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## Representations of Migrants and Migration Policy in Russia<sup>1</sup>

Between July 2006 and January 2007 a series of laws formed the basis of a new Russian migration policy<sup>2</sup>. The measures adopted, like the debates in the Duma and the media at the time, bear witness to the conflict and hesitancy associated with this migration policy. One observes on the one hand a desire to facilitate entry to the country and access to work permits for short-stay migrant, and on the other the fear of losing control of migration levels (compulsory registration, quotas, and the prohibition on working in certain professions, have all been retained). Beneath all this lies a specific vision of migrants and immigration: they are simultaneously seen as necessary, since in times of demographic crisis their participation is essential to the work force, and at the same time perceived as a threat to the host country. Moreover, this perception has intensified during a time of economic crisis. In this article I will attempt to identify the links between the representation of migrants and Russian public policy<sup>3</sup>. Or more precisely how the perceptions of the elites, the media and public opinion influence migration policy, and how in turn migration policy affects the representation of migrants.

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<sup>2</sup> Presidential decree no. 637 on 22nd June 2006 'On the ways of assisting the voluntary resettling of citizens of the Russian Federation in the country after a period living abroad'; Federal law, 18 July 2006 No. 109-F3 'On the introduction of changes to Federal law, "On the legal position of foreign citizens in the Russian Federation"'; Federal Law No. 2, 6 January 2007: 'On the introduction of changes to Federal Law: "On the legal position of foreign citizens in the Russian Federation"' (amendments to the law made in July 2006).

<sup>3</sup> Here public policy is not seen as a way to respond to an existing social problem, but as a way to select from among numerous social problems those which should be discussed and resolved. Social problems are constructed by a number of 'opinion makers' (newspapers, lobbyists, politicians etc.), and the way they are formed partly decides the response given to them. (See [Lascoumes, Le Gales 2007]).

### Crisis measures and public opinion

In Autumn 2008 *Molodaya Gvardia* [The Young Guard], the youth organisation of the leading political party *Edinaya Rossiya*, had a nationwide campaign called ‘*Our Money — For Our People!*’, whose official aim was to safeguard jobs for Russian citizens in times of crisis. Appeals indicating a national preference (*Money for Russian workers! Our Country — Our Work! We’ll Protect the Citizens of Russia!*) ran alongside slogans which were aimed at targeting migrants either indirectly (‘*Order on Building Sites — Order on the Street, FMS [Federal Migration Service] — don’t stop!*’) or directly (thus, the protesters held a huge railway ticket in their hands with ‘*From: MOSCOW to: HOME*’ written on it!).

This campaign seems to have received the approval of Prime Minister Vladimir Putin judging by an announcement he made during the television programme *Pryamaya Liniya* on 4<sup>th</sup> December 2008. Among the questions brought forward from people from all four corners of Russia, the remark of outraged Muscovite Elizaveta Nikolaevna Kuznetsova struck a chord: *Isn’t it strange that so many people are losing their job at the moment, but as I understand it, you recently confirmed new quotas for the foreign work force. So our companies are letting go their workers and taking on Gastarbeiter.* Having acknowledged the validity of such a question (*Elizaveta Nikolaevna, this kind of problem does exist*), but noting that migrants occupy the jobs which Russians do not want to do, Putin came to the following conclusion: *...bearing in mind the highly complex situation in the labour market, I think that you were correct to ask this question. We have not yet confirmed the quotas, they have only been drafted. I believe it is very sound to cut applications by at least 50%.*

This incident illustrates how the government ‘makes’ public opinion. Indeed, the Russian government does not actually ‘rely’ on public opinion to justify its decision to cut the quotas for the foreign work force by half. In reality it ‘creates’ it by explaining what we should think about this issue. In his answer Putin supported the idea that in Russia there are too many migrants — especially given the crisis — who are taking work away from the Russians. In this way he confirmed the in fact controversial link between migration and unemployment.

Furthermore, the authorities ‘make’ public opinion by selecting or legitimising those who express it. Kuznetsova’s question was clearly selected beforehand, and the other participants in the programme

<sup>1</sup> Photographs from the protest on 1 November 2008 can be seen at: <<http://www.molgvardia.ru/gallery/2008/11/01/2988>>, and those from 8 December 2008 at: <<http://www.molgvardia.ru/gallery/2008/12/08/3296>>. Videos are also available at: <<http://www.molgvardia.ru/video/nashi-dengi-nashim-lyudyam>>.

*Pryamaya Liniya* were expressing opinions that were certainly not picked at random; equally *Molodaya Gvardiya* cannot be considered to represent the views of the Russian population overall.

