

**BOOK REVIEW:**

**Olga R. Gulina. (2019). *Migration as a (Geo-)Political Challenge in the Post-Soviet Space: Border Regimes, Policy Choices, Visa Agendas*. Stuttgart: Ibidem Verlag**

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Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, newly independent countries have used (im)migration policies as a tool for influencing foreign policy choices of neighbouring countries, enforcing ethno-based nation-building, winning elections in internal politics, and controlling population. Dr. Olga Gulina's *Migration as a (Geo-)Political Challenge in the Post-Soviet Space* analyses migration policies in the post-Soviet space. When it comes to migration studies in the Eurasian space, most scholars have focused on migration developments in Russia. In this regard, Gulina's book stands out as it examines not only Russia's policies, but also that of neighboring countries in the region. As the author notes, the ruling elites of the newly independent states exploit, with different degrees of intensity and success, institutions and rules of migration laws, including the granting of citizenship, asylum, temporary and permanent residence authorization, etc., in order to advance certain foreign and domestic policies. The book utilizes rich data of statistics and provides comprehensive analysis of legislative developments in the countries in question.

Gulina organizes her book into eight chapters: the first chapter discusses legal framework of migration management in post-Soviet states. Two separate chapters are dedicated to migration policies in each Russia and Ukraine. Migrants from the post-Soviet countries in the European Union and diaspora and repatriation policies are also discussed in separate chapters. As noted in the introductory chapter, in examining the impact of migration policies on legal, social, and economic dynamics, we can advance our understanding about political challenges ahead in the post-Soviet countries.

In Chapter 1, Gulina gives a detailed analysis of how the legal framework of migration management was formed and developed after the collapse of the Soviet Union. Examining the first laws regulating population mobility in post-Soviet countries, the author *notes* that in Belarus, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan, the right to freedom of movement belonged only to citizens of these states. In other countries—Armenia, Azerbaijan, Russia, Georgia, Ukraine and Kazakhstan—the right to freedom of movement and choice of place of residence was reserved for everyone legally residing in these countries. The legal formalization of the mass movement of people in the first years of state-building in independent countries was carried out by means of such by-laws as orders, resolutions or instructions of various state bodies. It was only in the second half of 1990s, when the countries developed their laws of migration management. Legal changes in 2000s were closely related to the matter of ensuring security in the independent states, combating illegal migration and managing migration for internal demographic purposes. In 2010s, Gulina argues, capitalistic approach to migration prevailed and the countries started to monetize migration and its social capital.

In Chapter 2, Gulina further develops her argument that migration management has become a geopolitical tool in the post-Soviet space. The rules governing the issuance of visas or work permits, legalization of undocumented migrants, the granting of citizenship and/or asylum are the subject of political bargaining; as such they are used as instruments for leverage in both foreign and domestic policy making, the author argues. As examples, Gulina examines Russia's relations with Georgia, Ukraine and Belarus from the perspective of migration management. Particularly, Russian-Georgian confrontation before and especially after the August 2008 conflict was partly carried out in visa regimes: either by complicating or relaxing visa applications. The Russian-Ukrainian conflict that started in 2014 and the following granting of citizenship to thousands of Ukrainians turned upside down the migration management in the region. The author concludes that the institutions of migration law in Georgia, Ukraine, Belarus and Russia are designed to serve foreign policy objectives; when circumstances change, then the migration laws also change to suit.

Chapter 3 discusses migration as a geopolitical challenge to Russia. While one of the largest migrant destinations, Russia faces a serious demographic challenge of population decline. In 2018, the population of Russia was 146.7 million inhabitants (without Crimea's population—144.4), which is less compared to 148.6 million residents in 1993. Internal migration to the European part of the country, where 79 percent of residents live, also leads to depopulation of Russia's vast eastern territories. Russia is trying to compensate population loss with migration from other countries, which also means cheap production costs for its economy. Establishing visa regime with Central Asian countries, as populist-nationalist activists demand, would not meet the economic and political interests of Russia. According to the author, the major change in Russia's migration dynamics over the last few years has come from the Russian-Ukrainian conflict, which has had a dramatic effect on the volumes and composition of migration flows. Gulina concludes that migration management in Russia focuses on meeting the political needs of the country, which can be at odds with Russia's demographic, socio-cultural and other interests.

