

The Influence of Political and Economic Factors on Emigration From Russia to Europe

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Abstract

This research examines the influence and interaction of economic and political factors on the process of emigration from the Russian Federation to European countries (e.g., Finland, Switzerland, and Spain) from 1996 to 2019. According to the theoretical part, we determined that the scale of emigration decreases with an increase in GDP per capita. However, with a sharp increase in GDP at the turn of the 2000s, the emigration from Russia to the selected countries has only increased in what can be considered a phenomenon. Following the theoretical framework, we have determined that this process can be facilitated by some extra variable, which in our case is political freedom. To visualize the process, we observe the indicator of freedom of expression, which moderately declined from 1999 to 2016. As a result of the comparative analysis of migration, economic and political data from OECD, Eurostat, and V-Dem Institute, we determined that due to the deterioration of political freedoms within the country, negative political factors have shifted positive economic growth and affected the increase of emigration scale to the selected European countries.

Keywords

Demography; economy; emigration; political freedom; Russia

Introduction

Migration achieves one of the most critical forms of social adaptation and plays the role of the engine for the development of many states. On the contrary, the emigration process can pose significant risks for donor countries as they lose many prospective working age inhabitants (Pokrovsky, 2006). After the collapse of the Soviet Union, followed by “opened borders,” the dissemination of information, and socioeconomic problems, emigration outflows from the Russian Federation increased significantly. Emigration abroad occurs through multiple channels, including permanent work, education, marriage, etc. At that time, Russian officials did not pay much attention to the statistics, yet its scale was significant with an increasing dynamic (Denisenko, 2012). Thus, it was unclear about the actual scope of emigration flow and the main factors for emigration. This situation contributed to a critical increase in emigration in subsequent years, as the government could not take effective measures due to a lack of adequate information (Zorin, 2019). According to estimates, there were about 20 million Russian emigrants in European and North American countries alone at the beginning of the 1990s. Over the past 30 years, their number has increased by about 2.5–3 million (Lokosov & Rybakovsky, 2014).

Today, emigration is a central problem for Russian officials as negative population growth significantly aggravates the shortage of the reproductive age working population (Becker, 1991). For example, in 2020, the population of the Russian Federation, for the first time in the last 15 years, decreased by more than 500,000 people (Federal State Statistics Service of the Russian Federation, 2020a). At the same time, emigration flows increased dramatically among all social groups, especially among highly qualified specialists, as their share increased from 14% in 1992 to 31% in 1999 and 47% in 2012. Moreover, the number of scientists who emigrated from Russia amounted to more than 42,000. At the same time, the growing number of scientists with a Ph.D. is worrying, seeing as in 2003, there were 63 scientists, then in 2012, their number reached 234 (Iontsev & Magamedova, 2015).

To continue, the annual scale of temporary labor emigration from Russia (only through official sources) is 60,000 to 70,000 people. It should be noted that temporary labor migration is often transformed into permanent. Many Russians who left as labor migrants got permanent residence in the host countries. European countries (e.g., Germany, France, Spain, and Finland) usually hold high-ranking positions in the emigration of Russians (Federal State Statistics Service of the Russian Federation, 2020b). This happens due to the Russian regional differentiation phenomenon in terms of the intensity of emigration processes. In this regard, specific stable geographic areas of labor emigration can be highlighted. For example, the population of the Russian Far East who work in the states of the Asia-Pacific region (Japan, Korea, China, Australia, New Zealand, etc.). However, the Russian Far East is poorly populated, so the number of Russians emigrating to the Asia-Pacific region is insignificant. On the contrary, residents of the most populated North-West and Central regions go to European countries (Ryazantsev & Tkachenko, 2006). In this regard, emigration from Russia to Europe is among the most abundant.

Speaking about Russia, it has always been famous for its scientists and cultural and historical figures whose contribution to the development of world society was significant. Despite this, the emigration process among these population groups has always been a serious problem for Russia. In Soviet times emigration was associated with numerous repressions of the intelligentsia and those who did not share principles of communism (Benson, 1960). However,

in recent decades the structure and form of emigration from the Russian Federation have been shaped, preserving significant and increasing dynamics. First of all, this process happened due to substantial changes in the country's economic sector and the political atmosphere since the collapse of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) (Aslund, 2019). To continue, among the most popular destinations for the emigration of Russians is the European region which has gained popularity due to the high quality of life and proximity to the borders of the European part of Russia, where most of the country's population lives (Polyan, 2005). In this regard, we form our research question: What is the ratio between political and economic factors in emigration from Russia to Europe?

Theoretical framework

The concept of emigration has several dimensions (economic, political, cultural, and social), and each set specific guidelines for migration processes and research methods. Robinson (2018) stated that the current economic situation and political atmosphere worry Russians the most. In this paper, we want to investigate the causal relationship of factors that influence emigration from Russia to Europe (economic and political). Economic factors that affect migration usually manifest in unemployment and a decrease in the population's income. Political factors are more complex and include several interrelated features, such as freedom of speech and choice, an independent judicial branch, democracy level, and so on. In this connection, when people face the problems mentioned above, they do not have many solutions; therefore, the most popular is emigration. Thus, economic and political factors strongly influence migration processes, making them the most appropriate for empirical evaluation.