Finally, policy ‘makes’ public opinion by creating a problem out of issues which may have no real importance for the population of the country as a whole. Surveys are often examined as being a reflection of public opinion, while in reality the respondents are often coerced into expressing an opinion on issues which concern them very little. The format of the question sometimes predetermines the response<sup>1</sup>, but the main thing is that the results of a survey can be interpreted in various ways. Let us take the example of the ‘Inter-ethnic tension’ survey, which has been carried out for many years by the Levada Centre. In October 2008<sup>2</sup> in answer to the question ‘What do you think about the fact that on building sites in Russia you are increasingly likely to meet workers from Ukraine, Belorussia, Moldavia and other neighbouring foreign countries?’ the responses were as follows:

- definitely positive: 5%
- probably positive: 16%
- neutral: 46%
- probably negative: 22%
- definitely negative: 7%
- difficult to say: 3%

You can of course come to the conclusion that only 21% of those surveyed have a good opinion of migrants working on building sites, while 29% see this in a negative light. But on the other hand you can note that around half of the respondents (49%) are neutral or indifferent, and those people who have a precisely formed opinion on this question comprise a minority (5% definitely positive, 7% definitely negative).

In this way, although a strict migration policy is often looked upon as a response to the expectations of society, we must note that in reality these expectations are much less clear than politicians make out.

<sup>1</sup> See for example a survey of the Levada Centre from April 2006 which asks ‘Is there something about newcomers from the CIS which annoys you personally? If yes, specify what.’ The list of possible responses was a veritable catalogue of prejudices about migrants (They are rudely familiar, not observing the customs of our country, they take our jobs, they work for a miserly wage, they have saturated the market, they are involved in criminal activities, they are hostile towards Russians). In this context it is striking to see that 27% of those surveyed nevertheless said that migrants do not annoy them (Levada Centre, April 2006: <[www.levada.ru/files/1172666067.doc](http://www.levada.ru/files/1172666067.doc)>).

<sup>2</sup> <<http://www.levada.ru/press/2008111801.html>> (survey of 1600 Russian Federation citizens, 17<sup>th</sup>–20<sup>th</sup> October 2008, statistical error does not exceed 3%).

Quite often, the very fact that a decision has been made is used as proof that the problem already existed.<sup>1</sup>

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To return to the decision to cut foreign work force quotas by half (a decision made, as Putin claimed, ‘at the request of the population’), we must first of all note that in the end, the government did not achieve the 50% cut in quotas. The official quota of work permits that could be issued in 2009 was indeed reduced, but the ‘reserve’ (the percentage of possible supplementary work permits) was actually increased... If the FMS ends up using the entire ‘stock’ of work permits at its disposal, the total will remain at around 3.9 million, as had been requested in the first place. In this way, the reduction of the quotas was not decided for economic reasons and then justified publicly by popular opinion — it was a measure whose primary aim was to give the appearance of decision making and to influence public opinion.

Nevertheless, even if this decision is only a form of ‘official public relations’, it has had a real effect: on a local level, several governors have decided unilaterally to introduce zero quotas, which means they have stopped issuing work permits to foreigners. In January 2009, on the door to a local office of the migration service, not far from the metro station Prospekt Mira in Moscow, the following notice was displayed, written in large print on an A4 sheet of paper: ‘From 5/12/2008 work permit applications will no longer be accepted’. Note that Putin’s statement was shown on television the previous day, on 4<sup>th</sup> December. Can that be merely coincidence? In the event, Putin’s statement gave the *Molodaya Gvardiya* campaign new impetus. During their subsequent action which took place on 8 December 2008, participants held huge placards with ‘50%’ written on them and deliberately changed ‘reduction of quotas’ to ‘reduction of migrants’ while chanting ‘Kazhdyi Vtoroi — Domo! [Every other person — go home!]’.

### State xenophobia / xenophobia of the elites

The Russian government’s communication regarding the cutting of quotas can be seen as an illustration of ‘state’ or ‘government’ xenophobia — an idea used by French researchers when analysing the causes of France’s migration policy in recent years.<sup>2</sup> The idea

<sup>1</sup> As an illustration of this one can refer to the radio interview of V. Postavnin, former Vice-Director of the FMS, in which he speaks about the interdict on foreigners trading in markets (January 2007). The journalist reminds him, ‘There was a conference call this week. And the authorities in all regions were saying “There’s no problem, we have a maximum of 5% foreigners trading in our markets”’, then he asks ‘So does the experience of your department confirm this figure? Or are there other figures?’ Postavnin answers, ‘Naturally our experience confirms that the figures are different, otherwise this decision would not have been made. You can see this yourselves, if you visit our markets, how many foreign citizens there are.’ (Radio Mayak, 15 January 2007). See: <<http://www.upmonitor.ru/editorial/interview/1168801210/1108/print/>>.

<sup>2</sup> See for example: [Valluy 2008].

behind it is that while in democratic states the political elites have learnt to refrain from any openly racist declarations,<sup>1</sup> state policies themselves are nevertheless capable of constructing an image of migrants and migration in general as a problem, a burden and a threat. They can achieve this effect through laws, administrative rulings, policy documents, the naming of institutions etc.<sup>2</sup>

Like French politicians, members of the Russian elite who are anxious to appear ‘politically correct’ know how to present themselves as ‘democrats’ or ‘open-minded’ in front of their western partners. The Russian government seems also aware of what is expected internationally in terms of PR. Thus, even the people in charge of the Federal Migration Service essentially come from the security, defence and law enforcement agencies,<sup>3</sup> and continue to view migration from a police point of view — the person who has been entrusted with handling PR for the FMS is the only one of the six vice-directors of the FMS not to have been in the police, the army or the KGB, and the only woman.

