other Western immigration countries (Demintseva, Mkrtchyan, and Florinskaya 2018, 42). Western immigration

countries are particularly taken as a role model due to efforts in attracting 'educational migrants' and providing them with privileged entry and residence status (Chudinovskii 2013). In addition, experts refer to the Soviet tradition of labour recruitment, the so-called 'Orgnabor' (English 'organized recruitment'), which should be revised and adapted to the principles of a market society (Kurtser 2015, 79). Second, experts call for a simplification and flexibilization of residence rules in order to legalize migration and thereby make it more profitable for the Russian state. This includes removing bureaucratic hurdles to obtaining short-term or long-term residence permits and simplifying the procedure for obtaining a work permit or labour licence. The simplification of migration rules is advocated because it increases the number of 'legal migrants', who are of greater value to the Russian state due to higher tax revenues (Grebenyuk 2017). Against the background of the COVID-19 pandemic, experts such as Vladimir Volokh call for measures to 'make it easier to obtain or extend patents for migrants from visa-free states working in Russia' (Volokh 2020). Third, experts advocate a systematic integration policy that maximizes economic benefits and minimizes social risks. In the light of public resentments against 'culturally distant migrants' and the fear that they could destabilize the society, 'integration' measures are proposed to reduce 'differences' between 'migrants' and the 'receiving society' (Opora 2011, 9). However, the overcoming of these cultural differences between migrants and citizens is evaluated as something that can be learned and acquired if the right conditions are in place and the local population is willing to receive new members.

In sum, the first rationality represents a neoliberal development project aimed at creating the most favourable conditions for companies to take advantage of 'migrant workers', which is seen as a requirement for economic growth and prosperity. Although the social and political rights of migrants play a role in some of the expert debates, they do not have the same relevance as the economic arguments in favour of immigration. This can be explained by the fact that in illiberal states, policy reforms do not

have to be legitimized by reference to human rights. The legitimization of reforms, as this strand of discourse shows, rather feeds on the promise of generating rapid economic growth. The project of global competitiveness through selective recruitment can thus be interpreted as an expression of a ‘narrow modernization’ (Gel’man et al. 2021), a development path that is designed not to create democratic structures but primarily to become globally competitive ‘to achieve a high level of socioeconomic development through rapid economic growth’ (Gel’man et al. 2021, 72).

Technological Modernization without Guest Workers

Compared with the first rationality, the field of experts constituting the second political rationality is less dynamic and diverse. Strategic alliances exist between think tanks, trade unions, and academic research institutes. Overall, experts of this political rationality present labour migration as an economic obstacle to technological modernization. Unlike the political rationality identified above, this approach views large-scale labour migration as a major threat to Russian cultural and civilizational identity, especially in the light of disparate global demographical trends. Against this background, experts call for ‘culturally distant’ ‘immigration flows’ to be restricted and instead for the shortage of labour to be compensated for by investing in the country’s technological modernization.

In contrast to the political rationality described above, which frames labour migration as a fundamental engine of economic growth, experts of this second approach deny any positive connection between migration and economic growth. Instead, they argue that Russia’s economic dependence on migration must be overcome by modernizing the economy and increasing labour productivity. In 2014 and 2015, the conservative think tank the Institute for Strategic Development (Russian ‘Institut Natsionalnoi Strategii’, INS) published five extensive reports on the impact of migration on the Russian economy and other large immigration countries. Referring to the German case and its guest worker

regime in the 1960s and 1970s, the authors argue that no positive relationship can be detected between economic growth and migration, as there was no significant economic growth despite increasing numbers of immigrants (INS 2014b, 3). On the other hand, Japan, which pursued a restrictive immigration policy, showed a tremendous growth dynamic between the 1950s and 1980s despite ‘serious labour shortages’ and an ageing population (INS 2014b, 4). From this comparison, they draw the conclusion that Japan’s economic success and its high level of technologization and labour productivity must be the result of the labour deficit: ‘The shortage and high cost of labour are considered by many economists as one of the factors that contributed to the Japanese economic miracle and the achievement of extremely high productivity, automation and robotization of industry’ (INS 2014b, 4). Thus, what was identified as an economic benefit in the rationality of global competitiveness through selective recruitment—the low costs of foreign labour—is here evaluated as an obstacle to development. Labour migration is seen as a barrier to development because it would reduce incentives for technological modernization and labour productivity growth.

