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# BETWEEN THE EURASIAN AND EUROPEAN SUBSYSTEMS: MIGRATION AND MIGRATION POLICY IN THE CIS AND BALTIC COUNTRIES IN THE 1990s–2020s

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*The article analyses migration from border countries (the so-called overlapping area) of two migration subsystems — Eurasian (centred in the Russian Federation) and European (the European Union) from 1991 to 2021 (before the recent events in Ukraine). A step-by-step analysis of the migration situation in the countries of the former USSR — Belarus, Latvia, Lithuania, Moldova, Ukraine and Estonia was conducted. The article examines bilateral and multilateral migration processes, analyses the main factors influencing their development and explores migration policy measures and their impact on the regulation of migration processes in the countries of the overlapping area. These countries, located between the two centres of major migration subsystems in Eurasia (Eurasian and European, or, in other words, between the Russian Federation and the core of the EU), are subject to their strong influence and ‘competitive gravitation’. The strength of this gravitation depends not only on pull and push factors but also on the attractiveness and non-attractiveness of the migration policies prevailing in these migration subsystems at a given point in time.*

## Keywords:

migration subsystems, migration processes, migration policy, forced migration, labour migration

## Introduction

The disintegration of the socialist camp and the appearance of fifteen independent states in its place changed radically the migration situation in Eastern Europe, which was once fenced off from the rest of the continent by the Iron

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Curtain. The newly established states found themselves in different socio-economic and geopolitical situations. A reaction to the political and economic transformations was the shift in the migration behaviour of the countries' nationals having now an opportunity to change their place of residence, work and study. The direction, scale and type of migration flows revealed how successful the transformations taking place in an independent state were. From the perspective of migration, the past thirty years in Eastern Europe and in the post-Soviet space were neither homogeneous nor peaceful. The Nation-building process continues in the newly formed states. The unsettled borders which date back to the Soviet times, mixed populations and the weakness of democratic institutions contribute to ethnic tensions and provoke international conflicts. The 1990s saw forced mass migration caused by the collapse of the USSR. Many migrants from the former USSR states gravitated towards Russia due to its cultural proximity and their family ties. At the same time, the open borders spurred emigration from all former Soviet republics. Stress-driven at first, this process turned into labour migration by the end of the 1990s. Since the early 2000s, labour migration has been the principal kind of population movement in the former USSR. The Baltics, having acceded to the EU, gained access to the labour markets of Western Europe. In the 2000s, there was a permanent outflow abroad when sporadic ethnic conflicts were forcing waves of refugees into Western countries.

In the 2010s, young people were becoming increasingly active as migrants when student migration to Eastern and Western Europe from former USSR republics took place. However, the increasing multilateralism of political development causes internal instability in the latter. The political crisis and hostilities in Ukraine, the revolutions in Kyrgyzia and rallies in Russia created waves of involuntary migrants in both directions.

The beginning of the 2020s was marked by the global pandemic and ensuing travel restrictions, which led to mass return migration to source states, including the Baltics and countries bordering the EU — Ukraine, Belarus and Moldova. Economic instability rose in many labour-exporting countries. Against this background, political conflicts resumed with a new intensity sending waves of refugees towards the West and Russia (the Karabakh conflict, the Kyrgyz-Tajik border skirmishes, the events in Belarus and Kazakhstan and the special military operation in Ukraine).

### **The theoretical framework of the study**

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This article discusses factors affecting the functioning of migration systems in Europe. Two migration subsystems can be currently distinguished on the continent. The first is the EU subsystem, which attracts migrants from Eastern Europe, former Soviet republics, Africa and the Middle East. The second gravitates towards the Russian Federation, which attracts migrants from Central Asia, the South Caucasus and the European states that once were part of the USSR. This dichotomy influences the trends in, and the scale of, migration flows in Europe [1].

In our opinion, there is a single global migration system the subsystems of which (including the European and Eurasian ones) function as its constituent parts. Yet, when considering the development of individual subsystems and interactions between them, we use the commonly accepted terminology, which defines sustainable regional migration links as 'migration systems'. After gaining independence, Moldova, Ukraine, Belarus, Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia have constituted the region where European and Eurasian migration systems overlap. Russia has become an important destination for migrants from Eurasia due to its socio-economic attractiveness and the political alliances, agreements, treaties and programmes it has concluded (EAEU, CIS, CSTO and others). The geographical location of Moldova, Ukraine, Belarus and the Russophone space of the Baltics give migrants a choice between Russia and the EU.

For example, the three Baltic States acceded to the EU in 2004 and became members of NATO, having introduced a visa regime with their non-EU neighbours. The Baltics' Russophones who have the status of an alien or a permanent residence permit can travel freely within the EU and Russia. Ukraine has withdrawn from the CIS, signed an association agreement with the EU and is aspiring to join NATO. The country has a visa-free regime with the EU and the CIS countries. Moldova, whilst retaining its CIS membership, has signed an association agreement with the EU and enjoys visa-free travel with the East and the West. Belarus has formed a union state with Russia but maintained its independence; it also has migration preferences with the EU<sup>1</sup>. As we will show below, the migration policy of each of these countries has specific features stemming from their geographical position as borderlands.

To measure the impact of migration policy on migration flows, we examine the migration situation in the borderland countries through the lens of the migration systems theory and the influence of the Eurasian and European subsystems [2; 3]. Douglas Messey et al. [4] emphasise, in line with earlier findings, that migrants from the same country may move to states in different migration systems; this phenomenon is characteristic primarily of countries of origin. Changes in the direction of migration flows from a country are associated with social transformations and economic or political problems. It has been argued [3] that essential to a country's migration system is the intense exchange of information and migrants — tourists, students, workers, etc. — who drive the flows of goods, capital and ideas. It has also been demonstrated that a migration system is held together by economic, cultural, political and other ties. And the exchange of people, goods and capital within the countries of a system should be more intensive than with states outside it [5; 6].

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<sup>1</sup> The borderland countries of the EU introduced free border movement regimes with Eastern Partnership countries (Moldova and Ukraine) [58].

There are several migration systems (or 'subsystems' in our interpretation): North America, Europe, Persian Gulf, Asia-Pacific, South America and Eurasia. The Western literature offers a comprehensive analysis of the first five [7–9]. Regional subsystems, such as US-Mexico, North Africa-Europe and Germany-Turkey, have also been identified and described [2; 10; 11]. The European migration subsystem has various linking factors: 1) overlapping national migration policies; 2) close economic and political ties between the countries; 3) a comparable level of economic development (a similar cultural background); 4) geographical proximity; 5) common migration patterns. The EU countries have a common financial, legal, economic and political system [8; 12], which has four subsystems with different migration regimes [13]. Messey and Hania Zlotnik believe that the European migration subsystem is a product of the Treaty of Rome, which forms the EU's legal basis. The document ensures the circulation of people and a common market of labour, capital and services [8].

