

Issues of Migration in Newspapers of the Stavropol' Area

Interethnic as well as interregional relationships have long been of great importance for the socio-economic and cultural life of the Stavropol' area, which due to its geographical position was named gateway to the Caucasus in the 19th century already (the city was founded as a fortress in 1777).

It was L.D. Trotsky who described the Caucasus as a gigantic ethnographic museum. This also applies to the North Caucasus with its numerous people of different cultures, races and religions living together on a relatively small territory. Here, economic and political conditions caused extensive migration after the breakup of the USSR.

Geographically, the Stavropol' area lies in the South of Russia (Southern Federal District), and belongs to the North Caucasian region. It is the most Southern Russian-speaking area, further South are – as part of the Russian Federation (RF) – the North Caucasian Republics of North Ossetia, Kabardino-Balkariya, Ingushetia, Dagestan, Karachaevo-Cherkessiya, Chechnya, most of which share borders with the Stavropol' Area.

2,723,900 people lived in the Stavropol' area in 2004. Since 1989 the population increased by 13%. Looking at population statistics you find the Stavropol' area on rank 16 in the Russian Federation, and on rank 3 in the Southern Federal District.

Russians, Armenians, and Ukrainians have the largest share in the population that has long been consisting of more than 100 different nations (for comparison: in the Russian Federation you find 152 different nations). A stable immigration from North Caucasian regions is being named in unison as determining factor for the increasing multiethnicity of the population in the Stavropol' area since the 1990s.

The first inflow of migrants from the 1980s to the turn of the century resulted from the independence of the Caucasian Republics. People mainly came as Russian refugees from Trans- and North Caucasian Republics. Only during the last seven years migrants came as members of the North- and Trans-Caucasian nations, which lead to an increasingly diverse population in the Stavropol' area.

The Stavropol' area today is among the top five administrative areas of the Russian Federation where among 1,000 inhabitants the population growth due to migration is more than twofold the average Russian population growth.

The inflow of migrants contributes to an increase of real estate prices, a more aggravated competition on the labor market, decreasing standards of

living, a tightening of social conflicts and problems – mainly with regard to job training and health care –, an intensification of nationalistic and separatistic tendencies, as well as to a rising crime rate.

Social infrastructure is not laid-out for this increase in population (Khoperskaya/Kharchenko 2005, p. 49). This explains why administration officials as well as the average population in the area values migration as a social occurrence with a negative connotation. Migration in all its manifestations is being named almost in unison as one of the main reasons for ethnic tensions in Southern Russia, mostly in consequence of political conflicts, terrorism and inconsequent official migration policy. Characteristical for the ethno-political processes in the North Caucasus is their inconsistent dynamics, and further socio-economical and ethnic stratification.

Generally speaking it can be stated that the socio-psychological adaptation of refugees in our region is difficult, due to objective as well as subjective drawbacks. Problems of adaptation and integration of migrants are essential questions for the Stavropol' area, and as such they are a constant subject of discussion on different societal levels. A federal program "South of Russia" has been elaborated, containing different actions and measures aiming at the reduction of negative impacts of migration and the regions warranty of socio-political and economic stability. Among other things, the media is supposed to be supported in its objective discussion of migration issues and conflicts. A non-governmental organization "Danish Council of Refugees" has been working on an "Integration"-project in the Southern Federal District for years. According to surveys, problems of migration and refugees and their mutual relationships with the residing population, remains to be one of the most prevailing problems of the socio-political and economic life in the Stavropol' area – on different levels regularly discussed in the regional mass media as well. Problems of the socio-psychological adaptation of refugees, the idea of a positive interethnic and intercultural dialogue and the idea of tolerance are important topics not only in the newspapers of the Southern Federal District and the district capital, but also in the city- and county-issues.

Qualitatively and quantitatively, the branched system of district-, city-, and county-media has changed in the 1990s: today about 200 different newspapers and magazines are being published, among them news and entertainment newspapers, for general as well as for special interest, for purchase as well as for free. etc.

Popular are the regional issues of the federal newspapers: "Argumenty i fakty. Severnyi kavkaz", "Komsomol'skaya pravda na severnom kavkaze", "Moskovskii komsomolets – kavkaz". Since 1990 the evening newspaper of the district capital "Vechernii Stavropol'" plays an important role – with a constantly increasing readership. The newspaper "Stavropol'skie gubernskie

vedomosti” is again being published (since 1992), and so is “Pyatigorskaya pravda” (since 1995). The newspaper “Rodina” (KPRF, Communist Party of the Russian Federation) represents the party press. On the sector of private media there are mainly weekly newspapers – with the exception of two daily newspapers. Highest circulations in the Stavropol’ area can be found among the weekly advertisement-papers on the news-sector: “Ekstra-biznes”, “Telekur’er”, “Kavkazskaja nedel’ya”, the daily district newspaper “Stavropol’skaya pravda”, the city newspapers “Vechernii Stavropol’”, “Pyatigorskaya pravda”, the county newspapers “Rassvet” (Turkmeny County), “Blagodarnenskie vesti” (Blagodarnensky County), “Primanychskie stepi” (Apanasenskoy County).

Matters of general social importance are subject of journalistic interest mainly in the general newspapers of the majority – special interest media looks at the respective subject matter from its special interest point of view. Accordingly, our sample to study the characteristics of journalistic description of migration processes and issues consists of regional-, city- and county-newspapers – different levels of media reporting, where different attitudes towards the subject matter can be observed.