Similarly, the application of a sociological or philosophical ‘gloss’ onto statements with xenophobic content clearly shows that the political elites know what they cannot say in front of foreigners. This is probably the reason for using the fashionable idea of a ‘tolerance threshold’ to indicate the maximum level of foreigners a society can cope with<sup>4</sup>. This expression was used, for example, by an employee of the Moscow mayoral office in an interview, who for good measure made a reference to French philosophy: *You are probably familiar with the idea in sociology that there is such a thing as a tolerance*

<sup>1</sup> Whatever their opinions, politicians take care not to make them public, as this risks their coming under criticism from other parties, the media and civil society. This is shown by the scandal in France in September 2009 surrounding statements made by the Interior Minister Brice Hortefeux. Speaking about a young activist of the UMP (Union for Popular Movement), and hinting at his being of Arabic descent, the minister exclaimed, ‘If he is alone, it’s alright — the problems start when there are lots of them’. Having allowed himself to make a joke with racist connotations in informal circumstances, Brice Hortefeux later vigorously denied its racist implications, and the whole presidential party came together as one to defend him.

<sup>2</sup> In this way several French researchers, historians, sociologists, demographers and migration specialists publicly expressed their disagreement in 2007 in relation to the creation of the Ministry for Immigration, Integration, National Identity and Co-Development. In their opinion, the very name of the new ministry demonstrated their programme: the link between immigration and national identity refers to the ideas of the Far Right which sees immigration as a danger, and which, for example, erroneously supposes that co-development means that the economic development of a country allows it to avoid emigration.

<sup>3</sup> Konstantin Romodanovsky, Director of the FMS, is a police major-general (*general-maior militsii*) and has served in the KGB (where he fought organised crime), the FSB, and the Ministry of Internal Affairs. Of the six Vice-Directors of the FMS, three had high positions in the Ministry of Internal Affairs, one in the KGB/FSB, and one in the Border Guards before joining the FMS. The only woman used to be a teacher of Russian, who later became a lawyer, and then worked in the Ministry of Justice — she is in charge of public relations (<<http://www.fms.gov.ru/about/structure/head/>>, July 2009)

<sup>4</sup> On this term and how it has passed from sociological analysis to the statements of experts and then into political statements, see [Shnirelman 2008].

*threshold: 12%. When, in any nation, in any country, 12% or more of the population are perceived as being different, xenophobia begins to progress and develop. Sartre had a wonderful expression — hell is other people, therefore... [laughing lightly] So Sartre was not alone, many people here have a similar opinion.<sup>1</sup>*

In any case, the idea of State xenophobia is relevant in that it reminds us that even without racist statements made by the elites to create a threatening image of migrants, administrative decisions alone suffice to achieve the same effect. For example, this is clearly the case with the Russian government decree of 15<sup>th</sup> November 2006, which banned foreigners from selling alcohol and pharmaceuticals on the open market from 1<sup>st</sup> January 2007. This decision was taken after a series of crises: numerous reported cases of alcohol poisoning, a ban on Georgian and Moldavian wine since April 2006, the Russia-Georgia crisis in September 2006, ethnic riots in Kondopoga at the same time, and other such events. By issuing the November 2006 decree, the Russian government, whether deliberately or not, substantiated and strengthened the belief that migrants are potential ‘poisoners’ and a danger to the health of Russian citizens, and thereby directly contributed to their stigmatisation.

Moreover, by forbidding foreigners to trade on the market more generally from 1<sup>st</sup> April 2007, the government further fuelled public resentment towards foreign market-traders. This measure was officially rationalised by the need to improve Russian farmers’ access to the markets, but the real reason seems to have been the desire to reduce the visibility of migrants by excluding them from those jobs where they would be in direct contact with clients. Indeed, to this day, foreigners are not allowed to work as salespeople or cashiers, whereas they can still work on the markets and shops as loaders, cleaners, or, indeed, managers.<sup>2</sup> In any case, the effects of the measure were limited. Part of the migrant population was indeed forced to leave the markets, but some of them developed strategies for bypassing the ban, for instance by employing Russian citizens or members of their family with Russian citizenship. Russian farmers did not massively replace Caucasian middlemen as had been planned.<sup>3</sup>

But this policy shows above all that the Russian government, instead of combating prejudices against migrants, uses these as a starting

<sup>1</sup> Interview at the Committee of Inter-Regional Links and National Politics of the City of Moscow, 26 January 2009.

<sup>2</sup> See the Clarifications of the Implementation of Decrees of the Russian Federation Government from 15 November 2006, No. 683 ‘On establishing acceptable numbers of foreign workers employed by managers engaged in retail activity on the territories of the Russian Federation for 2007’ <[www.rosspot-rebnadzor.ru/documents/postanovlenia/725/](http://www.rosspot-rebnadzor.ru/documents/postanovlenia/725/)>.