The Eurasian migration system has been conceptualised in Russia [13; 14]. Irina Ivakhnyuk defines the Eurasian migration system as a group of post-Soviet countries linked by numerous sustainable migration flows driven by the interaction of various factors: historical, economic, political, demographic, socio-ethnic, geographical and others [13]. Sergey Ryazantsev et al. (2020) [15] define and outline the content of the concept 'migration corridor', which denotes a form of sustainable migration relations between sending and receiving countries. Three migration corridors (Eurasian, Slavic and Caucasian), all three parts of the Eurasian migration subsystem, have developed on the territory of the former USSR.

The ties between the two migration subsystems make the migration situation in Europe peculiar, distinguishing it from those in the rest of the former Soviet republics. For example, the Baltics introduced a visa regime with the countries of the former Soviet Union after gaining independence in 1990s. Whilst maintaining migration ties with the post-Soviet space, the three states have gradually become thoroughly integrated into the migration subsystem of the EU. The Baltics are countries of origin for the labour markets of Western European countries: Great Britain, Ireland, Finland, Sweden and others. Ukraine and Moldova seem to benefit from both worlds: they retain strong migratory links with Russia and, at the same time, send labour and educational migrants to Europe, including new EU member states (the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia). Belarus has joined the common labour market of the EAEU and its close integration with Russia has created a common migration space.

Messey et al. write that, in the 1980–1990s, the EU had six major zones distinguished by a considerable migration exchange [7]. As two migration subsystems (Eurasian and European) developed, interactions between them gradually

intensified and the number of contact migration flows increased. Franck Düvel et al. attribute this to the emergence of new mobility forms in the Eastern European border zones [16]. Despite the political conflict, Ukrainian migrants move to Russia to work, study and settle permanently. Ukrainians have accounted for the majority of applicants for Russian citizenship in recent years. At the same time, the flow of labour and educational migrants from Ukraine to Western European countries is growing. Obviously, the increasing diversity of migration flows in the Eastern European border zone is closely linked to the migration choice opportunities available regardless of whether people move willingly or under forced circumstances [17].

The factor of migration policies pursued by the neighbouring countries (Russia and the EU states) affects the migration flow formation in Eastern Europe. A prime example is the current situation in the Republic of Belarus. Before the 2021 protests, most Belarusian had been leaving their country for Russia, but the new possibilities to obtain political refugee status in Europe and the risks of deportation from Russia for alleged activists redirected the flows of Belarusian emigrants towards Poland, Ukraine, Lithuania, the Czech Republic and other EU countries. The changed geopolitical situation and the migration policies of the neighbouring countries rapidly redirected emigration from Belarus in favour of the European Union [18].

Hein de Haas, a Western migration theorist notes in the article 'Formation and Decline of Migration Systems' that the formation of migration systems is explained neither by the growth of a system of stable links or the poor development of such systems, albeit strong connections emerge in other situations [17]. Later, a team led by Haas published a series of papers analysing migration policies pursued by several countries over fifty years [19; 20]. Looking at major trends and drivers of international migration over the last century, the authors question to what extent modern borders can be defined as uncontrollable and how effectively states regulate migration.

## **The aim and hypothesis of the study.**

### **Information sources and methods**

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This article aims to measure the impact of the migration situation on transformations in the migration policies of some countries in the EU-former USSR borderlands (or the region where the migration systems overlap). We focus on six countries: Belarus, Latvia, Lithuania, Moldova, Ukraine and Estonia. The following objectives were achieved to fulfil the aim of the study: the analysis of the migration situation in the regions mentioned above; the investigation of the bilateral and multilateral migration processes and the main factors affecting their development in every studied period; the examination of migration policy meas-

ures and the way they affect the regulation of migration processes as well as the application of the main migration policy instruments to legal and administrative migration situation regulators in the ‘region of the overlap’. This article hypothesises that these states, being sandwiched between two centres of the major migration subsystems in Eurasia (Eurasian and European) or, in other words, between Russia and the centre of the EU, experience a strong influence of both subsystems as well as of what can be called ‘competitive attraction’. The intensity of gravitation to one or the other centre depends not only on the pull and push factors, but also on the attractiveness and unattractiveness of the migration policies pursued in a migration subsystem at a given moment. This study analyses migration from the borderland countries (‘the region of the overlap’) in the context of migration policy framing within two migration subsystems — Eurasian (with its centre in Russia) and European (the EU) — from 1991 to 2021 (before the recent events in Ukraine).

The subject of the study is migration flows from the six borderland countries, or ‘the region of the overlap’ (Belarus, Moldova, Ukraine, Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia); the focus is on the impact of migration policies of Russia and the EU member states on the development of emigration attitudes and the way people reacted to them in the six studied countries in 1991–2021. Although economic (primarily labour) emigrants accounted for most of the migration flow, student and forced migration was also noticeable. This article uses the comparative analytical method to assess migration legislation and the emigration situation in the six countries. The main information sources were the migration laws of Russia, the EU and the six borderland countries (the ‘region of the overlap’). The study relies upon the data on emigration figures from the national statistics of the borderland countries and immigration data provided by Russia<sup>2</sup> the OECD, the EU countries receiving migrants from the borderland states, the IOM, the World Bank, the UN Development Programme, the ILO and the UNFPA.

### **Stages of emigration from the borderland states or the ‘region of the overlap’ in Eastern Europe**

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This study distinguishes six stages (or periods) in the development of emigration in the countries of the region in the context of Russia’s and the EU’s migration policies toward countries “region of the overlap”. The distinctive features of a period are, firstly, the currently dominant factors and trends in emigration shaping the socio-economic and geopolitical situation in the home country and, secondly, the migration regimes in Russia and the EU — the centres of the Eurasian and European migration subsystems (Table 1).

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<sup>2</sup> Since 2014, Russian statistics has included information on the Crimean Peninsula, whilst Ukrainian statistics do not present data on the territories beyond the country’s control.

Table 1

**The evolution of migration flows in the 'region of the overlap' between the migration subsystems, depending on changes in the migration laws of Russia and the EU**

Migration period (stage)	Major migration flows from the 'region of the overlap'	Main features of Russia's migration policy	Main features of the EU's migration policy
I. Early post-Soviet period (1991—1995)	Forced migration to Russia (refugees, displaced persons); return migration of Russophones to Russia; ethnic emigration to the West; shuttle migration of vendors in border regions	Development of migration laws; lenient migration laws, including those on citizenship; displaced persons acceptance	Visa-free travel with the Baltics; visa-free short-term tourist trips; visa-free shuttle travel for vendors in the border regions; acceptance of ethnic migrants by some countries (Germany, Israel, Greece, Hungary, Poland, Romania, Bulgaria)
II. Later post-Soviet period (1996—2001)	Forced migration to Russia; labour migration to Russia; shuttle travel of vendors to European countries and Turkey; labour migration to the West; undocumented migration to the West	Visa-free migration between CIS countries; migration regime within the union state of Russia and Belarus (1996)	Visa-free and simplified travel with the borderland countries of Central and Eastern Europe; intergovernmental agreements on employing labour migrants and including them in national social safety nets
III. Eastward enlargement of the EU and the 'securitisation' of Russia and Belarus (2002—2005)	Labour, migration to Russia and to the West (mostly undocumented)	New law <i>On the Legal Status of Foreign Citizens and Citizenship</i> ; a stricter migration policy; crackdown on undocumented migration	Introduction of visa requirements for citizens of Russia and the borderland countries (Ukraine, Moldova, Belarus) by the Central and Eastern European (CEE) states granted EU candidate status; accession of the Baltics to the EU; the labour markets of Ireland, the UK and Sweden opening to the citizens of the Baltics and CEE EU member states; the introduction of simplified border control areas and 'ethnic passports and cards' in some CEE countries