In Chapters 4 and 5, Ukraine's migration policies and Ukrainians' migration strategies are analyzed. Although Ukraine supplied large numbers of economic migrants and asylum seekers to both European and post-Soviet (mostly Russia and Belarus) countries, nicknamed by some as "Europe's Mexico," Gulina argues that Ukraine is not a country of emigrants, rather immense movement of Ukrainians abroad took place in certain historical periods caused by political, economic and social upheavals. Especially, the conflict with Russia marked a transformational change in the choice of destination for migrants: between going to the east (Russia) or the west (EU member states). The author tried to illuminate the legal aspects of migration management from Ukraine to Russia and Belarus. Since the crisis in Ukraine, both Moscow and Kyiv started to use citizenship and residency institutions as instruments in political games. This led to a situation when a large number of population may be considered by both Russia and Ukraine to be citizens, without allowances for dual nationality. Given the lack of clarity and the ongoing crisis in Ukraine, Gulina warns that one should not expect a solution of the problem in the coming years. Flow of Ukrainian people to Russia following the crisis

and subsequent Western sanctions against Russia could complicate the situation in remittance-dependent countries of Central Asia and may lead to the re-drawing of the migration landscape in the post-Soviet space, the author writes.

Chapter 6 scrutinizes the migration laws of the European Union member states with regard to asylum seekers from the post-Soviet countries. In particular, different strategies in the designation of “safe countries of origin” by EU members states vis-a-vis the countries of the former Soviet Union. Rich statistical data are provided to demonstrate migration choices of humanitarian migrants in the European Union. Gulina also discusses EU’s visa liberalization policy in Moldova, Georgia and Ukraine. By chance or design, visa liberalization opens avenues for tackling “states with limited recognition”—specifically Transnistria in Moldova, the self-proclaimed republics of Abkhazia and South Ossetia in Georgia, and the Lugansk and Donetsk regions of Ukraine.

Chapter 7 raises the questions of whether and how far compatriots and diaspora members, through their ties and cultural interactions with home and host countries, have an impact on foreign and domestic agenda in post-Soviet countries. After the creation of the newly independent states, former Soviet citizens were engaged in negotiating newly established identities. This involved a new understanding of diasporic self-identification and challenges of migrants’ diversity. Over the course of past years, post-Soviet countries, except for Belarus, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan, have institutionalized their relations with diasporas through ministries, agencies, GONGOs and NGOs. Out of seven countries which have launched repatriation policies, the author analyzed those of three countries: Russia (*sootchestvenniki*), Kazakhstan (*oralman*) and Kyrgyzstan (*kairylman*). Gulina notes that while repatriation policy of Russia is designed to compensate population decline, repatriation programs in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan aim to increase a ratio of titular nation in line with their idea of building a nation-state.

In the concluding chapter, the author notes that the post-Soviet countries had to choose between orienting towards the European Union, towards a Eurasian Union, or somehow in between. While Moldova, Georgia and Ukraine chose a European approach, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan have maintained the Eurasian/Russian approach. Armenia, Belarus and Kazakhstan try to keep both approaches. Interestingly, Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan, and to a lesser extent Uzbekistan, due to their countries’ specific geopolitical circumstances, have chosen to carve their own paths and have not prioritized either the European or the Eurasian approach. As the main rule setter, moves and policies of Russia set off actions and reactions across post-Soviet space and beyond. Gulina concludes that there is a danger of current geopolitical games in the field of immigration leading to the fencing off of territories and people from one another. In fact, on-going conflict, introduction of restrictive migration policies, increasingly tight visa regulation, and accelerated repatriation programs across post-Soviet countries serve to alienate many inhabitants of newly independent states, exacerbate tensions within these new states, and xenophobia against different ethnic groups.

The main critique of the book can be attributed to the lack of an analytical framework. It does not contribute to theoretical discussions of migration studies in the Eurasian space. Although the book’s name suggests the whole post-Soviet countries, very

little space is given to Central Asia, where huge migration processes have been taking place for the last two decades. Kazakhstan, which has become both transit and destination country for migration, is mentioned in a couple of paragraphs. Having perspectives of migrant-sending countries of Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan as well as that of migrant-receiving Kazakhstan would be an additional asset to the book's appeal.

Despite this critique, *Migration as a (Geo-)Political Challenge in the Post-Soviet Space* is an important contribution in understanding migration processes in this part of the world. It provides a thorough analysis of how migration was used as a tool of foreign and domestic policy goals. The analysis of legislative framework of migration regulation and rich statistical data make the book interesting to those interested in understanding the key features of migration processes in the post-Soviet countries.