In another report, the INS also rejects the idea that labour migration is needed to compensate for labour shortages due to a shrinking population (INS 2014a, 6). In contrast to the expert opinions presented above, the authors do not see demographic development and labour shortages as the fundamental problem of development, but rather the ‘quality of the labour force’:

The main problem that will soon be faced by the new industrialization of Russia ... will be not the number of the working population, but its quality (adequacy to the modern technological environment). The barrier to labour force development today is not an abstract ‘lack of working hands’, but a shortage of specialists in certain categories. (INS 2014a, 6)

This shortage, however, could not be offset by ‘immigration flows from Central Asia’, which are devalued in terms of their ‘language skills’, ‘minimal professional qualifications’, and ‘cultural habits

typical for agrarian Islamic countryside' (INS 2015, 17). This assessment is shared by one of my interviewees, Denis Vasiliev, the head of a Moscow-based think tank:

Most of the immigrants who come to us are people with insufficient cultural and educational levels to perform the hardest jobs, which has a negative impact on the domestic labour market and even on the issues of innovative development. This is because this labour force often proves to be so cheap that it is easier for entrepreneurs in the construction industry to solve their problems using manual labour methods than to buy expensive machines. (Expert interview with Vasiliev, March 2019)

Olga Troitskaya, a political scientist from the Lomonosov Moscow State University, also challenges the argument put forward by liberal experts that labour migration could compensate for population decline and facilitate economic growth, since Russia, unlike other 'advanced economies', is not in the position to attract 'qualified specialists' (Troitskaya 2013, 479). In contrast to the USA, where annually hundreds of thousands of 'specialists' arrive, more than 95 per cent of 'migrant workers' in Russia come from countries of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) as well as from Türkiye, China, Vietnam, and are 'unskilled' (Troitskaya 2013, 479). Referring to official statistics, she claims that 'qualified foreign workers' are 'just a drop in the boundless sea of migrants' (Troitskaya 2013, 479). In the light of Russia's low level of global competitiveness, this tendency would not change soon but would rather lead to the outflow of Russian 'specialists' (Troitskaya 2013, 480).

The economic argumentation overlaps with a problematization of labour migration as a question of national security. In its publication 'Regulation of Migration: International Experience and Perspectives for Russia', the INS portrays 'culturally distant immigrants' as a risk to public order and claims that people from 'Africa', 'Latin America', 'Kosovo', and 'Albania' as well as other 'Islamic countries' show higher crime rates than people from China and European countries, especially in rape, homicide, and

drug trafficking (INS 2014b, 22). In addition, migration is linked to extremism, such as ‘ethnic hate crimes’ and ‘Islamist terrorism’ (INS 2014b, 28). All this leads to a perspective that views migration not as an economic benefit but as an economic burden to the Russian state:

Because foreign labour puts pressure on the economy, on society. We have to spend extra money to curb the crime associated with it. Everyone understands that these are other crimes caused by other reasons—if only with the fact that a huge number of men live extremely crowded and without women. If only because they are men of a different culture. These people put a huge strain on the health care system. When they linger here, they put a strain on the educational system because children are born. (Delyagin 2020)

Moreover, Mikhail Delyagin argues that many labour migrants do not pay taxes because they are not legally registered in Russia and therefore do not even contribute to the increased burden of public spending (Delyagin 2020). This argument is underpinned by references to Western Europe, where ‘culturally alien immigration ... has led to a multitude of social problems and is now seen as a major threat to social stability and national security, on a scale that far exceeds the economic dividends of attracting immigrants’ (INS 2015, 16).

In addition, experts of this rationality securitize migration as a threat to Russian cultural identity and social stability. In its publication ‘Non-Unified Russia. Papers on Ethnopolitics’ from 2015, the INS attributes an enormous potential for conflict to migration due to a ‘cultural distance’ between the ‘immigrants’ and the local people (INS 2015). Due to differences in the ‘ethnocultural type’, it claims, ‘integration’ and ‘assimilation’ could not be achieved even over a long period of ‘coexistence’ (INS 2014, 16). Instead, ‘autonomous communities’ would form, which would cause several problems for the rest of the population (INS 2014). Some experts even go as far as to speak not only of a danger to social cohesion but also of a threat to Russian culture and European

civilization through non-European migration. For instance, Robert Engibaryan, professor and former director of the International Institute of Management at the MGIMO (Moscow State Institute of International Relations), views ‘migrants’ from African and Asian countries as ‘aggressive destroyers of the European culture’ (Engibaryan 2019, 4).

The social construction of non-European immigrants as an essential threat is underpinned by references to Western Europe and the United States, where the idea of ‘multiculturalism’ has failed, according to experts of this rationality:

Ethnic crime, religious intolerance, the aggressive imposition of their norms of behavior and cultural values, visible and violent crimes, terrorism, pogroms, and riots by immigrants have become a mass phenomenon in these [Western European] countries and have radically changed the attitude of both ordinary citizens and politicians to the problems of immigration. (INS 2014b, 22)

Similarly, the historian Andrei Fursov substantiates his anti-immigrant position by pointing to the negative consequences that mass immigration would have for Western democracies, such as Germany, where ‘aliens, becoming more and more aggressive, are eating up their space, pushing the European lower and middle classes away from the social pie’ (Fursov 2018). He warns that ‘alien migrants’ are destroying European ‘civilization’ and its ‘ethnic composition’, and will eventually ‘extinct the white race’ (INS 2014b, 22).