The end of table 1

<p>IV. Lenient migration policy in Russia and the EU (2006—2011)</p>	<p>Growing labour migration to the West; student migration to Russia and the West; relocation of businesses to the West; forced migrants fleeing the conflict zones in South Ossetia and Abkhazia</p>	<p>A more lenient migration policy towards citizens of the CIS countries; Russian state repatriation programme</p>	<p>EU labour markets opening to migrants from the 'new' EU member states; simplified employment rules for citizens of Belarus, Moldova, Ukraine and Russia in the new EU member states; local border traffic regime for residents of the borderland CEE states further development of the 'ethnic card' and passport system; re-admission agreements with Eastern Partnership countries</p>
<p>V. Growing tension in the relations between many CIS countries and the EU: 'competition for migrants' (2012—2019)</p>	<p>Forced migration from Ukraine to Russia (in most cases) and the West; labour migration to the West and Russia; investment emigration to the West; undocumented transit migration via the borderland countries from third states to the EU</p>	<p>Work patent system introduced in Russia; the emergence of a common EAEU market; liberalisation of the law <i>On Citizenship for Ukrainian citizens</i>; simplified employment of foreign students; more initiatives aimed at compatriots abroad</p>	<p>Easier access to the labour market of CEE countries (primarily Poland) for citizens of the borderland states; association agreements signed with Moldova (2013) and Ukraine (2017) allowing visa-free non-business travel; further development of Eastern European states' return migration policy (Poland, Hungary)</p>
<p>VI. The pandemic period (2020—early 2022)</p>	<p>Reduction in all types of migration; undocumented transit migration via the borderland countries from the third states to the EU (the migration crisis at the borders of Belarus, Poland and Lithuania); forced migration from Belarus to the EU</p>	<p>Borders closed for foreign citizens; state-supervised labour migrant attraction programmes; selected opening of borders with some states accompanied by virus spreading monitoring</p>	<p>Borders closed for citizens not vaccinated by an approved vaccine; more lenient rules for the employment of migrants with in-demand skills (seasonal workers in agriculture; service and construction workers, healthcare specialists)</p>

### ***Stage I: the early post-Soviet period (1991–1995)***

In the ‘buffer’ zone countries, migration was involuntary in most cases, driven by political and socio-economic circumstances. The main push factors were armed conflicts, national politics, rising nationalism, bans on the use of the Russian language, declining production and unemployment. Emigration had a pronounced ethnic dimension, as some countries eagerly attracted ‘compatriots’ according to their ethnic origin: Germany welcomed Germans; Israel Jews; Greece Greeks; Romania Moldovans; Hungary Hungarians; Poland Poles; Bulgaria Besarabian Bulgarians. By 2001, the number of Jews in Ukraine had fallen fivefold due to large-scale emigration. In the early 1990s, 6,000–8,000 people emigrated each year from Ukraine to Germany as ethnic Germans or Jews, and about 15,000 Ukrainian Greeks left for Greece [22]. The number of Russians, Ukrainians, Belarusians, Poles, Germans, Greeks and Bulgarians in non-motherland countries decreased in 1997–2000: by 40 per cent in Russia, 25 per cent in Ukraine and 45 per cent in Belarus [23].

After regaining independence in 1990, the Baltics witnessed mass emigration. Two groups of residents started to leave: the families of Soviet army officers and administrators, as well as Russian speakers apprehensive of their future or unwilling to learn the official language of the country of residence to obtain citizenship [24]. The Estonian and Latvian governments chose the ‘restoration’ model for granting citizenship<sup>3</sup>. This ‘loyalty test’ left more than 25 per cent of the population in the two countries without citizenship. In Latvia, those people acquired the status of non-citizens or aliens (Latvian *nepilsoņi*). In Estonia, such residents have the status of foreigners with permanent residence permits. Under international pressure, Estonia and Latvia amended their citizenship legislation whereby children of aliens born in these countries after independence acquired citizenship automatically at the request of their parents. Yet, as noted in the literature, despite the mass emigration of the 1990s, Russophones (Russians, Belarusians and Ukrainians) remained dominant in Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania in the 2010s [25].

The location between two ‘centres of gravity’ has led to substantial population decline in Ukraine, Moldova and the Baltics, aggravating the problem of depopulation in the countries. In 1991–2000, Ukraine saw a negative net migration of 510,000 people (it was positive in 1991–1993); Moldova, 159,000; Latvia, 110,000; Estonia, 66,000; Lithuania, 47,000. These figures, however, include only those leaving for permanent settlement and do not cover temporary labour migration.

According to the official statistics, net migration in Belarus was negative in 1994–1995 (Table 2). Ninety per cent of the immigrants came from Russia, Ukraine and Kazakhstan. About 32 per cent entered the country for family reuni-

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<sup>3</sup> Those who had family in the given countries before 1940 were automatically given citizenship.

fication, and 24 per cent in search of employment. Return migrants accounted for another 24 per cent. There was also undocumented migration, which the Ministry of Taxes and Duties estimated at 15 per cent of the national workforce [26].

Table 2

**Net migration in Russia and the borderland countries of Eastern Europe  
in 1991–2000, 1,000 people**

Country	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000
Belarus	3.0	53.8	32.4	-3.3	-0.2	9.3	14.8	19.9	17.6	12.1
Latvia	-5.8	-23.2	-23.7	-25.0	-13.7	-7.4	-5.0	-3.0	-1.5	-1.4
Lithuania	-4.4	-11.7	-17.0	-6.9	-2.8	-1.8	-0.6	-0.6	-0.3	-0.6
Moldova	-33.7	-36.8	-15.1	-14.8	-17.1	-16.5	-9.9*	-7.1*	-3.0*	-4.7*
Russia	136.1	266.2	526.3	978.0	653.7	513.5	514.1	428.8	269.5	362.6
Ukraine	151.3	287.8	54.5	-142.9	-131.6	-169.2	-136.0	-152.0	-138.3	-133.6
Estonia	-4.2	-21.8	-12.8	-10.2	-7.7	-5.0	-2.8	-1.2	-0.3	-0.4

*Comment:* \* the data do not take into account the left bank of the Dniestr river and the town of Bendery.

The natural decrease in Russia and Belarus, on the contrary, was partly compensated for by migrants from the neighbouring borderland states. In 1992–2000, Russia's migration exchange with the CIS and the Baltic States amounted to about 6m people, making up for three-quarters of the country's natural decrease. Of all arrivals, one-fourth were from Ukraine. Most migration flows from Ukraine and Moldova, and to a lesser extent from Belarus, were oriented towards Russia [27].

