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DIASPORA AND NATIONAL IDENTITY IN A POST-GEOGRAPHICAL WORLD

According to World Bank statistics, as of 2017, more than 258 million people, or 3.4 percent of the world population, live outside their countries of birth. The absolute number of international migrants rose from 173 million in 2000 to more than 247 million in 2013, however, the percentage has remained constant at just above 3% for the last fifteen years.

The top migrant destination country is the United States, followed by Saudi Arabia, Germany, the Russian Federation, the United Arab Emirates, the United Kingdom, France, Canada, Spain, and Australia. The top six immigration countries, measured by the relative to population, are outside the high-income OECD countries: Qatar (91%), United Arab Emirates (88%), Kuwait (72%), Jordan (56%), and Bahrain (54%).

Today, the availability of fast, safe, and cheap modern transportation has made it easier for people to forsake their country of origin and move to another country for various reasons.

Contemporary international migration is generated by military conflicts, ethnic and religious violence, consequences of climate change, etc. Still, the major cause of migration is the desire of the people to get a job, earn more money, and live in wealthy and peaceful countries.

Migration is not a new phenomenon in the history of mankind. In the past, however, migration was a mass phenomenon in which tribes and ethnic groups moved to a new place as an entity and ceased all contact with the places they previously inhabited. The big change in recent decades is that migration has become an individual act. Millions of people have moved as a personal life choice, not by the decision of presidents, governments, or tribal leaders. Most of them have left part of their families, relatives and friends in their home countries. This does not mean that their connection with those relatives and friends comes to an end. Contemporary technology facilitates, connects and re-engages people from all parts of the world.

The impact of communications technology has led social scientists to develop a theory about the “shortening” of the distance between the countries that are very far from each other on the map. Rather than being an objective concept, distance, according to Bauman (1998), is “a social product; its length varies depending on the speed and the price with which it may be overcome”.

In recent decades, one of the main results of mass migration has been the emergence and strengthening of ethnic diasporas. In the past, nations had emerged as territorial entities confined to the borders of a single state. Many nations had compatriots outside the state’s borders, but these usually lived in neighboring

countries. Now the situation is different – because of the ethnic diasporas many nations are no longer territorial entities. They have a nucleus in one country but with many members living abroad. We can call this phenomenon geographic dispersion of the nations. In history, the Jewish people were such a dispersed nation, but their case is unique and not connected with the contemporary communications revolution.

It is very important to note that most migrants maintain their national identities even while permanently living in a new country. One of the reasons for that is the change in socialization. In the past, the main mediums of socialization were, on one level, immediate and extended families as well as fellow-citizens of the town or village. On a second level, socialization depended on the state through its classical instruments – mass education and compulsory military service for men. But in the era of globalization, the mechanisms for the formation and maintenance of national identity have changed. Today, the media, Internet, books, and the phone calls are very important for socialization. All these new means of socialization are not connected with territory at all - they are post-geographical means of socialization.

Migrants can maintain their original national identity in part also because of the fact that most of them move to liberal democratic countries that do not require newcomers to change their religion, language, or sense of cultural belonging. The process of national homogenization in Western Europe and North America finished by the middle of the 20th century. In the end of the last century, we faced the opposite tendency – otherness was not a vice, it was even an advantage. It was, and in many Western countries still is, the era of the multiculturalism – a policy that encourages people to be different in terms of ethnicity, religion and social preferences. Assimilation, the policy that prevailed throughout the nation building processes in all European countries in the 19th and first half of the 20th century has been replaced with the integration of minorities. Metaphorically, the melting pot type of nation has been replaced by the salad bowl nation.

In the 21st century, we faced one more new phenomenon – people with multiple national identities. Some migrants adopt the culture of their new state while also maintaining their original identity. Usually those people are bilingual.

There are three main prerequisites for further territorial overlapping of nations in the 21st century: the revolution in communication technologies, higher individual mobility, and the emergence of a global labor market for highly skilled specialists because of the total domination of the English language in the professional communication.

Smaller countries tend to have higher rates of skilled emigration. According to the World Bank's data, close to 93 percent of highly skilled persons born in Latin American country Guyana lived outside that country, followed by Haiti (75.1%), Trinidad and Tobago (68.2%) and Barbados (66.2%).

The formation of bigger and stronger diasporas in the 21st century has important economic impacts on the sending countries. Emigrants maintain not only emotional but also economic ties with their countries of origin, sending money to their families and relatives.

In 2017, worldwide remittance flows are estimated to have exceeded \$613 billion. Of that amount, developing countries are estimated to receive about \$441 billion, nearly three times the amount of official development assistance. The true size of remittances, including unrecorded flows through formal and informal channels, is believed to be significantly larger.

In 2017, the top recipient countries of recorded remittances were India, China, the Philippines, Mexico, and Nigeria. As a share of GDP, however, smaller countries such as Tajikistan (28%), Kyrgyzstan (37%), Nepal (27%), Tonga (20%), and Moldova (21%) were the largest recipients.

In addition to remittances, there are other ways emigrants can impact the economy of their countries of origin. Some return home, benefiting the national economy with their improved skills. Other emigrants invest part of the money earned abroad in the economy of their origin countries. In general, today emigration is not a one way street – many emigrants return back and go abroad again many times.

Finally, we should mention the political impact of the mass migration and the formation of diasporas. Today, people from diasporas want more than emotional and economic ties with their countries of origin. They want to participate in political process as well. Many countries of the world allow dual citizenship. This is important because, in order to work legally, settle and reside there, immigrants would usually obtain the citizenship of the destination country. But some countries, for example some of the former Soviet republics, do not permit dual citizenship, thereby restricting the diaspora from participation in the political process of the country of origin. This is the case of migrants that lost their initial nationality and acquired the nationality of the destination country.

Most countries in the world allow their citizens living abroad to vote in national elections (from abroad). This is an important political issue for countries like Turkey, Bulgaria, Romania and Moldova that have

large politically active diasporas. One of the most intensive political debates today is about the right of emigrants to vote in the elections of their countries of origin.

Much more restricted is the right of emigrants to be elected to the parliaments of their countries of origin. This will likely be an important issue of political contention in the future, as emigrants do not only want to vote in but also run the office in their home countries. There are some examples from Baltic countries, Bulgaria, Georgia, and Armenia, where emigrants have become prime ministers or even presidents.

In conclusion, communications revolution creates nations that are geographically dispersed. This new reality has serious social, economic and political impact on migrants' countries of origin.