The social construction of labour migration of the political rationality of technological modernization without guest workers is based on an intersection of class-based and racialized categories of difference that form the image of non-European migrants as backward subjects. Like the political rationality described above, experts hierarchize labour migrants based on their educational level and professions. However, in contrast to the approach above, class-based categories are closely intertwined with culturalized stereotypes. Immigrants originating from Central Asia are portrayed as a homogeneous group, generally coming from poor, rural areas

with low levels of education and no professional qualifications (INS 2015, 17). They are by no means perceived as human capital in the sense of the above approach. The INS describes people from Central Asia as having an 'agrarian', 'aggressive', 'uncivilized', 'religious', and 'Eastern culture', which is opposed to and incompatible with 'urban', 'secular', and 'developed' Russian society (INS 2014a, 22). Thus, based on the categories of religion, language, tradition, appearance, and demographic trends, an essentializing distinction is drawn between a European 'cultural-civilizational unit' and an 'agrarian Islamic Central Asia'. Together with the class-based hierarchies, this creates a racialized classification into 'positive European migration' and 'negative non-European migration', which determines the legitimacy of labour migration. Non-European immigration generally appears illegitimate because it harms the Russian economy and destroys Russian cultural identity and social stability.

Against this background, a political agenda emerges that advocates strict state control of the entry and residence of labour migrants. One measure proposed by the representatives of this approach is to extend the visa system to the entire post-Soviet space (INS 2014a, 129). Together with this, they suggest introducing a modern border control system with high-tech equipment and border control personnel (INS 2014a, 137). In addition, experts call for the restriction of access to citizenship so that labour migrants cannot stay in the country long term. Overall, experts of this approach favour an immigration policy that creates 'incentives to attract former compatriots to Russia, as well as the Russian-speaking population and groups of migrants who are socially and culturally adapted to the conditions of life in Russia' (FNPR 2021). Existing fast-track procedures for the naturalization of 'compatriots' and 'Russian speakers' should be limited to 'ethnic Russians' and the 'indigenous population' of the Russian Federation belonging to the Russian culture (INS 2014c, 119). The construction of ethnic and cultural belonging to Russia is associated with the category of 'native language'. Only those people who have spoken the Russian language since early childhood and do so

without an accent, verified by professional linguists, are regarded as ‘Russian speakers’ and ‘compatriots’ and should be eligible for preferential treatment in citizenship laws (INS 2014c, 120). This is a much narrower understanding of the category of ‘compatriot’ than the current official definition, which includes all former Soviet citizens and their descendants who identify with the Russian state and culture. On the other hand, regional constraints in the resettlement programme for ‘ethnically Russian compatriots’ should be removed, and the range of social rights and support should be expanded. In particular, the possibilities for ‘Russian-speaking Ukrainian citizens’ should be developed and a so-called ‘Russian card’ introduced, which would enable ‘reunification with the home country’ even without permanent residence in the country, for compatriots living abroad and especially in Ukraine (INS 2014c, 120). In contrast, for ‘ethnic non-Russian foreigners’, residence requirements for naturalization should be ‘radically increased’ (INS 2014c, 121).

In sum, the second rationality of migration policy can be understood as an attempt to establish a development path that focuses on the creation of a culturally homogeneous nation and rejects the Western model of diversity. Although radical conservative forces also exist in democracies, constructing ‘culturally distant’ migration as an essential threat, it appears specific to illiberal regimes that there is no normative counterweight to such political claims. While the determination of borders in democracies is always confronted by the universalist principles of the freedom and equality of all people (Schmalz 2020), no such norm of inclusion exists in authoritarian regimes. As result, political demands for the exclusion of certain social groups such as ‘non-Europeans’ are contested in authoritarian regimes such as Russia primarily on the economic level and not because they contradict any social values and principles. In this respect, the chance that racist policies will be enforced if they seem economically plausible is much greater here.