A factor in Russia's attractiveness for migrants from the neighbouring borderland states was its lenient citizenship laws. In particular, the Law on Citizenship (1991) introduced a period of simplified acquisition of Russian citizenship which lasted until 1996 (later, it was extended repeatedly). The last amendment allowed the choice of citizenship until the end of 2001. Since the establishment of a union state with Russia in 2006, citizens of Belarus have enjoyed the rights of citizens of both countries of work and residence without limitations [28].

In the early 1990s, Russia adopted laws regulating the reception, accommodation and support for involuntarily migrants: the Law on Refugees (federal law No. 4528-I of 19.02.1993), the Law on Forced Migrants (federal law No. 4530-I of 19.02.1993), the Decree of the President of the RSFSR On Organizing Work to Provide Assistance to Refugees and Forced Migrants (No. 123-RP of 14 December 1991). At the time, the key documents of humanitarian migration policy were the Resolution of the Government of the Russian Federation of 3 March 1992 No. 135 On Measures to Assist Refugees and Forced Migrants, the Migration long-term republican programme (1992) and the Federal Migration Programme, which was in force in 1995–2001. Seven intergovernmental agreements were

signed and ratified to regulate resettlement and protect the rights of migrants; Russia opened offices of the Federal Migration Service in several countries, including Latvia, Ukraine and Moldova. The state also signed bilateral treaties On Cooperation on Labour Migration and Social Protection of Migrant Workers with Ukraine, Moldova and Belarus (1994); bilateral treaties on social security for military personnel (1996) and Russian citizens (2011) with Estonia, Lithuania and Latvia; bilateral agreements on retirement pensions with Moldova, Belarus and Ukraine [29]. Belarus concluded agreements on temporary employment with Moldova (1994), Ukraine (1995), Poland (1995) and Lithuania (1996).

In European countries, demographic ageing and workforce shortages created strong demand for labour. In addition, neighbouring countries, geographically and socio-culturally close to the Union, were an excellent pool of workforce. Since 1991, the EU has granted candidate countries (including the Baltic States) visa-free access to its territory. This move gave migrants ample opportunities for undocumented employment in the European labour market. Residents of the Baltics have been described to combine international travel with working illegally. In the 1990s, labour emigration from Lithuania was a viable strategy to hedge one's risks amid economic transition [30]. Many Lithuanians opted for emigration in search of work in the West [29; 31].

After the EU's eastward enlargement, migration regimes were liberalised for residents of border areas in the 'region of the overlap'. People residing in the border territories of Ukraine, Moldova, Belarus, as well as in the Kaliningrad region of Russia, could travel visa-free to Poland, Hungary, Romania, the Czech Republic and Slovakia. A zone of free movement of people within the former socialist camp was established [32; 33]. On this basis, shuttle migration and trade in used cars, food and consumer goods developed in the border regions. The shuttle trade between the countries of the former USSR (Russia, Ukraine, Moldova, Belarus), Central Europe (Poland, Hungary, Romania), Germany and Turkey flourished during this period. The introduction of a visa regime by the Baltic States in 1992 with all CIS countries (including Ukraine and Moldova) limited burgeoning shuttle trade to the near-border area.

### ***Stage II: the late post-Soviet period (1996–2001)***

In this period, emigration from the studied countries, influenced by both migration systems, was rapidly increasing in scale and diversifying geographically. Although labour migration came to the fore, shuttle trade retained a prominent role. More and more people were seeking opportunities to earn money abroad. In other words, the 'professionalisation' of emigration was taking place.

In 1994, many Ukrainian emigrants engaged in shuttle trade were still formally employed elsewhere; in 2002, 39 per cent of them indicated their status as 'unemployed'. By the early 2000s, shuttle labour had become the main occupation for many Ukrainians [34]. The geography of Moldovan emigration expanded dramatically from 17 countries of destination stated by those leaving the state in

1994 to 26 in 2002. Germany, Portugal, Italy and Spain appeared on the list of countries receiving a significant number of Moldovan citizens [35]. The duration of migration also increased: from a few days which Moldovan and Ukrainian citizens could spend abroad at a time in the early 1990s to much longer trips in 2002 [34; 35]. Although the financial crisis of 1998 effectively ended shuttle trade migration as a mass phenomenon, it encouraged emigrants to settle in the countries with which they traded [34–36].

At that stage, CEE countries and the Baltics took steps towards accession to the EU. They enacted a series of laws tightening border control with the neighbouring countries; the issuance of simplified visas began in 1997 [37]. Stricter border control increased the cost of official travel for citizens of the ‘region of the overlap’, and many migrants from the area attempted to enter the EU illegally or stay in the Union with a tourist visa. Ukrainian and Moldovan nationals topped the list of illegal border crossers to the EU [38; 39].

Russia, a major receiving country at the time, promptly developed, adopted and ratified pertinent government regulations, seven intergovernmental agreements, two bilateral agreements and the principal legislative act governing foreign labour recruitment — federal law No. 115 of 2002 On the Legal Status of Foreign Citizens [33].

### ***Stage III: eastward enlargement of the EU and tighter migration control by Russia (2002–2005)***

After the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001, the US initiated a global shift towards a stricter migration policy and a crackdown on undocumented migration. The migration control and policy functions were delegated to the Ministry of the Interior. The 2001 law on citizenship was tightened, and the law On the Legal Status of Foreign Citizens was adopted (2002). Ukraine also reorganised its border guard service and established closer control at the eastern border with Russia. Belarus restored the Soviet-time border protection system [40].

In Russia, all foreign nationals had to go through a complicated registration system. As a result, only seven per cent managed to obtain necessary documents in due time, whilst the rest unintentionally became undocumented migrants and had to either pay fines (official or unofficial) for staying in the country without registration or turn to semi-legal intermediary companies to arrange fake registration. Only citizens of Belarus avoided these problems.

Restrictive migration policy led to an increase in the number of undocumented migrants (in 2001–2006, 75 per cent of migrants in Russia did not have a work permit, and another 50 per cent had no legal residence permit [41]). This trend in migration policy reduced migration flows to Russia from the former Soviet republics, partly redirecting them towards the West and new centres of gravity (Kazakhstan, China, Japan, the Republic of Korea, Turkey and the states of the Persian Gulf). Emigration was becoming more professional, involving doctors, researchers, professors, engineers, IT specialists and programmers.

The accession of the Baltics to the EU in 2004 intensified westward migration from the three states. About 52,000 Estonians live in Finland, comprising 21 per cent of all foreign nationals in the country<sup>4</sup>. Most new immigrants to Estonia were coming from Russia and Ukraine [42]. Mass labour emigration from Latvia resulted in the departure from the country of 260,000 people, or 14 per cent of the population. Lithuania's accession to the EU opened up new opportunities for the countries' residents<sup>5</sup>. In 2004, the net average earnings of a married couple with two children in the EU-15 was eight times that of in Lithuania, encouraging about 1 per cent of the country's population to relocate to the EU annually in 2004–2014 [29]. The UK and Ireland did not establish a transition period and immediately opened their borders to workers from the new member states. Today, the two countries have the largest Lithuanian diasporas [29].