We selected these two indicators because they perform the most influential reasons for emigration (Adamson & Tsourapas, 2019), as well as make it possible to access several research directions and methods:

- Identification of emigration factors and priorities of Russian citizens.
- Development of an integrated methodology to assess political and economic consequences of emigration from Russia, as well as the assessment of the impact and the loss of economic and demographic potential of emigration from Russia.
- Generalization of effective practices of different countries and their implementation of state policy regarding the improvement of migration and economic policy of Russia to reduce emigration outflows.
- Assessment of the effectiveness and improvement of public policy aimed to reduce the “ejector” emigration factors at the federal, regional, and local levels.
- Analysis of foreign countries' experiences in attracting features and resources for migrants.

We should note that most studies on emigration from Russia are narrowly focused. However, they discuss essential issues—rights of migrants, working conditions, and citizenship—conducted on different groups of migrants (ethnic, geographical, social). Moreover, most large research projects are funded by foreign organizations, while Russian funds usually finance

only small-scale projects with no practical output. For example, they investigate human trafficking in Russia, labor migration from Central Asian countries to Russia, protection of the rights of migrant workers, etc. (Nikiforova & Brednikova, 2018). All these topics are of scientific significance but narrowly focused and usually do not consider state migration policy. As a rule, the works of foreign research centers focus on fundamental sociological, economic, and ethnic aspects of the migration situation and migration policy of Russia, such as problems of migration regulation in Russia; the impact of migration on the Russian labor market; migration in the post-Soviet space, etc. Among international research centers with a strong output on migration processes in Russia, we can highlight Slavic Research Center at Hokkaido University (Sapporo, Japan); Centre for the study of Russia, and the CIS countries at Hitotsubashi University (Tokyo, Japan); Centre for contemporary studies of the Caucasus and Central Asia of the modern School of Oriental and African Studies at University of London (London, UK); University of Eastern Finland (Joensuu, Finland); and the European Schumann University (Florence, Italy).

Thus, to develop a well-structured theoretical framework, we should not refer to Russian articles based on state-funded projects. In this regard, we will highlight mainly independent Russian research projects or international ones. Regarding the theoretical approach to political and economic interaction with emigration from Russia, we should divide these variables regarding their area of scientific research. However, we should investigate these concepts coherently (Tuccio et al., 2019). Otherwise, if we try to link some economic/political theories with migration ones, we will face multiple misunderstandings regarding the main path of their synergies. Therefore, we will not be able to form our hypothesis on their basis. In this regard, we should take only those migration theories where emigration is analyzed in the context of political and economic factors.

It should be noted that in modern Russian science, emigration processes are studied to a lesser extent than immigration ones. As a result, this is reflected in the country's migration policy, which has a noticeable "bias" toward the regulation of immigration and practically performs no actions toward emigration (Ryazantsev & Pismennaya, 2013). However, due to emigration, the country loses highly skilled professionals and young people of reproductive age. In this connection, we can highlight five theoretical approaches to investigate our topic among the studies on emigration from Russia and general emigration issues.

The first one is a statistical and geographical approach to studying Russian emigration. This direction focuses on the geographical spread, and statistical extent of emigration flows from Russia. According to Denisenko (2012), Europe became the main attraction point for Russians due to several prominent features, such as relative geographical proximity to the European part of Russia and a low cost of living compared to North America and Australia. Kolstø (1996) and Ryazantsev and Tkachenko (2006) argued that the resettlement trajectories of Russians depend on the economic component. Those countries with a higher quality of life are a priority for Russian migrants. Bilsborrow et al. (1997) highlighted some crucial problems of statistical analysis of migration processes in Russia, which are still relevant today and reviewed below in the Data section and considered during our empirical part. Overall, this approach explains the popularity of the European region as a destination for emigration and confirms our selection of this region for further research.

The second direction presents a historical framework of migration processes in Russia. This topic was described in Polyak (2005) and Zayonchkovskaya and Korobkov (2004). The main idea of the historical approach is that after the USSR's collapse, a significant transformation of the whole migration structure emerged from internal to external. This was closely followed

by political changes (e.g., conflicts, new borders, passport systems). As a result, many people found themselves in entirely new socioeconomic conditions and statuses (Tingi, 2012). Thus, such a situation influenced people's perception of the migration process and the main factors for emigration. In this regard, we can argue that the reasons for emigration are variable and influenced by external factors.

In the third direction, emigration from Russia is analyzed as a process of "brain drain" caused by the situation within the country. This approach focuses on high-skilled migrants who leave Russia to study or work abroad. According to Pokrovsky (2006), this process usually happens in developing countries where the population can get a good secondary education and achieve some goals afterward (Ph.D., good job position). However, due to the inability to achieve great success and develop professionally, people prefer to move to more developed countries, where there are more opportunities for career growth (Kalinina, 2005). Iontsev (2001) described the whole emigration process from Russia as one significant brain drain because most Russians emigrate via education or high-skilled work. The phenomenon of brain drain was investigated in Metelev (2006) and Ryazantsev and Pismennaya (2013), where it was highlighted that due to poor working conditions and low salaries, most highly qualified specialists, including scientists, prefer to go abroad.