Mutual Benefits through Eurasian Integration

Knowledge production of the third identified political rationality is shaped by a strategic alliance of international and local actors, including think tanks, diaspora organizations, international organizations, trade unions, and individual academics. The basic assumption of this political approach is that Russia and the whole post-Soviet region can only 'develop' and remain competitive in the global market if they take advantage of international cooperation between the former Soviet republics. 'The development of our country and the states historically linked to it directly depends on how quickly and effectively we can integrate into a common union in the post-Soviet space' (Postavnin 2012, 30). With these words, Viacheslav Postavnin, head of the think tank Migration in the 21st Century, underpinned the necessity of creating a trans-regional labour market among the former Soviet republics three years before the foundation of the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU). The economic benefits of a 'Eurasian centre, which simultaneously defends the influence from the West and the East', have also been stressed by other migration experts, such as Natalia Vlasova and Anatoly Topolin (Vlasova and Topolin 2011, 31), as well as by Sergei Glazev from the conservative think tank Isborsk Club, who emphasizes the 'economic potential of increased competitiveness' within the region (Glazev 2014).

One crucial argument of this approach is that the circulation of labour leads to mutual benefits between labour-sending and labour-receiving countries within the region. For labour-receiving countries, such as Russia and Kazakhstan, a 'common migration space' is expected to contribute to GDP, compensate for population decline and labour shortages, and to provide geopolitical security (Vlasova and Topolin 2011, 34). On the other hand, labour-sending countries, such as Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, would benefit from 'social remittances' and a 'brain gain' generated by 'brain circulation' (UNDP 2015, 39). Against the background of the demographic developments in countries such as Kyrgyzstan, where the rising 'labour supply' meets a limited

‘demand for labour’, a trans-regional labour market is seen as a contribution to avoiding high youth unemployment and social unrest (Karabchuk et al. 2015, 69).

This means that, like the other approaches discussed above, the rationality of mutual benefits through Eurasian integration discusses migration against the background of the challenge of global competition. In contrast to the experts mentioned above, however, the representatives of this approach do not seek national solutions but see regional integration and cooperation as a way of dealing with global competition. The approach also reflects uneven relationships within the global market but views Russia as part of a transnational region that is in a peripheral position. Likewise, demographic decline and related labour shortages in Russia are seen in the context of demographic growth in other post-Soviet regions suffering from an oversupply of labour. Thus, this rationality resembles the first rationality in problem diagnosis but opens it up through a trans-regional perspective that leads to different conclusions. The experts of this rationality address development not as an exclusively Russian problem but as a problem of the entire post-Soviet space, in which Russia is part of a complex dynamic.

International organizations are vital in framing labour migration within the development discourse context. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) views labour migration and related remittances as an instrument of ‘development’, especially in relation to Central Asia, where large-scale migration flows to Russia originate (UNDP 2015, 6). According to the data cited by the UNDP, in 2015 one-third of all migrants in Russia came from Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan (UNDP 2015, 6). The related financial remittances are seen as substantially contributing to the GDP of these countries and compensating for trade deficits. Moreover, many experts agree that labour migration flows help to reduce poverty because remittances increase family incomes and facilitate the development of small businesses that can create new jobs. In addition, remittances are seen as driving investment in housing and allowing better access to education

and healthcare for the local population (UNDP 2015, 38). Referring to international examples, the Confederation of Trade Unions (VKP) underlines the point that remittances are the most important factor for economic growth in many countries:

Migrant remittances are one of the best channels for generating national income and, in fact, for solving the problems of improving the living standards of migrant workers and their families. They are an important source of economic growth in modern conditions, supporting the livelihood of 700 million people around the world ... Today, they have a greater effect than foreign aid because they go directly to households in need. (VKP 2010, 4)

Especially in times of economic crisis, labour migration and associated remittances are regarded as a financial safety net for the whole region that would be able to mitigate the effects of the economic crisis and, in part, compensate for losses in export revenues from raw materials and goods (Starostin 2017, 63).

The COVID-19 pandemic hit this 'development project' hard. The measures that were taken by the governments of Central Asia and the Russian Federation to flatten the infection curve severely affected 'mobility' in the region. In its study 'The Socioeconomic Impact of COVID-19 on Returnees and Stranded Migrants in Central Asia and the Russian Federation', published in March 2021, the International Organization of Migration (IOM) demonstrates the major impact of the disruption of mobility flows for the entire region, particularly pointing to the role of remittances now missing:

Given the importance of remittances as a share of GDP in many countries of origin, it may seem unsurprising that not only migrants but also their communities are affected by the negative side effects of the COVID-19 crisis and interrupted international labour migration flows. The COVID-19 emergency exacerbates all the pre-existing vulnerabilities of migrants, which may overlap with other factors such as gender, age, and underemployment, and limit opportunities for international migration. (IOM 2021, 2)

Based on a representative survey, the organization showed that COVID-19 severely impacted the number of remittances that could be sent home by labour migrants previously living in Russia. Because many migrants became unemployed or otherwise suffered from declining incomes during the quarantine in the Russian Federation, two out of five respondents were forced to stop sending remittances, with dramatic consequences for their families (IOM 2021, 59). Referring to statistics of the CIS Statistical Committee and the statistical authorities of several countries in the region, the VKP comes to a similar conclusion, stating that ‘the COVID-19 pandemic is not only a health crisis but also a humanitarian and development crisis that threatens to leave deep social, economic, and political scars for years to come, especially in countries already beset by fragility, poverty, and conflict’ (VKP 2021, 9).