Traditional and conservative is the coverage of issues of migration in county newspapers: Being published with 4-8 pages (3 of which contain journalistic material, the others advertisements, TV program etc.) once or twice a week, those publications aim at close contact to their readers, supplying them with information on local issues of their county. In doing so they focus on the activities of communal authorities, reporting on their sanctions and measures taken in order to solve migration-related problems.

A news report in the county-newspaper “Levokum’e” (April 7th, 2007) can be seen as an example: “On Migration and Security Measures” it says in the headline of the article, reporting on a meeting of the county council of economic and social security that discussed processes of migration in the Levokumsky County. In his article the journalist discusses several key issues related to migration: its uncontrolled development, its evocation of socio-economic and ecological chance in the Levokumsky County:

The newcomers do not make an effort to get to know existing traditions, customs and conventions of the residing population, their behavior oftentimes attests to their depreciative relationship to the residing population. Should not the migrants be thankful to the residing population, that a higher educational level in new living conditions is being granted to them, and that they get the opportunity to be proficient in the use of the national language.

From there it can be concluded that certain efforts of assimilation are expected of migrants. In general, media content regarding their traditions, religion, and culture is being verbalized in a positive way.

County-newspapers also publish official statements of the public administration. These are oftentimes official greetings on public holidays. Representatives of the different administrative offices repeatedly declare the need for peace and friendship among the different Caucasian nations – even though they hardly ever mention the matter of migration in their official speeches and greetings, as our analysis shows.

Another characteristic of the county press is related to its traditional focus on personality, a focus on the people that are of special importance and interest for the development and history of the county – to be read in emotional portraits and life stories.

(Mostly successful) migrants and refugees can be among the “heroes” in these emotional reports as well, because their fate is unique, dramatic and interesting. They are being portrayed as people who subdued their fate, successfully reassembling their life in a new place and under new conditions. Without question, this kind of reporting can be seen as an important contribution of county-journalists to the building of a positive migrant image: the media is qualified to affect their readers emotions, evoking sympathy for their heroes. But in the total amount of material, this kind of publication makes up for a very little part.

Regional and city-press declares the intercultural dialogue of members of all nationalities to be of great importance, and it also sees public dialogue on a national level to be of great importance for the integration of the respective migrant groups. But our analysis shows regional as well as city press not to pay a great deal of attention to issues and problems of migration, even though the subject matter is not avoided. But informative and analytical reports on migration issues can be found on this level – indicating that journalists and newspaper offices have realized the topicality and importance of migration matters. The newspapers “Stavropol’skaya pravda”, “Stavropol’skie gubernskie vedomosti”, “Otkrytaya dlia vsekh i kazhdogo” often publish information and comments on migration-related conflicts. Most frequently migrants themselves and members of the authorities represent the parties of the dispute. This is along the lines of press guidelines to defend the average citizen in his or her dispute with administration officials. Where the former is often portrayed as hard-working and decent, the latter in many cases is depicted as mercenary.

You may take the article “Disguised Schemes” as an example: Reporting on current issues of city planning in Stavropol, the city newspaper “Otkrytaya dlia vsekh i kazhdogo” gives the floor to a refugee, telling of his law suit with “russian bureaucracy” – a preamble tells of his fate, his escape with children

and parents from Grosny, and his first difficult years of adjustment to life in Stavropol' ("Otkrytaya dlia vsekh i kazhdogo" 2007, No. 21, p. 10).

On the other hand, media often diagnoses migrant problems, and the oftentimes problematic character of migration processes in the Stavropol' area, especially in the Eastern rural districts with more and more Dagestan settlements. In these cases, journalists seek for scientific comment and sociological evaluation of the migration development, asking regionally well-known political scientists, sociologists, and experts in the field of conflict studies. Concluding it can be stated that the regional-, as well as city- and county-press have a different attitude towards issues of migration – differences that result from different journalistic policies and a varied readership. Where county- and city-newspapers concentrate on single events or the story of one single person, they often report in news, advertisements, accounts of different social programmes, and letters to the editor, on migration issues from a positive point of view. Journalists avoid a discriminatory vocabulary and negative stereotypes.

In the Eastern counties of the Stavropol' area, sharing borders with the North Caucasian Republics, oftentimes unbalanced and negative material is being published, sometimes leading to a deepening of conflicts.

County newspapers inform a large readership about migration-related occurrences, about tendencies of integration policies – oftentimes in the context of federal policy. In doing so, they prefer analytical news and interviews to report on the issue.

Letters to the editor are one more source of information on the subject. Regularly being published, refugees and migrants have themselves a share in the statements on problems of integration into the receiving society.

A survey that has been conducted among journalists by researchers from the faculty of history and theory of journalism at Stavropol' State University, shows that journalists are aware of the importance of the issue, as well as of their own responsibility when journalistically dealing with the respective subject matter. Sometimes this awareness leads to an omission of migration issues in reporting, in order to, as one journalist put it, "bring no harm".

All in all, the print media of the Stavropol' area acknowledges the potential for conflict going along with migration processes, especially in the Southern parts of the Russian Federation. But still, media content with positive tendencies prevails, thus encouraging positive associations and attitudes among citizens. In the process, tolerance and multicultural integration are keywords, positively shaping the main concept of interethnic relations and of non-controversial, intercultural communication in the North Caucasus.

References

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