The CEE countries preparing to accede to the Union in 2001–2003 (Romania, Poland, Hungary, Slovakia and the Czech Republic) introduced a visa regime with their neighbours. The new regime affected the historical ties between people living on both sides of the border and impeded the movement of cheap labour. In Hungary, the EU's demand to close the border sparked a debate about the fate of compatriots abroad. In 2003, the country's parliament passed a new 'status law' to allow Hungarians living in the neighbouring countries to use the Hungarian card (an equivalent of the passport) when entering Hungary [43]. Poland developed a similar initiative for ethnic Poles, introducing the Pole Card in 2007. Romania and Bulgaria also took steps to issue compatriots with passports. In 2004, Estonia launched the Programme for Compatriots (*Rahvuskaaslaste Programm*), which supported the culture and language of ethnic Estonians abroad.

In the early 1990s, the EU was euphoric about the defeat of socialism and the dream of an 'integrated and free Europe' coming true. In 2000, the future already looked much grimmer as a surge of migrants crossed the eastern border of the Union. The enlargement underscored the need for measures to control the Union's borders. Former Soviet republics were offered readmission agreements in exchange for visa liberalisation. Still, many countries, including Russia, were reluctant to sign these agreements, wary of the risk of becoming reservoirs of irregular migrants from Asia and Africa. During the 2014–2016 migration crisis, such fears were partly confirmed: many undocumented migrants took the northern route via Murmansk to reach the EU. Russia became a transit area for irregular migrants headed for the Union [44]. As a result, the country introduced measures to counter irregular migration in the CIS.

The EU authorities came up with the idea of creating a 'circle of friends' that would contribute to security and support peace and stability at the eastern bor-

<sup>4</sup> Population structure, *Statistics Finland*. In: Kallioma-a-Puha, L. "Migrants" Access to Social Protection in Finland., p. 152, URL: [https://www.tilastokeskus.fi/tup/suoluk/suoluk\\_vaesto.html#muuttoliike](https://www.tilastokeskus.fi/tup/suoluk/suoluk_vaesto.html#muuttoliike) (accessed 18.02.2019).

<sup>5</sup> Eurostat, 2019, Annual net earnings [earn\_nt\_net], *Eurostat Database*, URL: <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/data/database> (accessed 05.02.2019).

ders. It was put into practice through the European Neighbourhood Policy [45] implemented through running specific programmes. The EU intended to build a buffer zone to control potential threats coming from Belarus, Moldova, Ukraine and Russia. The latter state did not join the initiative, proposing instead a Russia-EU strategic partnership package [46]. The European Neighbourhood Policy followed the global approach to migration management. Yet, some experts maintain that it betrays commitment to power geopolitics dividing Europe into the EU and its environs [45].

#### ***Stage IV: the liberal period (2006–2011)***

In January 2007, the demographic crisis and labour shortages prompted the Russian government to liberalise its migration policy. Net migration compensated in Russia for 75 per cent of the natural decrease. The liberalisation of labour migration was successful. About 7.5m migrants from visa-free CIS countries went through registration, and 2.5m received work permits. This new liberal policy yielded a budget revenue increase of 11bn roubles. In 2005, 54 per cent of migrants had registration; in 2008, 85 [47]. The law on citizenship was amended, restoring some privileges granted earlier to compatriots and launching the process of return migration. A state repatriation assistance programme was adopted with a target of 300,000 people per year [48]. The Russian regions (12 in 2006 and 13 in 2008) that welcomed repatriates within the programme were few and economically backward, and the target was not achieved in the first years of the initiative. Until 2011, the number of state programme participants did not exceed 30,000 per year.

In 2006, CEE countries (the Czech Republic, Poland, Slovakia and Hungary) eased access to their labour market for migrants from Moldova, Russia, Ukraine and Belarus. For example, Poland started liberalising its migration policy following the mass emigration of Poles to the EU after 2004 and a labour shortage in the national market. In 2007–2013, over 2m Poles emigrated to the UK, Germany, Ireland, the Netherlands and the US [49; 50]. The liberalisation of migration policy contributed to an increase in the number of migrants working legally in Poland [51].

Right before the introduction of the Schengen Agreement, CEE countries secured a possibility for citizens of the neighbouring countries to work on their territories for six months a year without a work permit upon application from an employer. After that, the flow of labour and educational migrants diverted to Poland and, later, the Czech Republic, Slovakia and Hungary [50]. In 2007, the EU decided to simplify visa procedures, signing readmission agreements with Ukraine, Russia and Moldova. Local border traffic agreements were concluded with Hungary in 2007, Poland and Slovakia in 2008 and Romania in 2014.

All the former Soviet republics suffered in the global financial and economic crisis of 2008–2009. The number of jobs for migrants sharply decreased, and

many foreign workers were forced to return home or opt for shadow employment. In 2008—2010, Latvia went through a severe financial crisis, losing 25 per cent of its GDP and hitting an unemployment rate of 18.7 per cent [53].

### **Stage V: competition for migrants (2012—2019)**

The data on permanent immigration indicates that, in 2010—2020, the principal country of destination in the region was Russia, which received from 100,000 to 320,000 migrants each year. Amongst the states of the ‘buffer’ zone, net migration was positive in Ukraine and Belarus. In the Baltics and Moldova, these figures were negative (except for Lithuania in 2019—2020; Table 3).

Table 3

#### **Net migration in Russia and the borderland countries of Eastern Europe in 2010—2020**

Country	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Belarus	10.3	9.9	9.3	11.6	15.7	18.5	7.9	3.9	9.4	no data	no data
Latvia [1]	-35.6	-20.1	-11.9	-14.3	-8.6	-10.6	-12.2	-7.8	-4.9	-3.4	-3.2
Lithuania [1]	-72.0	-38.2	-21.3	-16.8	-12.3	-22.4	-30.1	-27.5	-3.3	10.8	19.9
Russia [2, 3]	158.1	319.8	294.9	295.9	270.0	245.4	261.9	211.9	124.9	285.1	106.5
Moldova	-0.5	-0.9	0.1	-1.7	-1.6	-0.8	-1.1	-0.4	-0.2	-1.2	no data
Ukraine [4]	16.1	17.1	61.8	31.9	22.6	14.2	10.6	12.0	18.6	21.5	9.3
Estonia [5]	-2.5	-2.5	-3.7	-2.6	-0.7	2.4	1.0	5.2	7.0	5.4	3.8