Aside from poverty reduction and social stability, experts of this rationality view labour migration as an essential driver of innovation. According to several scholars, the mobility of labour would facilitate innovation, increase the region’s competitiveness, and create jobs. It is assumed that labour mobility in the post-Soviet space fosters technological innovation and consequentially drives economic growth. This primarily concerns the mobility of ‘qualified specialists’, including engineers, technologists, IT specialists, specialists in chemistry and new materials, planners, ecologists, etc. (Vlasova and Topolin 2011, 33). The idea is to pool forces within the Eurasian region to develop innovations in certain hot-spots that will keep the area globally competitive. At the same time, however, regionally local actors also work to problematize the weaknesses and dangers of the global and Western-dominated development discourse. In particular, the General Confederation of Trade Unions (GCCU) regularly takes a critical stance on the distribution of social rights within a Eurasian mobility area, pointing to inadequate protection of the social rights of labour migrants (VKP 2011). A significant risk of labour migration regarding the development prospects of sending countries, highlighted by some scholars of this approach, is the threat of brain

drain. They warn that the dynamics of the one-sided emigration of young and qualified people could lead to a resource drain in the region. According to Irina Ivakhnyuk, a well-known economist and policy adviser, recruitment strategies of immigration countries that pursue a purely selective policy could economically 'bleed' the weaker economic countries in the region (Ivakhnyuk 2013, 89). She explains that selecting and attracting the best and most talented people undermines the labour and demographic potential of 'donor countries' and leads to an erosion of 'qualified human resources', solidifying 'underdevelopment' and eventually widening the gap in the level of economic advancement (Ivakhnyuk 2013, 88).

As indicated above, economic arguments rationalized by international organizations and local experts to promote a common Eurasian labour market are underpinned by ideas of a common 'culture' and 'civilization' by local experts. According to Vyacheslav Postavnin, regional integration is not just an economic or political question but a matter of a 'common civilization' (Postavnin 2012, 29). Similarly, Sergei Glazev emphasizes the importance of the commonality of historical roots as an ideational foundation alongside economic ideas of interaction, mutual adaptation, and cooperation (Glazev 2014). However, while Glazev implies historical roots and a geographical scope beyond the post-Soviet territory, other experts explicitly refer to Soviet history as the main ideational foundation of regional integration. According to Vlasova and Topolin, historically developed cultural ties among the people living in the post-Soviet space the knowledge of a common (Russian) language, a similar education system, a common mentality and behavioural traits, and a common historical memory build the basis for regional integration (Vlasova and Topolin 2011, 31).

In sum, the political rationality of mutual benefits through Eurasian integration, which advocates regional integration for mutual economic benefits and development, is based on culturalized boundaries grounded in the category of Soviet historical membership. Thus, culturalized ties between former Soviet citizens and their descendants constitute a community of solidarity, which

justifies economic cooperation. In this context, migration within the Eurasian post-Soviet space appears legitimate for economic and cultural reasons. However, despite the economic promises of mutual benefits, global hierarchies between developed and developing countries are evident, manifested in their assigned function as labour-receiving or labour-sending countries. Moreover, highly skilled specialists are distinguished from other labour migrants and praised for their particularly important role in innovation. Thus, despite the commitment to equality, hierarchical boundaries remain prevalent in the rhetoric of this community of experts, raising the question of whether all countries and migrants benefit equally from this political rationality or whether, on the contrary, the rationality reproduces existing economic inequalities within the post-Soviet space, similarly to the approaches discussed above.

From the social construction of labour migration emerges a policy agenda that advocates (1) the creation of a common mobility space, (2) the creation of a single legal space for the common labour market, including guarantees of social protection, and (3) the optimization of remittances as a development tool. The most fundamental goal of this approach is to create and institutionalize a common mobility space in the Eurasian post-Soviet space, facilitating legal mobility and residence throughout the region. However, contrary to the political rationality described above, this approach rejects a selective migration policy designed only for Russian benefit and seeks to prevent possible ‘brain drain’ by means of ‘brain circulation’. Thus, in contrast to the idea of facilitating long-term stays and integration of high-skilled labour, this approach suggests creating ‘circular movements’ that contribute to the development of emigration countries through social remittances.