<sup>3</sup> Fieldwork observation and interview with Elena Tyuryukanova and Vassili Filipov, Moscow, March 2008.

point and adds to them simultaneously. By implementing a decree like this, the Russian government gives validity to those who think that there are too many foreigners trading in the markets; it is trying to resolve this 'problem' with cosmetic measures, by removing the supposed source of the tension. There are few voices to be heard speaking out against this distancing of foreigners. On the contrary, some officials criticise this measure not for its encouragement of xenophobia, but rather because it is useless and unable to reduce the number of foreigners: *the mediator is usually an Azerbaijani, who knows how to do this. But what else is there left for him to do? You invite an Azerbaijani to trade at a counter, one who already has a Russian passport. But the buyer, a Slav, who might be annoyed that there isn't a single Russian face to be seen, he doesn't ask for any passports. So nothing has changed. An Azerbaijani owner and an Azerbaijani trading at the counter. Except he has a Russian passport.*<sup>1</sup>

### 'Illegal = Thief'

On 19<sup>th</sup> January 2009, activists from *Molodaya Gvardia* met the train from Tashkent to Moscow with placards reading 'Illegal = Thief' and a stylised depiction of prison bars and handcuffs. They were chanting 'If you want to work, pay tax', and 'Work legally', and handing out leaflets detailing the process migrants need to go through in order to gain legal status. Similar protests were taking place at the same time in different cities in Russia.

Behind the pretence of concern for migrants (called upon to legalise their situation so as not to become vulnerable), the dominant factor is primarily stigmatisation: this protest action means that migrants arriving at Kazan train station are *a priori* illegal. Yet those coming from countries in Central Asia (with the exception of Turkmenistan) benefit from a system that does not require a visa to enter Russian Federation territory, and are not, by definition, illegal at the moment of their arrival<sup>2</sup>. Overall, the appeal for them to 'work legally' puts the responsibility of searching for legal work entirely on their shoulders, whereas the blame for the large number of workers having to work illegally in Russia lies to a significant extent with the employers and state migration policy (restrictive quotas, insufficiently strict sanctions on employers).

<sup>1</sup> Interview in The Committee of Inter-Regional Links and National Policy of the City of Moscow, 26 January 2009.

<sup>2</sup> Upon arrival migrants must obtain a residency registration within three working days. Since the introduction of new laws in July 2006, this 'registration' (*postanovka na uchet*) must be done through or with the support of their 'host' (a hotel or an employer) and cannot be refused. They can stay then for a period of at least 90 days. If they want to work, they have to apply for a work permit, which they receive if the Federal Service of Migration has not exceeded the set quotas. See also HRW report [Are You Happy to Cheat Us? 2009].

The stigmatisation of migrants as ‘illegal’ in reality allows *Molodaya Gvardiya* to develop the theme of the migrant thief by using several layers of meaning. As has been mentioned above, the first refers to the image of migrants ‘stealing’ work from Russian citizens. Thus migrants are turned into scapegoats and are given responsibility for the difficult economic situation, of which they themselves are the first victims.

The second latent issue is the idea that migrants take money from the Russian State whilst evading any taxes. Ruslan Gattarov, president of the political council of *‘Molodaya Gvardiya of United Russia’*, explains their action at the Kazan train station, saying ‘We want newcomers to Russia to understand that if they mean to work illegally, without paying taxes, they become common thieves. It is likely that many of them do not realise this’.<sup>1</sup> The issue of taxes has been used elsewhere as an argument for the adoption of new laws about migration in July 2007: designed to help migrants formalise their position more quickly, they should in time limit the tax evasion of migrant workers and their employers. However, migrants are not the only ones accused of not paying taxes. The very fact that they send their salaries home instead of spending or investing them in Russia is seen as a ‘theft’ from the country that allowed them to earn this money. Even K. Romodanovsky, director of the FMS, maintained this position when he stated in an interview in *Komsomolskaya Pravda*, ‘It is not for nothing that we are indignant at migrants not paying taxes. Indeed, if you do the calculations, it is a huge amount of money. Each year we lose more than 200 billion roubles in taxes alone, which employers do not pay. Plus each year foreign workers take around 260 billion roubles out of Russia back to their own country. In total we lose 460 billion at the least. And this money should go towards social services, pensioners and those on State salaries’.<sup>2</sup>

The third meaning of the slogan ‘Illegal = thief’ is in fact the most literal. Well before Russia began to feel the consequences of the crisis, the Russian media published a large number of alarmist articles suggesting that those migrants who were going to lose their jobs would inevitably turn to petty crime. President Medvedev himself reinforced this anxiety when he asked the Minister of Interior Affairs in February 2009 to track the growth of criminality amongst migrant workers. His speech established a clear link between ‘illegal migration’ and ‘crime’ in the following juxtaposition: ‘Another problem is illegal labour migration. It is well known that crime among people from

<sup>1</sup> ‘Our money — for our people!’. New stage of the campaign. Published on Monday 19 January 2009 — <<http://www.molgvardia.ru/nextday/2009/01/16/3871>> (last accessed January 2009)

<sup>2</sup> Olga Vadysheva, ‘The Head of the Federal Migration Service of the Russian Federation Konstantin Romodanovsky: New citizens are drawn to Russia by roubles, not persuasion’, 9 January 2007, <<http://www.kp.ru/daily/23834/61913/>>.