The fourth approach focuses on the Russian-speaking communities around the world. As a result of the collapse of the USSR and an active emigration, there were formed numerous Russian-speaking communities, which in the media terminology often referred to as "Russian diaspora" (Tikhomirov, 2004) and (Akaha & Vassilieva, 2005). However, according to Benson (1960) and Andrews (1993), the term "Russian-speaking community" more accurately reflects a demographic and socio-cultural phenomenon rather than ethnic, socioeconomic, and cultural. Currently, this theoretical concept of "Russian-speaking communities" is not integrated into the scientific literature and statistical practice (Tolz, 2003). Thus, it is not clear about the exact number, socio-demographic structure, and features of the Russian-speaking communities abroad (Nikitina, 2011). In addition, there is no evidence-based methodology to assess the socio-demographic and economic consequences (including population loss) of the emigration from the Russian Federation (Polinsky, 2010).

The last and most crucial theoretical approach investigates social, economic, and political aspects of emigration from Russia. According to Rothstein (2011), political and economic factors affect the migration process differently, but they have a typical relationship in their impact. The primary way that economic factors affect migration is unemployment, high inflation rate, and low wages among highly qualified specialists (Portes, 2019). In this case, it is a problem of having an excellent job with a decent income that becomes the reason for emigration. In the case of political factors, they have a more complex process of influencing emigration since they affect several factors in general, such as freedom of choice, freedom of speech, social security, independence of the judicial system, and so on (Bækken, 2019).

In some cases, according to Aslund (2019), political factors can also have an impact on the economic sector (corruption and misuse of public funds). Thus, economic factors can directly affect emigration only if there are clear signs of democracy in the country, i.e., the government does not interfere with the freedom of speech and justice. Otherwise, economic factors become one of the variables of political ones. At the same time, the European Union is the most attractive destination for Russians (Kuznetsova et al., 2021).

When we investigate political and economic factors in the context of their effect on emigration, it is crucial to divide their mutual interaction. Buckley (1996) stated that political and

economic factors could influence emigration. However, in some cases, one variable can affect emigration via a consequent effect on another. This happens when one aspect substantially impacts society, so it can shift other variables and force people to emigrate. In our case, we believe that the main effect on emigration possesses economic factors which political ones have influenced.

This research is based mainly on international literature and data sources. However, it is impossible not to turn to the Russian sources used in this work regarding theoretical and methodological approaches to studying political emigration from Russia.

Change of emigration priorities and hypothesis

Following mentioned abovementioned theories, we can describe the whole emigration situation in Russia as a wide-scale brain drain that emerged long before the collapse of the USSR but came into force in the 1990s. Historically, Russian citizens have always experienced pressure from the government for dissent, which led to forced emigration. Furthermore, the poor economic situation in the country for most of the 20th century caused by the First and Second World Wars, as well as communist rule, had an impact on emigration preferences. Nevertheless, it is not clear how specifically political and economic factors influence immigration from Russia (Vishnevsky, 2000). There is no doubt that the wars stimulated this process, but we have no clue about the scope of the effect they produce. What is more, little is done to investigate their synergy regarding immigration from Russia.

According to the second, third, and fifth theoretical approaches, we can assume that the main reason for the emigration processes from Russia in the 1990s was the catastrophic economic situation caused by the process of “perestroika.” Russian society was just beginning to embark on the consumer path, guided by the idea of private property, savings, etc. However, the country's economy was only entering this new framework. The inflation rate was too high, and the country had a strong unemployment rate (Tomchenko & Chaptikova, 1996). Thus, emigration was the fastest and most popular way to change their economic situation.

However, after the 2000s, when the economic situation in the country began to improve, and Russia increased its position among developing countries, the emigration process did not stop. Here we come to a specific phenomenon of modern Russian emigration that links economic and political factors. During the 1990s, according to Bækken (2019), Russia was on a democratic path of development with the inherent features of this regime: freedom of speech and an independent judicial branch. In this regard, according to the fifth theoretical approach, only economic factors affected the emigration process. On the contrary, after the 2000s, Russia began to lose its positions in many democratic ratings, such as freedom of speech and independence of justice). For example, PEN International, a worldwide association that promotes friendship and intellectual cooperation among writers, described the freedom of speech situation as unfavorable, with a stable decrease since the 2000s. Bonch-Osmolovskaya et al. (2018, p. 3) stated that “the Russian authorities control the media landscape, with most media outlets owned by the state or their close affiliates. Independent journalists face huge pressure – legal, physical, and economic – to not contradict the official line or provide coverage of critical viewpoints.” They continued that “the Russian authorities have failed to respond to violence against journalists, including murders, physical attacks and threats, creating a climate of impunity that encourages further attacks.” And finally, “following Russia’s ‘annexation’ of Crimea in March 2014, the Russian authorities and the de facto Crimean authorities have pursued a crackdown on independent media, opposition politicians

and activists.” In this connection, we hypothesize that due to a change in Russia’s political and economic sphere, political factors displaced economic ones in terms of emigration to Europe.

Data overview

To develop our research design, we should make a brief overview of the available statistics regarding emigration processes from Russia as well as the distribution of the influence of political and economic factors. This would help us evaluate existing data sources and highlight the most appropriate approaches for further empirical research.