Competing Projects of Post-Socialist Development

Based on the analysis above, I argue that the identified political rationalities of labour migration in the Russian expert discourse can be interpreted as competing projects of ‘post-socialist

development'. As the comparison shows, each identified rationality assigns a specific role to labour migration in achieving economic growth and progress. At the same time, they appear as strategies for coping with significant challenges that accompany Russia's post-socialist integration into global capitalism. Such challenges include a substantial demographical decline, international competition, and Russia's peripheral position in the global capitalist market. Each rationality, however, draws different conclusions about how to address these challenges in the context of migration policy and, against this backdrop, justifies specific models of political regulation.

The first and most dominant rationality of the Russian expert discourse, global competitiveness through selective recruitment, views large-scale labour migration as a necessary condition for and engine of Russia's future economic growth and development. In the light of demographic decline and the low degree of automation in many production areas, the approach presents labour migration as the only way to prevent labour shortages and remain competitive in the global market. Thus, labour migration appears to be part of a development strategy that seeks economic growth and global competitiveness by exploiting cheap labour. Meagre labour costs make it possible to attract foreign investment, realize large-scale infrastructure projects, and increase overall competitiveness in international markets. At the same time, this enables the social mobility of the native population, which can outsource the poorly paid, heavy, dangerous, and prestige-less work.

This strategy must be seen against the background of Russia's relatively weak economic position on the world market, where Russia has struggled to keep pace in the face of advanced Western technologies on the one hand and cheap consumer goods from emerging market economies on the other (Neunhöffer and Schüttelz 2002, 391). Due to its own comparatively low level of technologization and innovation, Russia could not significantly increase productivity and efficiency to be globally competitive. Instead, in the 2000s, the strength of the Russian economy was based primarily on oil and gas resources (Akindinova, Kuzminov, and Yasin

2014, 44). After 2012, however, this growth model faltered 'due to the cessation of growth in hydrocarbon prices and the stabilization in physical volumes of external fuel deliveries' (Akindinova, Kuzminov, and Yasin 2014, 44). Overall, Russia appears to be located on the periphery of the global capitalist centres as a competitor with unequal opportunities. This provides the context for the perceived need to lower production costs and attract foreign investment to strengthen its competitiveness. As experts repeatedly emphasize, highly qualified specialists would be necessary to develop the Russian economy. However, the Russian economy is not proving to be competitive with the global capitalist centres, which appear much more attractive to migrant workers than Russia and even draw away Russia's own (high-qualified) citizens.

Against this background, the political rationality of global competitiveness through selective recruitment appears as an attempt to compensate Russia's peripheral global position by building on its post-imperial status, which allows Russia to extract labour migration as a kind of resource from its periphery. However, this strategy comes with the risk of jeopardizing social cohesion and stability through the influx of labour migrants. This creates a massive dilemma within this first political rationality of migration. Russia must rely on foreign labour and, in the future, labour that is seen as culturally alien to remain competitive but must then expect resistance from the population that could severely affect the stability of the authoritarian-ruled country.

This problem constellation gives rise to a political project that attempts to recruit only economically necessary migrants through selective recruitment and integrate them according to economic and social necessities. In this way, the approach resembles the Western guest worker model. However, instead of imitating Western experiences as was the case in the 1990s, experts call for selective learning from the experienced migration countries and adaptation to local conditions. The development project also shows certain continuities with Soviet mobility policies but modifies them and adapts them to current conditions. For example, it borrows from the Soviet model of 'organized recruiting' and tries

to combine it with Western point systems. Culturally, the development project ties in with the Soviet legacy by postulating a cultural closeness of post-Soviet migrants and Russian citizens, although cultural differences based on language, religion, and appearance are assumed. However, cultural difference is not essentialized but is seen as a changeable social component (e.g., through integration policies). However, unlike in the Soviet model, the notion of cultural proximity is valued exclusively in terms of economic benefits, for instance because less resistance from the Russian population is assumed in the case of culturally close migration. In this respect, this development project is more reminiscent of Western diversity management (de Jong 2016). Integration is primarily seen in terms of economic exploitability and avoidance of societal disruption rather than as a means of creating emancipatory and democratic structures in a pluralist society. Accordingly, an opening of national boundaries occurs only under the condition of economic utility. Class-based differences are thus the decisive category for the constitution of social order and hierarchies.

The second political rationality, technological modernization without guest workers, denies a positive correlation between labour migration and economic growth and represents non-European migration as a significant 'civilizational threat' to Russian culture. Considering liberal migration policy as a severe obstacle to technological modernization, it supports political measures that control and constrain 'culturally alien migration' and instead facilitates the immigration of 'ethnic Russians'. Unlike the first rationality, this development project does not see demographic change as the fundamental problem of development. Instead, it problematizes Russia's labour-intensive mode of production and technological backwardness, which would account for its lack of competitiveness.