neighbouring countries who are staying in Russia is constantly growing'.<sup>1</sup>

In fact, not only is there no logical link between the two issues, but also the question of crime levels among migrants is debatable. Figures provided by the Minister of Interior Affairs Rachid Nurgaliev on 1 July 2009 show the percentage of foreigners among the total number of registered crimes in Russia (2.2%<sup>2</sup>) and not the number of foreigners resorting to criminal activity, or the proportion of foreigners in the population. Nevertheless, this does not prevent numerous statements in the press picking up on the theme of a growing criminality among migrants: 'In the Russian Federation the number of crimes committed by foreigners is growing, says head of the Ministry of Interior Affairs' (Itar Tass Ural, 1 July 2009); 'Russian Interior Ministry: Unemployed *Gastarbeiter* are populating the criminal world'.<sup>3</sup> The website newsru.com posted an item entitled 'Ministry of the Interior: Unemployed *Gastarbeiter* are swelling the ranks of the criminal class', and goes on to say that 'According to some information, some ten thousand Tajik citizens have become unemployed as a result of the Cherkizovsky market in Moscow being closed. Some of them might swell the ranks of the criminal classes when they find themselves without the means to survive'.<sup>4</sup>

Besides the sensationalist drive of the media, which is prepared to distort information or latch on to one detail as if it were the only one worth mentioning, the problem comes down to statistics and how to define crime. There is in effect no distinction in the statistics used between administrative offences and crimes. So if the work quotas are reduced, a greater number of migrants will be driven to work illegally and will find themselves committing an administrative offence<sup>5</sup>. The number of foreigners to have broken the law (regulating length of stay or permission to work) will have grown, which does not mean that they have become dangerous criminals for Russian society. Yet it is this which inspires the media and policy-makers, suggesting that migrants will automatically and naturally turn to criminality when they do not work.

<sup>1</sup> See: <<http://lenta.ru/news/2009/02/06/crimes/>>.

<sup>2</sup> 'From January to May of the current year in the country's territories 1,299,000 crimes were registered. [...] Foreign citizens and persons without citizenship committed 27,800 crimes, of which 25,600 were committed by citizens of member states of the CIS' <<http://www.mvd.ru/announce/6623/>>.

<sup>3</sup> This item from RosBusiness Consulting, <<http://top.rbc.ru/society/01/07/2009/313212.shtml>>, is also present on many other sites, such as <<http://www.centrasia.ru>>, <<http://newsland.ru>>, <<http://rssportal.ru>>.

<sup>4</sup> <[www.newsru.com](http://www.newsru.com)>, 1 July 2009

<sup>5</sup> In fact, migration is not falling as quickly as politicians would like, and migrants are continuing to arrive in Russia, despite the crisis. There is a fundamental contradiction in Russian migration policy, since by reducing their quotas the government 'creates' the very illegal migration they are supposed to be trying to combat.

### The 'Tajiki' — personification of an unskilled labourer who speaks poor Russian

It is also interesting to note that in the newsru.com post above, the Cherkizovsky market is mentioned in connection with citizens of Tajikistan. In fact this huge Moscow market has always been identified as a 'foreigners' market, and for this reason was the target of terrorist action in August 2006, but it is particularly the Azerbaijani presence which has been highlighted.<sup>1</sup> Yet it seems that in public discussion on migration there has been a gradual shift from the image of the 'Caucasian working in the market' to that of the 'immigrant from Central Asia working in construction'.

Thus the term 'Tajiki' has become a metonym signifying both migrants from Central Asia and unskilled labourers.<sup>2</sup> The most obvious example is probably the television programme *Nasha Rasha [Our 'Rusha']*, with its principal characters Ravshan and Dzhamsud who are two *Gastarbeiter* from Central Asia working for a Russian boss. The meaning of the sketches is ambiguous: the two Tajiks, lazy and incompetent, barely able to speak Russian, behave foolishly and get into various scrapes, but at the same time they use this technique of playing the fool as a strategy, and their jokes do not spare the Russians. Nevertheless, the popularity of this programme has served to reinforce the stereotype of the 'Tajik' as an 'unskilled labourer who speaks poor Russian and works in construction'.

This kind of stereotype has a tendency to be self-perpetuating, since most of the time a reference to nationality designates the fact that migrants do unskilled jobs (those who have skilled, academic or management positions are generally identified by their status, not their nationality).<sup>3</sup> By excluding qualified people from the 'Tajik' category, this usage not only groups together all Central Asian migrants doing unskilled jobs into the term 'Tajik', but also introduces the idea that Tajiks *are* unskilled. In reality, as often happens with migration or exile, people arriving in Russia are obliged to work in positions inferior to their actual level of qualifications (doctors working as nurses, teachers working as waitresses etc). But the

<sup>1</sup> The former vice-director of the FMS, V. Postavnin, even spoke about an Azerbaijani ghetto: '...in the area of the Cherkizovsky market, where many Azerbaijan citizens live, the outflow of the native population was beginning to show. The assimilation and integration of newcomers into society in these kinds of region generally does not take place, they begin to live by their own laws'. V. Postavnin, *Vremya Novosti*, 16 November 2006, <<http://www.vremya.ru/2006/211/51/165741.html>>.