Sources: \**Rossiya i strany — chleny Yevropeyskogo soyuza. 2019: Statisticheskii sbornik [Russia and the EU member states. 2019: A statistical book]*, 2019, Rosstat, 2019, p. 43—45; Rosstat, 2022, URL: <https://rosstat.gov.ru/storage/mediabank/Rus-Es2019.pdf> (accessed 15.02.2022); Population change — Demographic balance and crude rates at national level [demo\_gind], 2022, Eurostat, URL: <https://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/submitViewTableAction.do> (accessed 15.02.2022); \*\*2010—2018 data: *Demograficheskii yezhegodnik Rossii 2019, Statisticheskii sbornik. [The demographic yearbook of Russia 2019. A statistical yearbook]*. Moscow: Rosstat, 2019, p. 200. URL: [https://rosstat.gov.ru/storage/mediabank/Dem\\_ejegod-2019.pdf](https://rosstat.gov.ru/storage/mediabank/Dem_ejegod-2019.pdf) (accessed 15.02.2022); \*\*\*2019—2020 data: *Sodruzhestvo nezavisimyykh gosudarstv. Predvaritelnyye itogi, 2020, Statisticheskii sbornik Statkomiteta SNG [The Commonwealth of Independent States. Preliminary results, 2020. A statistical book of the Interstate Statistical Committee of the CIS]*, p. 151, URL: <http://www.cisstat.com/> (accessed 15.02.2022); \*\*\*\**Державна служба статистики України*, URL: <http://www.ukrstat.gov.ua/> (accessed 15.02.2022); \*\*\*\*\**Statista — The Statistics Portal*, URL: <https://www.statista.com/statistics/1264960/estonia-immigration-figures/>, <https://lb-aps-frontend.statista.com/statistics/1264949/estonia-emigration-figures/> (accessed 15.02.2022).

In the 2010s, the Baltics emerged as destinations for migrants from third countries. Table 3 shows that Russia, Belarus, Latvia, Estonia and Ukraine had a positive migration rate during the study period.



Russia sees migrants from the CIS countries as a resource to compensate for the declining demographic potential. Unofficially, migrants from Ukraine and Belarus are considered the preferred ethnic group, whose adaptation and integration are the most unproblematic for Russian society. In 2014–2015, the Russian authorities liberalised the procedure for obtaining Russian citizenship by Ukrainian nationals. Ukrainians account for the vast majority of foreign nationals acquiring Russian citizenship (400,000 people in 2019).

The 2014 political crisis in Ukraine triggered a wave of forced mass migration [54]. The division of the country created two roughly equivalent flows of involuntary migrants: about 1m refugees from the Donetsk and Luhansk regions moved to Russia, and about 1.46 million internally displaced persons to other Ukrainian regions [55]. In 2015, Ukraine's GDP decreased by 10 per cent; unemployment and poverty grew, provoking labour emigration of Ukrainians.

Many Ukrainians participated in Russia's repatriation assistance programme. Belarus received about 60,000 asylum seekers from Ukraine in 2014.

In the same year, the five states of the former Soviet Union that signed the Eurasian Economic Community agreement established the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU), which constituted a sub-national governance structure along with the Eurasian Commission. Several types of migrant workers entered Russia's labour market: 1) citizens of EAEU countries with free access to the labour market; 2) migrants from visa-free CIS states (including Ukraine and Moldova) with less easy, patent-based access to the market; 3) foreign national that need visas to enter Russia and require a work visa and work permit. This has created a hierarchy of inequalities in the labour flows [40].

In 2017, the Ukrainians were granted visa-free access to the EU; this spurred population mobility: 7.6 per cent of the country's population visited the Union in 2018, and 14.4 per cent in 2019. Each tenth (9.4 per cent) took a trip to visit friends and relations or find employment (8.2 per cent) [56]. The bus link between Moldova and Russia, running through Ukraine, became costly and unreliable; trains and flights to Russia were cancelled. Out of 728,000 Moldovan migrants, according to the IOM data, most still reside in Russia (over 217,000 people or 30 per cent). As a principal destination for the Moldovans, the country is followed by Italy (16 per cent), France (7 per cent), the US (6 per cent), Canada and Poland (5 per cent each), Portugal, Ireland, Ukraine and Germany (3 per cent each)<sup>6</sup>. Russia, however, was losing its attractiveness to the Moldovans. The decrease in the proportion of the country's nationals amongst all immigrants in Russia was as large as 55 per cent in 2005, 41 per cent in 2018 and 63 per cent

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<sup>6</sup> *Bolshe vsego grazhdan Moldovy za rubezhom nakhodyatsya v Rossii* [Most of the Moldovan citizens abroad reside in Russia], 2022, Sputnik Moldova, 17.01.2022, URL: <https://ru.sputnik.md/20220117/bolshe-vsego-grazhdan-moldovy-za-rubezhom-nakhodyatsya-v-rossii-48087394.html> (accessed 17.01.2022).

in 2019. Although this decline testifies to Moldova gravitating to the EU, the country remains part of the Eurasian migration system. The Moldovans seem to benefit from visa-free travel in both directions: European and Russian.

Ukrainian and Moldovan experts stress [57; 58] that the above factors, combined with the liberalisation of the visa regime with the EU, the economic crisis in Russia caused by the sanctions imposed by the West following the incorporation of Crimea and the ensuing devaluation of the rouble reoriented Ukrainian and Moldovan labour migration to the EU. The number of Ukrainian labour migrants decreased in Russia and grew in the Union.

Ukraine, Estonia and Lithuania, once countries of origin, were turning into destinations for migrants. Even before the pandemic, student mobility had become a major source of migrants from the 'region of the overlap'. The flow of young people leaving the area to study in the EU was increasing in almost all the countries: many states and universities awarded scholarships and grants. In the early 2000s, about 10,000 schoolchildren and university students from Ukraine studied in the EU. In 2020, their number reached 72,000<sup>7</sup>. Young people from the Baltics, Moldova and Belarus were actively involved in student migration. Russia adopted a policy aimed to attract international students as well. In 2018, Rossostrudnichestvo reserved 11,000 places at Russian universities for the children of ethnic Russians living abroad. Out of 282,000 international students studying in Russia, about 100,000 came from the CIS; 21,000 from Ukraine; 11,000 from Belarus; 501, 220 and 305 people from Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia, respectively<sup>8</sup>.

### ***Stage VI: the pandemic (2020 – early 2022)***

In 2020, the studied countries were closing their borders and imposing lockdowns, and migration flows drastically reduced. The only exception was Belarus, which never introduced restrictive measures. Curfews and strict lockdown measures were introduced in the Baltics. In Poland, Ukraine and Moldova, the restrictions were partly lifted a month later. Russia, in turn, took rather strict restrictive measures. The closure of many border crossing points caused a 5.5-fold decrease in migration from Ukraine to Russia.

The lockdowns and closed borders sharply reduced the inflow of seasonal and temporary labour migrants to the EU and Russia, resulting in acute shortages of some categories of workers, primarily in construction, agriculture and service sector. Some European countries (Germany, Austria, the UK and Finland) liberalised their migration legislation, despite the pandemic, to attract seasonal work-

<sup>7</sup> Global flow of tertiary-level mobile students, 2022, URL: <http://uis.unesco.org/en/uis-student-flow> (accessed 15.02.2022).