The second rationality also problematizes contemporary Russia's peripheral global position. While the first approach accepts this position to some extent and seeks to balance it by utilizing its own periphery, the perception of this peripheral position within this approach challenges Russia's self-image as a great power.

Experts of this rationality position Russia within global hierarchies at the level of the Global North and firmly distinguish it from the Global South. Therefore, in this approach, it seems necessary to overcome the peripheral position by catching up technologically. The invitation of guest workers is seen as an obstacle here, since it would prevent incentives within the economy to modernize the mode of production and thus cements technological backwardness.

Cultural boundaries are an integral part of this development project. They are closely linked to economic hierarchies, resulting in the binary classification of a 'developed Christian European civilization' versus an 'underdeveloped Islamic non-European civilization'. Thus, this development project is decisively opposed to official Soviet ideas of internationalism and friendship of the people, as well as Western ideas of multiculturalism. Based on essentializing, racializing demarcations between non-European and European populations, it rather ties in to racist discourses the origins of which can be located in postcolonial Europe (Gilroy 2016). From this perspective, the integration of 'culturally alien' migrants seems impossible and, therefore, a pointless financial burden on the public purse. According to this approach, it is more important to encourage and support the immigration of 'ethnic Russians'. National boundaries are thus narrowed down to race and ethnicity, which is justified both economically and culturally.

Finally, the third political rationality, mutual benefits through Eurasian integration, points to the beneficial role of labour migration in developing the entire post-Soviet region. Given uneven economic and demographic trends in the region, this approach views labour migration as a lucrative way for both sending and receiving countries to solve related socioeconomic problems and advocates political measures that facilitate circular mobility and prevent selective recruitment. Like the first rationality, this approach considers the demographic change in Russia as a problem for the labour market and thus for the country's development. Likewise, it problematizes a peripheral position within global competitive relations. However, this rationality broadens the view

of the entire post-Soviet region, the economic and social integration of which would bring competitive advantages in the global market. This takes up an idea already relevant during the Soviet Union in the 1970s and 1980s, when workers from Central Asia were recruited to Russia to compensate for demographic imbalances within the Soviet Union (Abashin 2014, 11).

However, a more robust link can be drawn to current Western development narratives. It mainly reflects a discourse referred to in the literature as the migration–development nexus, which has been applied to regions of the Global South for some time by international organizations such as the World Bank (see, e.g., Faist 2010). According to this, circular international migration would trigger development dynamics in emigration countries of the Global South through financial remittances, human capital and knowledge flows, and social remittances (Faist 2010, 70). In contrast to the political rationality of global competitiveness through selective recruitment, migrants in this neoliberal discourse are not only understood as a ‘resource’ to be appropriated but are invoked as active subjects and ‘managers’ of development (Schwertl 2015, 23). This neoliberal invocation is accompanied primarily by the idea of responsibility for the country of origin and not, as Maria Schwertl critically notes, by the assurance of political and social rights (Schwertl 2015, 23).

The dominance of Western narratives in this approach is not surprising, since international organizations such as the IOM, the World Bank, and the UNDP are central actors of knowledge production within it. In addition, the political rationality is normatively underpinned by local actors tying in with official Soviet ideas of internationalism and the friendship of the people. From this perspective, the borders of the nation state lose their significance for feelings of belonging. However, the expansion of cultural boundaries remains limited to the Eurasian post-Soviet space. Furthermore, the question arises regarding the extent to which the reproduced dichotomous classifications of sending and receiving countries, as well as of highly skilled and low-skilled

migrants, are capable of overcoming systematic imbalances in the region.

In summary, all three political rationalities design specific strategies in the context of migration policy debates to cope with the economic challenges arising from Russia's post-socialist transformation and integration into global capitalism. The individual rationalities not only constitute specific social constructions of labour migration but at the same time map out broader social projects in terms of economic development, its political regulation, and the relationship between state, economy, and society. Since these projects differ fundamentally in terms of their goals, I speak of competing projects of post-socialist development.

As I have attempted to show, these projects are closely linked to a specific global positioning. The first rationality reflects a post-imperial position within the post-Soviet space to cope with the simultaneous peripheral position vis-à-vis the global centres of capitalism. Its normative reference point is Western immigration states, even though a modification and adaptation of Western models to regional specifics is called for. The global positioning can therefore be aptly described, in Morozov's words, as a 'subaltern empire' (Morozov 2015). The second model identifies Russia as a 'great power' in crisis the status of which needs to be regained through a process of catch-up modernization. Russia is seen within global hierarchies as a 'developed civilization', in distinction to the 'underdeveloped' Global South. Although there is an identification with a postcolonial Western discourse, there is at the same time a normative separation from the (contemporary) West and the associated ideas of diversity and pluralism. The third rationality locates Russia as part of the Eurasian post-Soviet region, which is seen as an integrated unit between the East and West in the global order. Western ideas of development are adopted, although critical voices of local actors regarding the dangers of interregional imbalances and hierarchies can also be detected. Overall, it becomes apparent that the West has long since ceased to be an undisputed point of reference for post-socialist development.