<sup>2</sup> In the same way, Nicolas Jounin shows in his research on construction workers in France that the terms 'African' and 'Malian' are used interchangeably, and that the surname 'Mamadou' systematically referred to unqualified African workers who were low down on a professional hierarchy built upon ethnic distinctions [Jounin 2008].

<sup>3</sup> A Tadjik researcher in Russia is most likely to be called a 'researcher', while a Tadjik working on a building site will be referred to as a 'Tadjik'. Just so, it would never occur to the French to call a scholar from Magreb an 'Arab', whereas this word is widely used in relation to, for example, the owners of small grocer's shops.

stereotype causes a shift: a specific social situation is turned into an intrinsic characteristic of people from a certain region. Therefore, from the description of one objective situation (migrants from Central Asia essentially doing unskilled jobs) we arrive at a depreciation of migrants themselves ('migrants from Central Asia *are* unskilled').

In this way during an interview, the director of a Moscow company dealing with building sewerage and heating systems explained that he had brought miners from different regions of Russia to work twenty metres underground because 'The Tajiks are afraid'<sup>1</sup>. According to him, these fearful Tajiks can only be employed to carry out unskilled labour, since 'the Tajiks don't work with electricity, you need specially trained staff. But they can dig trenches'. While explaining how his company cares for the well-being of its staff, this director said that they organised Russian lessons because 'the Tajik' understands Russian less and less. Which is a problem, he continued, laughing, because 'otherwise you can't swear at him [...] he looks at you like a clever dog, he understands everything but can't say anything.'

This idea that migrants from Central Asia do not speak Russian is very widespread, and here also the process of stereotyping leads to a shift. From the description of a sociolinguistic situation (Russian is used much less now in Central Asia than during Soviet times, so the younger generation speak it much less proficiently than their elders), one depreciates the linguistic ability of the 'Tajiks' in general, who they imagine to be able to identify just three Russian words, much like Ravshan in the *Our 'Rusha'* sketches.

This generalisation, suffused with real contempt (cf. the above comparison of the Tajik to a dog), also has consequences in terms of public policy. The issue of language tests for migrants has in fact been discussed a number of times at the Duma. Introduced in November 2008, and rejected once in January 2009, a law making language tests for migrants obligatory was approved by the Duma at its first reading at the end of June 2009. This law will make a language exam obligatory in order to obtain a residence permit and offers those who pass the exam the possibility of extending their work permit from one to two years. According to this bill, migrant workers should acquire a minimum of 780 words, which is considered as the minimum to understand security instructions. The tension upon which Russian migration policy is based is clearly visible here: it is the poor language ability of migrants which supposedly prevents them from integrating; on the other hand, they are only viewed as temporary workers (as the use of the term *Gastarbeiter* suggests), and a minimum language level useful for work interaction is demanded [Pavlikova 2009].

<sup>1</sup> Interview, Moscow, 29 January 2009.

Finally, the stereotype of the migrant speaking poor Russian acquired an additional political dimension with the mini scandal provoked by the statements made by the Minister for Culture Alexander Avdeev on 30 June 2009. During a press conference (following a meeting on the topic of tolerance), he put forward the idea that the Russian language was being degraded because of migrants: *People have begun to travel more, they are more willing to move in search of work, a better climate or a better future for their children [...] In many respects because of these migratory processes people have begun to speak poorer Russian.*<sup>1</sup> Although the meaning of this statement is not altogether obvious, in that it seems primarily to refer to internal migration, the press rushed to interpret it as an allusion to foreign migrant workers. An item on the site Lenta.ru was entitled 'Culture minister accused migrants of spoiling Russian language' (30 June 2009); a couple of days later, after the minister was forced to apologise, the site followed up with 'Culture minister admitted migrants are not guilty of spoiling Russian language' (Lenta.ru, 2<sup>nd</sup> July 2009). *Moskovskii Komsomolets* states clearly that 'labour migrants influence language usage in a negative way'.<sup>2</sup> In the case of the minister's statements here, the media were primarily responsible for the stigmatisation of migrants, but the end result was the same: migrants were not only accused of speaking poor Russian, but also of having a negative influence on the host society.

### The fear of 'contagious' migrants

Similar accusations indicating the negative influence of migrants and the danger that they represent are most often expressed in the realm of health. Numerous headlines taken from newspapers or internet news sites demonstrate the fear of illnesses that migrants could bring into Russia: 'In Russia every tenth labour migrant suffers from tuberculosis, AIDS or hepatitis' (<[www.newsru.com](http://www.newsru.com)>, 22 February 2007); 'Which illnesses are migrants bringing to Moscow?' (*Moskovskii Komsomolets* (MK), 14 August 2007); 'Moscow is filling up with infectious Gastarbeiter' (MK, 22 January 2008); 'Temporary newcomers are spoiling the map' (an article on the epidemiological situation in St Petersburg, *Chas Pik [Rush Hour]*, St Petersburg, 28 January — 3 February 2009); 'Migrants bring infection' (MK in Petersburg, 27 May 2009).<sup>3</sup> This last article, which is about tuberculosis, says, in fact, that there are no official statistics. Indeed, the actual content of most of these articles does little to back up such alarmist headlines

<sup>1</sup> 'Migration guilty of poor level of Russian language', <[http://www.bbc.co.uk/russian/russia/2009/06/090630\\_russian\\_language\\_avdeev.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/russian/russia/2009/06/090630_russian_language_avdeev.shtml)>.