To begin with, a good part of our data belongs to the migration process. At the same time, migration scope is a huge statistical database divided by many criteria and indicators, such as age, gender, reasons for emigration, country of origin, and so on. Regarding labor migration, most Russian citizens who go abroad for work are specialists with professional education. Thus, highly skilled migrants from Russia with high education are more in demand. According to the Federal State Statistics Service of the Russian Federation (2020b), the distribution of labor emigrants by age was as follows: 25% were aged 40–49, 25% were 18–29, about 24% were 30–39, and approximately 14% were 50–54 years old. Moreover, we should mark the persistence of a gender imbalance among Russian labor migrants. Based on statistics from the Federal State Statistics Service of the Russian Federation (2020b) for 2015, more than 95% of Russian labor migrants were men, and this ratio did not change.

It should be mentioned that any research on emigration from Russia is complicated by the lack of sufficient and reliable data sources. This crucial problem is discussed in the following sections. In this connection, our research is not narrowly focused, as we want to highlight the general emigration scope from Russia. These selection criteria are caused by two significant factors. Firstly, political emigration from Russia is rarely differentiated and correlates with gender and age since the reasons that prompt people to leave may be completely different (Lyanov & Vereshchagina, 2021). Secondly, we should mention insufficient data from Russian statistical agencies according to the age and gender of emigrants. Thus, we will not divide the flows of emigrants by social groups and gender-age criteria.

As the region of our interest in Europe and we cannot proceed with all the country’s data, we should select some European countries for further empirical research, highlighting the region's general situation. These countries should have some differences in the socioeconomic structure regarding migration purposes. For example, we cannot take only the Scandinavian and Benelux states or the most economically developed ones. In this regard, we decide to take Finland, Spain, and Switzerland for further research. Finland is one of the most famous European countries for the migration of Russians (business and educational), as it shares a border with Russia and is located near the second most populated city in the country – St. Petersburg. Spain is considered one of the most popular destinations for Russian real estate investors, as the purchase of expensive real estate guarantees permanent residence. Switzerland attracts all layers of Russian emigrants (students, highly qualified specialists, and businessmen) due to its high quality of life and scientific and economic development (Denisenko, 2012).

Data sources

When it comes to data sources on the scale of emigration from the Russian Federation to Europe, there exist very few. Moreover, the quality of data provided remains poor statistical quality due to poorly developed evaluation mechanisms.

Thus, data on emigration is provided by several primary sources (Russian and international). The prominent Russian source of information is the dataset of the Federal State Statistics Service of the Russian Federation (2020a). Information on the number of citizens of the Russian Federation who have left abroad for permanent residence is formed based on data on the removal from the registration list at the place of residence. The other primary Russian migration data sources are the Ministry of Labor and Social Protection, the Federal Migration Service, and the Ministry of Internal Affairs. Their statistics provide a specific idea of the number of Russian citizens abroad based on the data on the registration of Russian citizens temporarily or permanently residing abroad in Russian consular institutions of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The advantage of this approach is the relative simplicity and transparent criteria for accounting. Many Russians used to contact the consular services for the certification of documents, passport renewal, obtaining a child's birth certificate, and so on.

International statistics are usually compiled based on the host countries' data by the UN Population Division, OECD, and Eurostat. Each provides unique indicators to measure migration scope, such as the number of asylum seekers, migrants who obtained permanent residence, etc. These statistics are often compiled based on different administrative sources and are divided according to the data. For example, Eurostat disseminates European statistics according to the Community legal framework and the European Statistics Code of Practice. Migration data is updated according to the most recent statistics of the national statistical institutes. Overall, the United Nations Procurement Division (UNPD) and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) form their statistical dataset, while Eurostat collects migration data from national statistical institutes.

Speaking about data on political factors, we should note that data can be formed from numerous indicators. Political factors directly influence elections, the judicial branch, and civil rights. However, in this research, we want to focus on the aspect of human rights, as it performs the most visible component of interaction between government and civil society. One of the essential elements of human rights is freedom of expression. It is a principle that supports the freedom of an individual or a community to articulate their opinions and ideas without fear of retaliation, censorship, or legal sanction (Molnár, 2015). Freedom of expression is a part of human rights in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and is protected by the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. It is like a barometer of the state of society: the way society treats the views of a minority, no matter how undesirable or unpleasant they may be for the majority, illustrate the whole political atmosphere within the country (Puddephatt, 2005). Such data can be found in the reports of NGOs specializing in human rights, freedom of speech, and democracy. Amnesty International, Carnegie Centre, Freedom House, Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem) Project, and Human Rights Watch are the most authoritative and accurate.

Regarding economic data, we are interested in the average indicator of the financial well-being of citizens. Thus, we select GDP per capita, which perfectly shows economic activity and the quality of life. Among the most reliable sources of GDP, we can highlight data from the World Bank.

Migration data processing problems

Regarding data on the migration scale from Russia, we should note some shortcomings in compiling statistics, especially among Russian sources. This should be taken into account when working with the empirical part. For example, comparing various sources of data on labor and education emigration of Russians, we can conclude that the scale of labor emigration can be underestimated by at least 3–4 times (Lokosov & Rybakovsky, 2014). This happens since this data includes only those citizens who contact official migration agencies. The same occurs in the distribution by sex and age groups, professions and positions, educational level, duration of professional activity, etc.