<sup>8</sup> Global flow of tertiary-level mobile students, 2022, URL: <http://uis.unesco.org/en/uis-student-flow> (accessed 15.02.2022).

ers. Flights were chartered from Ukraine and Moldova. The Russian authorities repeatedly emphasised the shortage of construction workers. Yet, the country's migration policy focused on creating a system for organised recruitment from Uzbekistan and Tajikistan.

During the pandemic, net migration was positive in Lithuania and Estonia, apparently due to the growing return migration from Europe, including the UK [59]. Returning migrants are generally expected to bring a different culture of production, new skills and knowledge that will spur socio-economic development at home.

The migration situation in Belarus merits special attention. Since the second half of 2020, the country has experienced a major migration outflow caused by the domestic political situation that arose after the suppression of protests in August 2020. On 10 December 2020, the Belarusian government restricted exit across the land border with Ukraine, Poland, Lithuania and Latvia to some categories of citizens. The number of Belarusian emigrants headed for Poland continued to increase during the pandemic: from 65,000 in 2019 to 78,000 in 2020 [60]. By mid-2021, 0.5 per cent of the population had left the Republic of Belarus for political and economic reasons, mainly for Lithuania, Latvia, Poland, Ukraine and Russia [18].

The EU's decision to ban Belarus's flag carrier, Belavia, from the EU's airspace in May 2021 unexpectedly provoked a migration crisis on the country's borders with Poland and Lithuania, i.e., the eastern boundary of the Union<sup>9</sup>. Belavia had to divert its routes from the West to the Middle East (Iraq, Syria, Turkey), thus adding to the inflow of transit migrants disguised as tourists. Unauthorised camps of irregular migrants striving to get to Germany were pitched at the EU's eastern borders. The migration crisis caused the then Lithuanian government to resign in July 2021<sup>10</sup>. Belarus's Western neighbours started to build a wall along the border with the country<sup>11</sup>. These developments resulted in tighter control over the EU's eastern border as well as strained relations between the Union and Belarus.

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<sup>9</sup> YeS zakryl nebo dlya Belarusi iz-za intsidenta s samoletom Ryanair [EU closes airspace for Belarusian airlines over Ryanair flight incident], 2021, *BBC*, 24–25 May 2021, URL: <https://www.bbc.com/russian/news-57358491> (accessed 15.02.2022).

<sup>10</sup> Shturm Vilnyusa i otstavka pravitelstva: k chemu vedet migratsionnyy krizis v Litve [An attack on Vilnius and the cabinet dismissed: possible outcomes of the migration crisis in Lithuania], 2021, *Rubaltic*, URL: <https://www.rubaltic.ru/article/politika-i-obshchestvo/20210728-shturm-vilnyusa-i-otstavka-pravitelstva-k-chemu-vedet-migratsionnyya-krizis-v-litve/> (accessed 15.02.2022).

<sup>11</sup> Migratsionnyy krizis na granitse Belarusi: polskiye pogrannichniye strelyayut v vozdukh, Lukashenko grozit perekryt gaz [The migration crises at the Belarusian border: Polish border guards fire warning shots, Lukashenko threatens to pull the plug on gas], 2021, *BBC*, 11 November, <https://www.bbc.com/russian/news-59250538> (accessed 15.02.2022).

Russia's migration policy had some remarkable features during the pandemic: the president of Russia repeatedly renewed patents and residence permits for foreign nationals. Many experts considered this measure the most effective assistance to labour migrants rendered one of the most vulnerable social groups by the pandemic. Still, severe labour shortages aggravated by the pandemic did not preclude another round of complicating migration procedures, which took place at the end of 2021. From 29 December 2021, Russia introduced obligatory dactylography for migrant workers at the place of stay; medical examination rules were also tightened up: now, the procedure had to be repeated every three months<sup>12</sup>. Although these rules have not yet affected citizens of Belarus, they have complicated the situation for labour migrants from Ukraine and Moldova. As the literature shows, stricter labour migration requirements push a substantial proportion of migrants towards the shadow economy and add to corruption [61; 62]. Thus, migrants from Ukraine, Belarus and Moldova, having several migration options, were likely to choose EU countries with clear migration laws.

The study countries have yet to overcome COVID-19 and eliminate its consequences. The WHO maintains that no varieties of the disease pose a significant risk to the lives of the vaccinated. And many countries have begun to open their borders since February 2022; migratory links are being gradually re-established.

Migration policy of the Eastern European borderlands: old factors and new trends.

After the dissolution of the USSR in December 1991, the Baltics applied for NATO and EU membership, which they were granted in 2004<sup>13</sup>. This added a new, European, dimension to the countries' migration policy influenced by the bitter historical memory of incorporation into the Russian Empire and the USSR. Soviet deportations dealt a hard blow to the demography of the Baltic States. Today, their migration strategies seek to increase the proportion of the titular (state-forming) ethnic group, establish the total dominance of the national languages and counter demographic ageing and population reduction. The states have returned to the laws in force during their first independence in the 1920s. At the same time, the situation is complicated by the presence of Russophone minorities and the mass migration of the titular population to economically developed countries, primarily in the EU [63].

Latvia is very sensitive to immigration from outside the EU, jealously preserving the ethnic balance and protecting the country's language and culture.

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<sup>12</sup> Amendments to law No. 115-FZ On the Legal Status of Foreign Citizens in the Russian Federation of 25.07.2002; laws № 128—93 On the State Dactylographic Registration in the Russian Federation of 25.07.1998 and № 109-FZ On the Migration Registration of Foreign Citizens and Stateless Persons in the Russian Federation of 18.07.2006.

<sup>13</sup> Vzaimodeystviye Litvy i NATO [Lithuania-NATO cooperation], 2022, *HATO.pф*, URL: <https://xn--80azep.xn--p1ai/ru/lithuania.html> (accessed 15.02.2022).

This sensitivity is a reaction to the deportations and the consequences of Soviet-time Russification. As a result of the deportations, the proportion of ethnic Latvians in the country declined from 77 per cent in 1935 to 52 per cent in 1989. According to the 1989 census, Latvia had a population of 2.67m, which decreased by 738,000 to 1.93m in 2018<sup>14</sup>.

In 2018, Latvia's Cabinet of Ministers approved a migration policy concept, which simplified some procedures for non-EU graduates of Latvian universities seeking employment in the country.

Despite Latvia's immigration policy being generally aimed at protecting the local workforce, visa liberalisation was nevertheless initiated to tackle labour shortages. According to the Population Register<sup>15</sup>, 2,101,061 people lived in Latvia as of 1 July 2018. Of them, 228,855 were aliens and 92,342 third-country nationals: 54,258 citizens of Russia, 7,485 of Ukraine, 3,318 of Belarus, 1,708 of India and 1,556 of Uzbekistan.

