

Press release of the conference:

“Twenty five years on: between the Soviet past and an unclear European and Eurasian future”

25-27 November Central European University hosted the conference "25 years later: between the Soviet past and uncertain European and Eurasian future ", devoted to the study of migration processes taking place after the collapse of the Socialist system. The conference was attended by over 60 experts from Romania, Hungary, Slovakia, Czech Republic, Serbia, Lithuania, Latvia, Russia, Ukraine, Moldova, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, Georgia, Armenia, as well as from Canada, Israel, Great Britain, Italy, and experts from the International Red Cross. Altogether there were 40 reports.

At the plenary session presented researcher of the Project for Migration and Security Studies on the post-Soviet space, of the Central European University Dr. Irina Molodikova, President of the International Council for the Study of Forced Migration of the CIS and Baltic states Professor Zhanna Zayonchkovskaya and Director of the Center for Inter-ethnic Relations of the Institute of Sociology of the Russian Academy of Sciences, Academician Leocadia Drobizheva.

Over the past 25 years the number of countries on the post-socialist space has increased from 9 to 29 (plus 5 unrecognized states). After the fall of the Iron Curtain, all these countries became involved in international migration movements. This led to the fact that migration processes have undergone radical changes, though two of the leading vectors of migration - from all countries of the region to the West, and from the countries of the former Soviet Union to Russia - remain unchanged. Thus, Russia and Germany are among the three countries with the largest number of international migrants in the world (for 2015 - 11.6 and 12 million respectively).

Unfortunately, the problem of forced migration due to ethnic conflicts in the post-Soviet space also remains relevant. Only in the 1990s the number of refugees and internally displaced persons amounted to more than 5 million people. Over the past 25 years more than 20 million people have moved from the former socialist countries to the West, and there appeared new diasporas, actively interacting with both the local population and with the countries of origin. Due to the mass emigration in many places (Romania, Bulgaria, all the Balkan countries, Moldova, Ukraine, the Baltic States), the population is rapidly declining. It leads to a tough demographic crisis, which manifests itself in a sharp decrease of population of the working age, in disruption of the sex and age structure of population, in the shortage of qualified personnel for the development of the national economies. In recent years, powerful migration corridors had formed between the countries of the former USSR. According to the World Bank the trafficking of migrants between Ukraine and Russia in 2013 in both direction was more than 6 million people, and between Russia and Kazakhstan – about 5 million people, ranking at second and

third places in the world respectively after migration corridors between the US and Mexico. For many countries, remittance received from emigrant population is the most important source of replenishment of the budget (for example, in Tadzhikistan- more than 40%, in Kyrgyzstan - 30%, in Moldova- 26%, in Armenia -18%, in Georgia- 12%, etc.)

Gender composition of migrants also is changing, more and more women in all countries become involved in the process of labor migration. For sending countries this often means the destruction of traditional family ties.

In the receiving countries (i.e. for Western Europe, Russia and Kazakhstan), a sharp surge of migrants in the context of the current economic crisis creates more competition for jobs, increasing ethnic diversity and causes the growth of xenophobia among the native population. In many sending countries, on the contrary, the outcome is the process of ethnic homogenization, ejecting abroad primarily ethnic minorities. For example, Balkan and the South Caucasus countries, which were characterized by multi-ethnic composition in the past, were transformed into mono-ethnic countries (for example, the proportion of the indigenous population in Georgia was about 71% in 1989, while in 2014 - already 87%).

Studies have shown that the tightening of the visa regime leads, among other things, to an increase in illegal migration and irregular employment. Unfortunately, in recent times zone of free movement and access to employment has declined. In the European Union in connection with the refugee crisis in recent years, an active construction of the wall on the borders has started. Since 2011 the number of border walls increased from three to sixteen.

The Conference also paid attention to the problems of integration of migrants in host communities, noting that it is a complex process. However, even in a country like Israel, which pays great attention to the integration of immigrants, a certain gap in salaries between the natives of the former socialist countries, the local population and immigrants from Western countries remains for decades. In other countries, such gap may be even higher.

It is gratifying to note that, along with venerable scholars who have working in the field of migration for a long time, at the conference were present many young scientists and graduate students who shared results of their studies.

Prof. Ruben Mnatsakanian

Dr. Irina Molodikova