Until 2011 the values published by the Federal State Statistics Service of the Russian Federation (2020b) did not include information about labor migrants, as well as educational migrants. However, since mid-2011, changes have been made to the registration rules of foreign citizens in the Russian Federation. After these changes, the migration statistics include persons registered at the place of residence for nine months or more (previously, it was one year or more), and there is also an automatic de-registration of foreign citizens whose registration period has formally expired. This has led to significant distortions in emigration statistics (Iontsev & Magamedova, 2015). Thus, a comparison of data on those who left abroad before 2010 and since 2012 indicates a sharp increase in the number, which does not imply a rapidly growing emigration. The following example presents "shortcomings" of the statistics due to the inclusion of labor migrants. Such statistical shortcomings concerning emigration accounting have resulted in the fact that the traditional list of countries of emigration of Russians has changed a lot. Thus, if in 2010 Kazakhstan, Germany, Belarus, and the United States were among the leaders, then in 2014, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Armenia, and China suddenly became new destinations for emigration (Rybakovsky & Kozhevnikova, 2019). An additional factor of indeterminacy is that it is not entirely clear whether these citizens left Russia, or their registration period has expired. We can conclude that the list of countries for emigration has become the same as the list that are donors of migrant workers for Russia.

Speaking about data on the registration of Russian citizens temporarily or permanently residing abroad from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, we should note that the consular registration of Russian citizens is carried out voluntarily. Thus, according to estimates of Russian diplomats, only 10–15% of Russians get up on the consular register. For example, the official website of the Russian Foreign Ministry reports that more than 2 million Russian citizens are registered in Russian consular offices in foreign countries. However, surveys show that many Russians do not regularly interact with diplomatic offices abroad. In this connection, data on Russian emigrants are counted with a certain statistical margin of error. This margin of error increases if the total data on emigration is taken separately regarding age, gender, and reasons for emigration.

On the contrary, international statistics often record many Russians abroad, which correctly reflects the scale of Russian emigration. Migration registration is highly developed in European countries. A comparison of the data for these countries with the Russian ones (when we record the emigration of Russians) shows that the difference in scale of emigration is several times higher. For example, in Spain-22 times, France-14 times, and Germany-8 times. However, a significant part of the sources includes insufficient data. Thus, if we look for some specific countries and take a long observation period (more than 20 years), most of them would have significant gaps in indicators over the years. This is due to a change in the methods of collecting statistical data and the availability of data from national statistical

institutes. In this regard, we must choose countries only with a continuous indicator for the selected period.

Summing up Russian data sources, it should be noted that, despite their large scale, for many countries of Europe where Russian citizens live permanently, it is quite challenging to form a clear idea of their exact number and socio-demographic structure. Moreover, Russian data is incomplete due to the reasons listed above. In this regard, we take only international data sources in our empirical part. Furthermore, we should keep in mind that information on some countries is not provided for all years, which significantly narrows the number of countries we can investigate.

Methods

Our evaluation presents a comparative empirical analysis of migration data with economic and political indicators. According to Pickvance (2001), comparative analysis allows us to understand and see common features in phenomena and identify a pattern, or conversely find out that there are no patterns, and everything changes chaotically. We use a variation-finding comparison type of analysis because, with its help, it is possible to establish a proportion of variation in the disposition or intensity of a phenomenon by examining methodical differences between instances (Tilly, 1989).

The main aim of our empirical part is to find the overall trend in data metrics. To test our hypothesis, we should observe the interaction of selected indicators. To achieve that, we must proceed with our empirical analysis in four steps. Firstly, we have to compare how political and economic indicators changed during the investigated period, i.e., what years there was an increase or decrease. Secondly, we need to evaluate how the scope of emigration to the selected countries has changed. Third, we need to compare emigration data with economic and political indicators. Fourth, to test the results, we will take a unique predictor of emigration, which directly depends on political factors - the number of asylum seekers and compare it with the results obtained.

As a period, we selected 1996 to 2019 because, since the collapse of the USSR in 1991, migration flows have been directly affected by several significant events within the country (Kolstø, 1996). The most important determinants are the Constitutional Crisis in Russia (1992–1993) and the First Chechen War (1994–1996). In this regard, we will not be able to get an unbiased assessment of the impact of economic and political factors on the scope of emigration. Thus, only by 1996, with the second presidential election in Russia, did the most peaceful period begin. Moreover, some data we are looking for is available only up to 2019. All these factors explain our time framework.

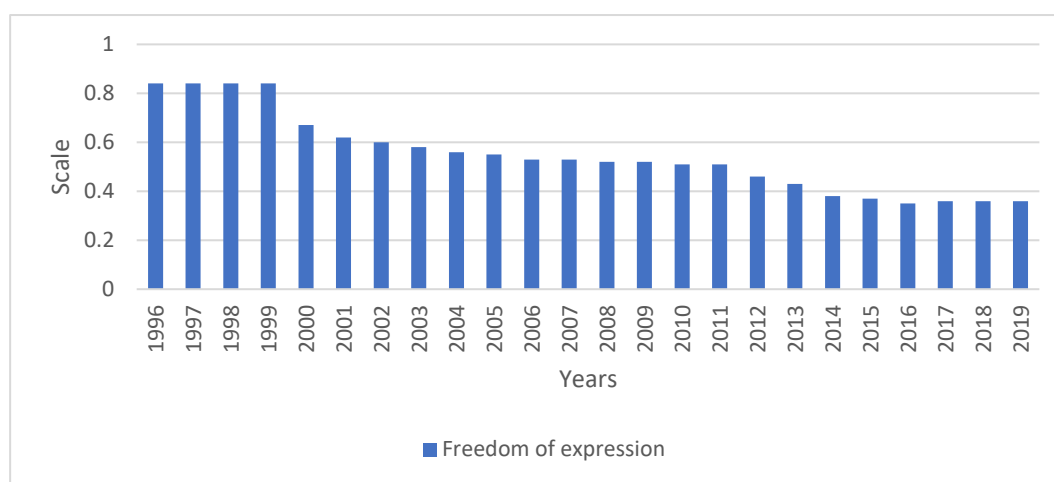
We should mention that the selection of variables in the empirical part is limited due to insufficient reliable data. In this regard, we proceed with only accurate and reliable indicators, which allow us to investigate standard features of emigration processes from Russia.

