

# **REPATRIATION: OUTLINES OF THE RUSSIAN MODEL**

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A concern for compatriots makes the list of the most important national interests in many countries. In many cases, this concern is motivated by the strengthening of the national spirit or the bond to the homeland. True, states often use these motives to conceal somewhat more realistic goals of practical foreign policy: to create conditions for manipulating the so-called national minorities issue by emphasising the need to protect compatriots.

Without recalling the lessons of history about the consequences of this type of manipulation on international relations, we would like to draw attention to the fact that until now the so-called element of compatriots has allowed for the assessments of relations between, for example, Latvia, Estonia and Russia in the Cold War terms. If only for this circumstance, one can wonder at the order signed by the President of the Russian Federation Vladimir Putin on June 22, 2006, which approves the “National Programme for Supporting Voluntary Migration of the Compatriots Residing Abroad to the Russian Federation (2006-2012)” prepared by the government. In other words, this was basically the first time that Moscow officially started considering systematic repatriation.

There are well-known examples of systematic repatriation.

There is perhaps little need to discuss the peculiarity of Israel. The witnesses who are still alive will probably never forget Soviet experiments after the Second World War. It is also clear why the Nazi Germany resorted to this measure after the Ribbentrop-Molotov Pact. However, it is not so easy to give an unambiguous answer to why Putin’s Russia grew interested in this issue. It does not help that the goals of the said programme are officially stated: to compensate population and labour force shortages in the subjects of the Russian Federation where repatriates are going to

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resettle; to ensure state and public control of the resettlement of compatriots and the fulfilment of the obligations assumed by the repatriates.

Without going into a detailed analysis of the Programme, we may distinguish several of its main leitmotifs.

The state will guarantee financial provisions and socio-economic support (compensation of resettlement and documentation expenses, lump-sum settlement payments, monthly unemployment benefits for the duration of six months, and a compensation package that covers state and municipal services). Repatriates will have to make an informed choice of the place of residence and employment with regard to the socio-economic situation of the subjects of the Russian Federation, as well as the state priorities. As a footnote, we may add that the Programme specifically lists and arranges the territorial subjects into three groups by their importance: Krasnoyarsk, Primorsk and Khabarovsk regions, as well as Amur, Irkutsk, Kaliningrad, Kaluga, Lipetsk, Novosibirsk, Tambov, Tver, and Tyumen oblasts. Strategically important border areas, including the neighbouring Königsberg region, are subsumed under the most important category A.

In this context, it is worth recalling one telling detail.

Already in the fall of last year, the governor of the Kaliningrad Oblast Georgy Boos began talking about an unconventional initiative for modernisation of the region – to double its population. A mechanical increase in Kaliningrad's population was planned by introducing all possible facilitated conditions for immigration of able-bodied people from mainland Russia, as well as Russian-speakers from the Baltic States and other countries.

At that time, some mocked this initiative. For example, in Latvia they asked ironically: “What would the Latvian Russian choose – the Kaliningrad Oblast, where the monthly wage would be 300-500 conventional units (US dollars), or Ireland, where they would earn 3,000 euros?” The irony was not without a basis. Despite constant accusations from Moscow about alleged violations of human rights in Latvia, there is a glaring absence of any signs that discriminated Russian-speakers are emigrating from this country; on the contrary, we may even speak about the opposite tendency.

In Lithuania, the plans of the neighbouring region's boss were met with greater reservations.

Some hastened to make frightening prognoses that a mechanical increase in the population of the Kaliningrad Oblast would affect the formation of a peculiar identity of local inhabitants and make this territory demographically larger than Latvia and Estonia, as well as increase the flows of transit across Lithuanian territory.

Others connected the intention to the geopolitical schemes of the Russians. They argued that the very fact of such an initiative indicates that the Russians are determined not only to implement unconventional solutions for modernisation of the Kaliningrad Oblast, but also to move the issue of Russian-speaking compatriots in the Baltic States from the dead point. Although the aspiration to preserve influence in the Baltic countries by playing the Russian-speakers' card remains, this factor is probably starting to be regarded as less important due to the ongoing rapprochement between Russia and the West. Meanwhile, it is considered that the Kaliningrad factor has a chance of becoming a "passed pawn" in the complex geopolitical chess game between the EU and Russia. In the course of natural and open rapprochement there would doubtlessly be increasing tendencies to europeanise the region's population, which could lead to undesirable political consequences for Russia. Therefore, it is the situation that impels the search for ways of how to increase the loyalty of the region's population towards the continental homeland. It is noteworthy that the proponents of this hypothesis also rely on the fact that Boos' initiative was immediately backed by Moscow.

Indeed, Modest Kolerov, the head of the Administration on Interregional and Cultural Relations with Foreign Countries under President Putin's office, promptly commended Boos for the initiative. This high official of the Kremlin is responsible for dealing with the compatriot issue. It seems that he will supervise the implementation of the Programme under discussion. The key question is whether it can be implemented at all.

Many experts do not doubt that the flow of compatriot migration to Russia has stabilised and a radical increase is hardly likely. In an ideal case, about four million people are expected. It is easy to calculate that six years later this number would not help overcome the population decrease tendency (700,000 per year).

The geographic limitedness of the Programme makes it even less attractive, not to mention that the heads of some of the listed regions have already admitted that they don't see any possibilities of implementing the Programme. Even the leadership of the Kaliningrad Oblast was forced to state that, in the best case, it would accept about 450,000 repatriates within five years. But the question remains open as to where such repatriates would come from and what they would be (a qualified labour force is expected). It is already clear that it is unrealistic to invest hopes into the Russian-speakers living in the Baltic States. Only 10 people responded to Boos' invitation in Latvia. Meanwhile, the president of the Estonian Union of Russian Compatriot Associations S. Sergeyev declared that those who wanted it have already left and those who stayed have built independent lives.

It is possible that Moscow expects to receive repatriates from Central Asia, where the standards of living are lower than in Russia and where the rights of Russian-speakers are increasingly restricted in some places. However, it is unlikely that they would be welcomed in Kaliningrad, for example, which has experienced several waves of migrants from Central Asia.

All of this leaves no doubt that the Kremlin is trying to use the compatriot resettlement Programme as a political measure that demonstrates the sufficient strength and capacity of Russia under Putin to protect the interests of compatriots abroad and secure their return to the historical homeland. In this context, it is likely that the propaganda machine will soon be set into action. Taking into account its peculiar features, we may expect information campaigns about allegedly systematic, wide-scale and outrageous violations of the rights of compatriots, rather than the advantages of repatriation to Russia. By the way, it was Putin's idea that a compatriot is not merely a juridical category but a spiritual resolve, which grounds the claim that, in the course of centuries, the "Russian world" has transcended not only the geographical borders of Russia but the Russian ethnos itself.