<sup>2</sup> 'Russian citizens are speaking poorer Russian. Labour migrants have influenced newsreaders', MK, 30<sup>th</sup> June 2009, <[http://mk.ru/social/310486.html?phrase\\_id=1542575](http://mk.ru/social/310486.html?phrase_id=1542575)>.

<sup>3</sup> <<http://www.mk-piter.ru/2009/05/28/026/>>.

and the accusations that it is, indeed, migrants who ‘bring infection’ to Russia are rarely corroborated.

Admittedly, various medical NGOs or international organisations point out the degradation of healthcare, and especially the rise of tuberculosis, in Central Asia.<sup>1</sup> But all the above articles actually mix together different kinds of diseases, with no precision about, for instance, what kind of hepatitis is being talked about — A, B or C — and with confusion occurring even between, say, sexually transmitted diseases and tuberculosis.

This confusion, as well as fear of contagion, can be seen in the interview with an employee of the Moscow mayor’s office cited above: *An average of 15% of people who come to us are infected with an illness. This becomes evident here when they are tested. They have illnesses such as hepatitis, tuberculosis, syphilis and HIV. [...] They have to have a blood test in one place, undergo other diagnostics in another, and in this way they mix with a whole crowd of Muscovites around the city, and with the density of population being 13,000 people per square kilometre this is not a particularly welcome situation.*<sup>2</sup>

*This fear of contagion is based on an inversion of the idea of a ‘risk group’, which implies that a group is vulnerable and risks catching certain diseases. Here, it implies that migrants themselves are a risk for the Russian population.*<sup>3</sup>

Once again, these representations have consequences for migration policy, as they are used to justify the imposition of stricter controls on migrants’ health. Indeed, although the principle of special health check-ups for migrants is quite universal (see, for example, the role of the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) on an international level), it takes a specific form in Russia. After receiving their work permit, migrants have to go through a medical check-up that involves the detection of potential carriers of what are termed ‘socially dangerous diseases’ (TB, AIDS, syphilis, other sexually transmitted diseases, leprosy, etc.) as well as of potential drug-users. The health certificate they receive must be brought back to the Federal Migration Service within one month. If a migrant fails to present this certificate or if s/he is found out to be ill, his/her work permit is cancelled and s/he is supposed to leave Russia. In case of AIDS s/he can be deported.

<sup>1</sup> Moreover, we should recall that there is usually a distinction between ‘imported diseases’ (brought by migrants from their country of origin, where this disease is endemic) and ‘acquired diseases’ — contracted by migrants in their place of arrival because of their difficult living or working condition. In the case of TB, for example, the fact that migrants are forced to live in overcrowded and sometimes insalubrious places, makes TB an ‘acquired’ disease as much as an imported one.

<sup>2</sup> Interview in The Committee of Inter-Regional Links and National Policy of the City of Moscow, 26 January 2009.

<sup>3</sup> We should also note that migrants suffer from the same kind of stigmatisation in their home country, where they are accused by the health authorities of bringing back certain diseases from Russia, especially AIDS.

These measures, adopted following new legislation of 2006, are however not universally considered to be sufficient. In June 2006 for example, during a debate on the new laws on migration, the deputy of the LPDR Kurianovich criticised the rule which gave migrants a month to pass the medical tests, saying 'In the course of a month a foreign citizen can certainly spread infectious diseases, pass on AIDS and other infections to Russian citizens [...] You don't need to wait a whole month to contract bird flu or syphilis'.<sup>1</sup> In January 2009, a group of delegates from *Edinaya Rossiya* introduced a bill calling for obligatory insurance for migrants, which would mean that migrants would have to provide medical certificates upon arrival in the country.<sup>2</sup>

Migrants are also accused of paying for and using false medical certificates. To avoid this problem, the Moscow authorities intend to introduce a 'foreign guest card' containing a microchip; approved doctors will input the results of medical tests into an information database. The information contained in this database would be accessible to the Ministry for Work and the FMS but also the FSB<sup>3</sup>. So under the pretext of protecting the health of Muscovites, it would in fact be establishing a new system of computerised control of migrants involving the police.

These health measures are meant to protect Russian society and to ensure a physically healthy migrant workforce,<sup>4</sup> but certainly not to take any responsibility for it: if a migrant worker fails the health test s/he is supposed to be taken care of in the home country. The Russian State will step in only in the case of emergency: standard TB treatments, for example, are available only to Russian citizens, while migrants can be treated only if they have 'open' forms of tuberculosis.<sup>5</sup> According to the law, all migrant workers have the right to medical insurance,<sup>6</sup> yet in practice employers very rarely provide for it.