Economic and political evaluation

The index of Freedom of expression is based on coded data of V-Dem Institute Dataset - Version 11.1 (Varieties of Democracy, 2021). The variable is aggregated by the day-weighted

mean from the country-date level to the country-year level. It is formed by taking the point estimates from a Bayesian factor analysis model of the indicators for print/broadcast censorship effort, harassment of journalists, media self-censorship, freedom of discussion for men/women, and freedom of academic and cultural expression. For this particular variable, the question is as follows: *To what extent does the government respect press and media freedom, the freedom of ordinary people to discuss political matters at home and in the public sphere, and the freedom of academic and cultural expression?* The scale is ordinal, converted to interval by the measurement model from 0 to 1, where 0 means freedom of expression is not respected. Figure 1 shows how freedom of expression has changed in the Russian Federation during the investigated period.

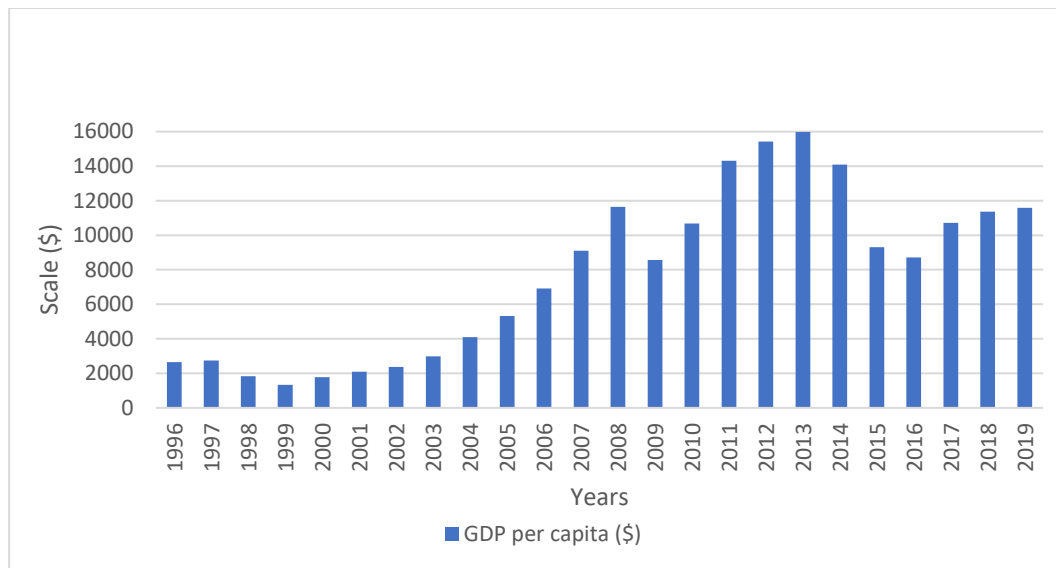
Figure 1: Level of Freedom of Expression in Russia



Note: *Varieties of Democracy* (2021)

As we can observe, the value of 0.84 remained stable from 1996 until 1999. Further, confirming our theory, after 2000, the indicator suddenly fell, reaching 0.6 by 2002. For the next nine years, it had a stable decline resulting in 0.51 in 2011. From 2011 until 2014, the freedom of expression significantly dropped by approximately 20% (0.38). It consistently decreased for the next few years, with the lowest level of 0.35 in 2016. Overall, we can mention that for only 20 years, from 1996 to 2016, freedom of expression had a considerable decline of 58%.

Speaking about GDP, it is the sum of gross value added by all resident producers in the economy plus any product taxes and minus any subsidies not included in the value of the products. It is calculated without deductions for the depreciation of fabricated assets or depletion and degradation of natural resources. However, we are interested in GDP per capita, and the formula for its calculation is straightforward: total GDP / population of the country. The higher this indicator, the more productive citizens work and, on average, earn more.

Figure 2: GDP Per Capita in Russia

Note: The World Bank (1996–2019)