Moreover, all three economic rationalities are linked to ideas of cultural belonging and a reflection of national boundaries, showing different references to the Soviet legacy of ‘multinationality’ (Brubaker 1994), ranging from clear distinction to reactivation of Soviet ideas of membership. The first rationality refers positively to the historically developed connections within the post-Soviet space. However, it is aimed primarily at increasing national competitiveness through cheap and available labour resources and the outsourcing of unwanted precarious work to guest workers. An expansion of national boundaries takes place only under the condition of the economic usability of migrants. In contrast, the second rationality rejects any sense of belonging beyond national borders and pushes for a political institutionalization of ethnic boundaries to achieve technological and economic progress. The third rationality reactivates Soviet-rooted ideas of membership to develop a competitive community. It criticizes national solo efforts at the expense of the post-Soviet periphery and stresses the economic advantages of trans-regional solidarity.

Against this background, the different migration policy positions can also be understood as expressions of a society searching for and fighting about its global and cultural coordinates in post-socialist times. They are a manifestation of a specific global positioning and historical experience that cannot be directly transferred to other post-socialist societies. Nonetheless, the Russian case provides some indications of how current migration policy conflicts are related to societal challenges arising from the economic and cultural transformation and the new geopolitical constellations of former socialist societies. In particular, demographic change and the associated shortage of skilled workers combined with emigration dynamics towards the West pose a massive challenge for most post-socialist states, which also influences how immigration is discussed in the respective societies (Krastev 2017).

Conclusion

The analysis has demonstrated that, as in democracies, migration is a contested political field in authoritarian Russia. Liberal political projects of opening are opposed to radical projects of closing. In particular, liberal Western-oriented rationalities are at odds with anti-Western nationalist projects.

Based on this analysis, the chapter concludes that the contradictory character of Russian migration policy is by no means merely an effect of the clientelist nature of the Russian state, in which corrupt political elites use migration as a resource in informal patronage networks. Instead, it argues that the conflicts and contradictions of Russian migration policy can be interpreted as an expression of a society that is renegotiating its post-socialist coordinates in economic, cultural, and global terms within a changing and increasingly challenged post-Cold War world order. At the same time, there is a close connection between migration policy and the authoritarian regime in Russia, as Putin's increasingly authoritarian and now dictatorial regime has increasingly restricted the possibilities for debate and dialogue between state and social experts since 2014. This has marginalized economically liberal social visions for the Russian state, which were still being discussed in the early 2010s under the banner of 'conservative modernization' in strategic partnership with the West, and which also had a decisive influence on the regulation of migration policy. Today's apparent consensus on neo-imperial expansion, an absolute break with the West, and the attempt to establish Russia as a military and 'sovereign' great power is therefore still comparatively new. And this also explains some of the contradictions of Russian migration policy, in which the neoliberal footprint of Western-oriented migration experts is still visible, but the agenda of which is fundamentally undermined by the neo-imperial aspirations of the current political regime.

Notes

- 1 The chapter is based on a chapter of my dissertation ‘Migration Policy and the Post-Socialist Condition: The Role of Experts in Forming Russia’s Contradictory Migration Policy under Authoritarian Rule’ (Glathe 2023).
- 2 The concept of ‘political rationalities’ originally goes back to Foucault’s lectures on ‘governmentality’ from 1978–1979, in which he pointed out the close relationship between power and forms of knowledge (Bröckling, Krasmann, and Lemke 2010).
- 3 The data analysis was guided by the method of qualitative content analysis (QCA). At the centre of data analysis using QCA is the so-called ‘coding frame’, a set of categories through which to organize comparisons between observations (Dey 1993, 103). It usually consists of several ‘main categories’ indicating relevant aspects of the research object, and ‘sub-categories’ for each main category specifying the relevant meaning concerning this aspect (Schreier 2012, 61). As main categories, the different logics of the social construction of migration were taken from the literature: the ‘economization’, ‘securitization’, and ‘humanitarization’ of migration. As sub-categories, these were then assigned four dimensions of the social construction process, which I abstracted on the basis of the literature: (a) problematization of migration; (b) categories and classifications of migrant groups; (c) principles of evaluating the legitimacy of migration; and (d) positions regarding the political regulation of migration. The coding frame allowed me to organize the vast amount of data and enabled comparison between different types of text. This procedure was realized with the help of the software MAXQDA.

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