<sup>1</sup> <[http://wbase.duma.gov.ru/steno/nph-sdb.exe?B0CW\[F11&28.06.2006&F11&28.06.2006&F11&&F258&^&\]X2366](http://wbase.duma.gov.ru/steno/nph-sdb.exe?B0CW[F11&28.06.2006&F11&28.06.2006&F11&&F258&^&]X2366)>.

<sup>2</sup> 'The Duma is to Examine a Bill on Obligatory Medical Care for Migrants', 15 January 2009, <[http://www.gazeta.ru/news/lenta/2009/01/15/n\\_1317695.shtml](http://www.gazeta.ru/news/lenta/2009/01/15/n_1317695.shtml)>.

<sup>3</sup> The 'Map of the Foreign Guest' is a document for internal use from the Moscow Administration, given by E. Chernetsov; see also interview with M. Solomentsev, Director of the Committee for International Relations in the Moscow City Administration, *Rossiskaya Gazeta*, 29 December 2008, <<http://www.rg.ru/2008/12/29/solomencev.html>>.

<sup>4</sup> This approach is not specific to Russia. In France, there were special health check-ups for those migrants invited from the French colonies before the end of the 1960s to work in the coal mines in the north of the country. However, the approach has changed since then in France. Asylum seekers and foreigners still have to take a medical exam, but persons who are seriously ill can request to stay in France if they cannot receive proper treatment in their home country.

<sup>5</sup> Interview with Olimi Shirinbek and Marteen Kocklerocken from Médecins du Monde, Moscow, 28 January 2009.

<sup>6</sup> See [Are You Happy to Cheat Us? 2009: 67].

As the director of the Moscow company providing water and heating mentioned above explained, it would be possible to come to an agreement with a private hospital or take out insurance policies for migrants working on their building sites. However, he added, if the migrant leaves Russia, this insurance is rendered useless, the more so because he cannot be sure that the foreign worker will fall ill during his stay in Russia (sic). Therefore his company prefers to pay when a problem arises and resort to ambulance services, since ‘an ambulance will take anyone’. Migrants who are ill are generally sent back to their home country (‘It’s fine as long as you manage to get him into the train alive’). In cases of death the company pays funeral fees, which demonstrates, the director concludes, that ‘it’s a myth that migrants are cheap’.

### **Conclusion: migrants’ view of themselves and the host society**

An important question has been left aside in this paper: how do migrants themselves, living in Russia, deal with these representations and stereotypes? A brief conclusion can be drawn by quoting some interviews conducted in Moscow with migrant workers from Central Asia (Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan).<sup>1</sup> Indeed, discussions with them showed that they were, of course, well aware of the dominant representations of migrant workers (poor, working in low-paid jobs, living in poverty, having poor Russian) and even seemed to appropriate some of these stereotypes in their own self-representation, while at the same time seeking to distance themselves from or deflect this image. They clearly felt depreciated by their situation in Russia, but dealt with their loss of status as migrants in different ways.

A 40-year-old Kyrgyz woman, working as a cleaning lady, was clearly distressed by her situation. When asked if she was ever given time off when she was ill, she answered: *If I have the flu, yes. They have a little pharmacy, and if I say I have a headache, they ask right away ‘Have you got the flu?’ They ask so that they don’t catch it too. People visit us, so it’s important that they don’t catch anything from us.* She herself was a nurse back in Kyrgyzstan, and may share the common Soviet-era fear of infectious diseases, including common ones, such as flu. But one cannot help seeing a form of symbolic violence in the fact that the prime concern (both for her and for her employer) was not her own health, but the health of potential customers. This sense of symbolic violence was there in the background throughout the interview. She apologised several times for her ‘bad Russian’ (even though in fact she spoke it fluently), regretting that ‘now I know neither Kyrgyz nor Russian, just a mop and cloth, that’s all’.

<sup>1</sup> Interviews with migrants were done at the ‘Trade Union of Migrant Workers’ in Moscow, where they came to get work permits and registration certificates.

By contrast, a 50-year-old woman from Pamir, who used to be a teacher of Russian in Tajikistan and who now works as a waitress and cleaner in Moscow, answered by turning her difficult life into something to be proud of: *Muscovites don't work hard, they get fired, and they are lazy. But we immigrants, we work. We are poor, born in the mountains, we toiled on the land, slaving away, and here we will accept any conditions. How do the Muscovites live? They sit in their rooms, go out, have a good time, drink — they can't stay on their feet for 12 hours. Whereas I work 15-hour days.* By creating a reverse stereotype of the Russians', she turned into a virtue precisely those aspects of the Tajik' that Russians seemed to denigrate.

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This text examines the perception of migrants in the elites, the media and public opinion, and analyses how this perception influences Russian migration policy, and how in turn migration policy leaves its mark on the image of migrants. This mutual influence can be seen for example in the decision to cut the quotas due to the economic crisis of 2008, the actions of *Molodaya Gvardiya* directed at 'illegals', and also the widespread image of the 'Tajik' or the 'contagious migrant'.

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