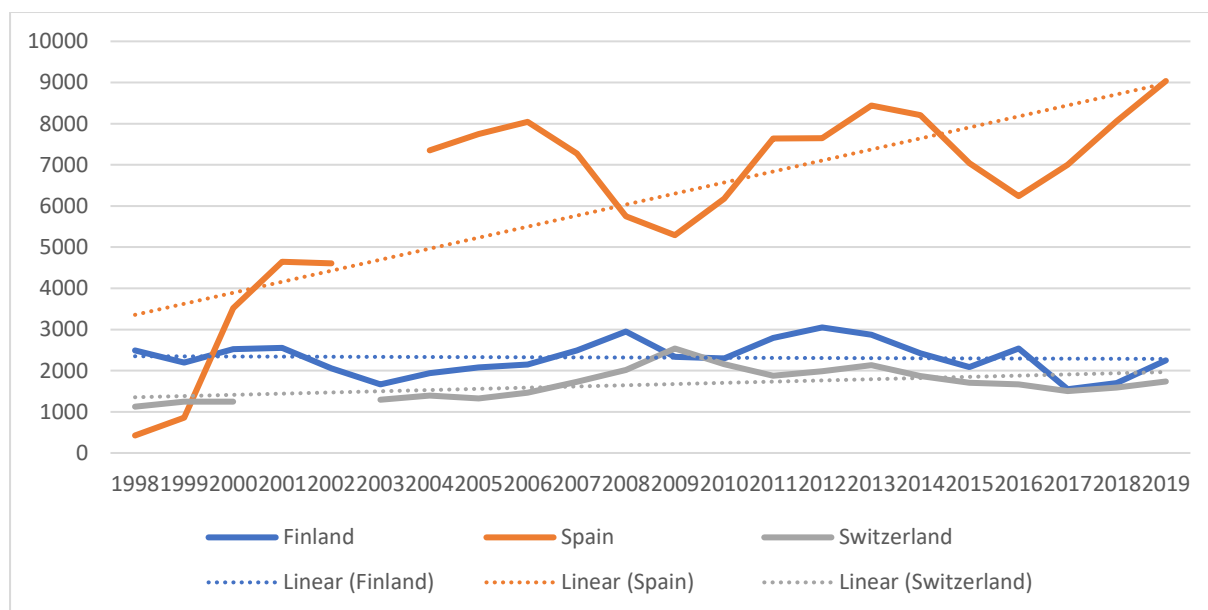
The graph shows that since 1996 there was a decline in GDP per capita in Russia from US\$ 2,644, bottoming out with a value of US\$ 1,331 in 1999. However, the indicator has increased over the next nine years (7.7 times), reaching US\$ 11,635. After, we can observe that GDP per capita fluctuates (US\$ 8,563 in 2009 – the peak of US\$ 15,975 in 2013 – fall to US\$ 8,705 in 2016). In 2019 GDP per capita climbed to close to indicators of 2008, amounting to US\$ 11,585. Overall, despite ups and downs (2008–2019), we can conclude that after 1999, GDP per capita has a moderate q growing dynamic, exceeding the indicators of the 1990s in some years by 3 to 5 times.

Migration analysis

Regarding data on migration scope from Russia to Spain, Finland, and Switzerland, we selected the Eurostat dataset because it provides a complete data series than UNPD and OECD. In this dataset, migration statistics are disseminated by a single country. The completeness of the time series for the migration statistics is formed voluntarily and depends on the availability of data that national statistical institutes provide Eurostat. Information on migration flows is disseminated in integer numbers. The reference period for migration scope is the calendar year in which the migration happened.

However, even Eurostat has provided data since 1998. We believe that these missing data are an acceptable error since the primary purpose of the analysis of the migration value is to determine that its scale has not decreased in dynamics, which makes it possible to assume a change in the causes-trends of migration. Moreover, even though the selected source provides the complete indicators, there are still a couple of years when data were unavailable. This is 2003 for Spain and 2002–2003 for Switzerland. This happens due to improvements in and changes to administrative systems and statistical methodology. Thus, we added trend lines for each country to visualize indicators with missing numbers in Figure 3.

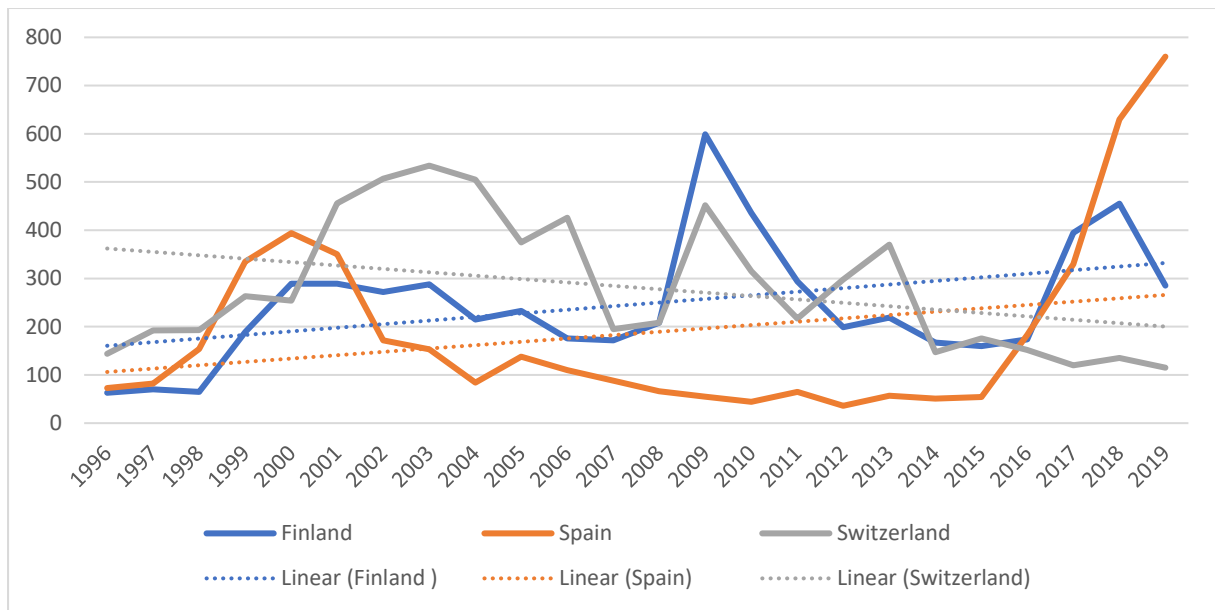
Figure 3: Migration Scope from Russia



Note: Eurostat (1998–2019)

As we can see, the total migration scope from Russia to the selected countries has increased (Spain, Switzerland) or remained stable (Finland) during 1998–2019. Finland and Switzerland show stable dynamics with indicators in the range of 1,670–3,050 and 1,125–2,538. However, Spain has soared 19 times in 8 years (1998–2006), with indicators growing from 425 to 8,041. What is more, we see no common features of ups and downs for all countries, except in 1998, when Spain and Switzerland showed their lowest results. Overall, we can conclude that there were no negative dynamics according to emigration from Russia.

As mentioned above, to test the influence level of political factors, we take OECD statistics on the number of asylum seekers from Russia. Data on asylum seekers is based on numbers provided by the UNHCR. In most cases, the number of asylum seekers is included in the statistics when their application is accepted. Thus, they are included in the statistics, not when they arrive in the country.

Figure 4: Inflows of Asylum Seekers from Russia

Note: OECD (1996–2019)

According to Figure 4, the inflows of asylum seekers from Russia have rapidly grown from 1997–1998. However, the indicators behave irrationally in other dynamics with various ups and downs. In general, we can say that the number of asylum seekers in the 21st century has not decreased compared to the indicators of the 1990s. On the contrary, each country hit its highest score in 2003 (Switzerland with 534), 2009 (Finland with 599), to 2019 (Spain with 760).

Findings

In general, speaking about the selected indicators (economic and political) that affect emigration, we can observe that in the 1990s, the freedom of expression in Russia was at its highest level. At the same time, GDP per capita was extremely low. On the contrary, since the beginning of the 2000s, these dynamics have opposite values of growth and decline. For both indicators, the decisive year was 1999. Many reasons have influenced this dynamic, but the most significant is the change in the political trends of the Russian government (Bækken, 2019). Overall, these data confirm our assumption that political freedom has deteriorated along with improving the economic situation in Russia. Thus, we have shown the first part of our hypothesis that at the turn of the 2000s, significant changes happened in the economic and political sphere of the Russian Federation.

To continue, the essential part of empirical data on the scope of emigration from Russia to European countries shows that emigration remained reasonably high from 1998 to 2019. Moreover, only in Finland does the level of migration of Russians remain consistently high, while in Switzerland and Spain, it has increased. Thus, considering that GDP per capita in the Russian Federation increased significantly during the investigated period while the level of emigration to European countries did not decrease, we can state that another variable has blocked the positive economic effect and contributed to the emigration process.

As we hypothesize that this variable represents the political situation within the country and the data on freedom of expression confirm our guess, we took an extra indicator of the level of asylum seekers to test our findings. It shows that the scale of refugees from Russia increased in the 2000s compared to the figures of the 1990s. In general, if we look at the trend lines of individual countries, we see that this indicator has an increasing trend in 2 out of 3 countries. Moreover, the decrease in the trend line in Switzerland was only due to the low numbers in 2016–2019, while there was stable growth over the previous 19 years of observations. Thus, we suppose that political factors have acquired a more significant and multi-component influence on the citizens of Russia, far surpassing the economic ones. We believe that the vector of transition from democracy to autocracy contributed to the process of changing emigration priorities and maintaining a high level of emigration from Russia, despite the improved economic situation.

Overall, the data described above shows that at the turn of the 2000s, sufficient economic improvements increased GDP per capita in Russia. However, the emigration from the country to Europe has only increased. Based on the data on the level of freedom of expression and the number of asylum seekers, we believe that political factors shifted economic ones regarding the impact on the emigration process, contributing to its increase. Thus, our hypothesis is fully shown.

Conclusion

As we have mentioned, emigration is a big problem for the socioeconomic development of Russia. Every year, the country loses thousands of prospective citizens, many of whom are of reproductive age. Given that the population growth in Russia is negative, this problem is particularly acute. Unfortunately, due to the lack of a progressive migration policy and a number of research projects on emigration processes, the Russian authorities cannot adequately assess the severity of this problem and therefore take action to minimize the consequences (Docquier & Rapoport, 2012).

In this study, we showed that the country had good economic conditions at the turn of the 2000s for normalizing emigration scope. However, along with the change in economic development, significant political changes in civil rights emerged that have directly affected emigration flows to Europe. In this regard, we can assume a shift in emigration trends in Russia, in which political factors have replaced economic ones. Thus, we can state that political factors have become decisive arguments in today's emigration from Russia to Europe. To conclude, following the deteriorating dynamics of political freedoms in Russia (Robinson, 2018), as well as the current scope of emigration to Europe and the growth of asylum seekers, it was evident that the process of emigration from Russia to Europe will only increase. Taking into account its dynamics and scale, as well as the negative natural population growth in the country, without immediate actions of the government aimed at improving political freedoms within the country, we can expect severe labor and demographic crisis in the future.

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