In 2017, Latvia introduced start-up visas for top talented and developers of innovative products. Yet the number of arrivals from third countries was rather small in 2017: 4,029 Ukrainians, 1,230 Belarusians and 1,095 Russians<sup>16</sup>. Latvia also issues immigrant investor visas: 17,000 thereof were given in 2010–2017. They allow non-EU investors to obtain a residence permit in exchange for a certain amount of investment in real estate, *venture capital and credit institutions*. *Russians accounted for the majority of investor visa holders (70 per cent), followed by Ukrainians (8 per cent)*<sup>17</sup>. Residents of the neighbouring countries who have Latvian origin<sup>18</sup> can obtain dual citizenship.

Just like in the other Baltic States, the demographic situation in Lithuania is alarming<sup>19</sup>. The country's migration model, however, has started to change. In 2018, 32,200 of its residents emigrated, which is 33 per cent below the

<sup>14</sup> Centrālā statistikas pārvalde, 2018, *Latvija 2018, Galvenie statistikas rādītāji*, p. 5, URL: [https://www.csb.gov.lv/sites/default/files/publication/2018-05/Nr%2002%20Latvija%20Galvenie%20statistikas%20raditaji%202018%20%2818\\_00%29%20LV.pdf](https://www.csb.gov.lv/sites/default/files/publication/2018-05/Nr%2002%20Latvija%20Galvenie%20statistikas%20raditaji%202018%20%2818_00%29%20LV.pdf) (accessed 03.05.2020).

<sup>15</sup> Population Register (Iedzīvotāju reģistrs), 2018, *Latvian residents by nationality (Latvijas iedzīvotāju sadalījums pēc valstiskās piederības)*, URL: [https://www.pmlp.gov.lv/lv/assets/documents/statistika/Iedz%20C4%ABvot%20C4%81ju%20re%20C4%A3istrs%20st.%20uz%2001072018/ISVP\\_Latvija\\_pec\\_VPD.pdf](https://www.pmlp.gov.lv/lv/assets/documents/statistika/Iedz%20C4%ABvot%20C4%81ju%20re%20C4%A3istrs%20st.%20uz%2001072018/ISVP_Latvija_pec_VPD.pdf) (accessed 10.01.2018).

<sup>16</sup> LR Saeima, 2018, *Imigrācijas loma darbaspēka nodrošinājumā Latvijā. Sintēzes ziņojums*, URL: [https://www.saeima.lv/petijumi/Imigracijas\\_loma\\_darbaspeka\\_nodrosinajums\\_Latvija-2018\\_aprilis.pdf](https://www.saeima.lv/petijumi/Imigracijas_loma_darbaspeka_nodrosinajums_Latvija-2018_aprilis.pdf). (accessed 03.05.2020).

<sup>17</sup> OCCRP, 2018, *Latvia's Once Golden Visas Lose their Shine — But Why?* 5 March, URL: <https://www.occrp.org/en/goldforvisas/latvias-once-golden-visas-lose-their-shine-but-why> (accessed 03.05.2020).

<sup>18</sup> For example, the US, the UK, Australia and some EU countries.

<sup>19</sup> Population on 1 January by age, sex and type of projection [proj\_15npms], 2019, *Eurostat Database*, URL: <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/data/database> (accessed 05.02.2019).

2017 level. The country welcomed 28,900 immigrants in 2018, 57 per cent of whom were return migrants. Ukrainians accounted for almost half of foreign immigrants; Belarusians 26 per cent; Russians 6 per cent. Compared to 2017, the number of westward immigrants from Ukraine increased by 32 per cent; Belarus, 20 per cent; Russia, 19 per cent [31]. Lithuania drew up the Action Plan for Integration of Foreigners in Lithuanian Society 2018–2020, and the most recent strategy for demographic, migration and integration policy for 2018–2030 was adopted in September 2018<sup>20</sup>. Its primary goals are to ensure positive net migration, encourage return migration and attract foreign workers to meet demand in the labour market [29].

About 15 per cent of Estonia's residents were born outside the country (Population Census, 2011) [64]. Most Soviet-time immigrants arrived in Estonia from Russia, Ukraine and Belarus [65; 66]. The immigrant question is sensitive in the country. Although Estonia's immigration policy relies on a quota system for third-country nationals, the rules have become more lenient in recent decades in response to labour shortages. The country launched the Bringing Talent Home initiative. The International House Estonia, an institution assisting newcomers in their settlement efforts, finances trips to Estonia for IT specialists willing to move to the country [67]. Although there are signs of an emerging immigrant inflow, Estonia still has near-zero net migration [68].

## **Conclusion**

The economic and political competition between CEE countries and Russia for the population of the western borderlands of Europe's two migration subsystems has been growing in the last 30 years. The situation does not benefit Russia. The crisis in Russian — Ukrainian relations could reorient the Ukrainians, Moldovans and Belarusians towards the EU.

Russia's migration policy, like that of the Baltics, focuses on compatriots abroad and student migration. Yet, transforming temporary labour migration into circular, for which Russia has all the prerequisites and resources, may be just as effective in addressing demographic and socio-economic problems.

The socio-demographic and political situation is acute in the western part of the post-Soviet space: Ukraine, Moldova and the Baltics. The latter, however, demonstrate GDP growth supported by socio-economic improvements and attract more and more labour and involuntary migrants from the other study countries. This trend will slow down the Baltics' emigration losses in the long run.

Most labour migrants arrive in the Baltics from former Soviet republics with which they have preserved close ties despite the formal desire of Lithuania, Lat-

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<sup>20</sup> Strategy for the Demographic, Migration, and Integration Policy for 2018–2030, 2018, Seimas, 20 September 2018, URL: [https://www.lrs.lt/sip/portal.show?p\\_r=119&p\\_k=2&p\\_t=260865](https://www.lrs.lt/sip/portal.show?p_r=119&p_k=2&p_t=260865) (accessed 05.02.2019).

via and Estonia to fence them off and become part of the West. Historical roots and memory work on both sides. The Baltics' Russophone space is another factor in their attractiveness to migrants. The Baltic Sea region is receiving more and more migrants from other source countries, such as Central Asian states, Moldova, Ukraine and Belarus.

Immigration processes, still largely gravitating to Russia, will not ensure significant population growth without revising the current, overly strict immigration policy. The westward shift in the migration flows from the former western Soviet republics will continue to influence the transformation of the ethnic, social, professional and confessional composition of the Russian population.

European countries, particularly the most developed EU member states, can increasingly rely on an influx of educated and skilled workers from Ukraine and Belarus, many of whom seek asylum in the West. This pattern of migration exchange is not favourable; it depends not only on the nature of migration policy measures but, above all, on the internal political and socio-economic situation in each of the study countries and Russia.

In the pre-crisis period, the most widespread form of migration behaviour amongst the Ukrainians, Moldovans and Belarusians was systematic circular labour migration (mainly for 3–6 months) to the neighbouring countries. The expansion of the labour migration geography slowed down during the pandemic. During lockdowns, travel to neighbouring countries was safer and less complicated. Before the pandemic, 31 per cent of labour migrants working in Poland were willing to land a job in Germany or another EU country where salaries are significantly higher; today, this proportion does not exceed 19 per cent<sup>21</sup>.

The liberalisation of migration laws (the Covid amnesty) by receiving countries has proved most effective in reducing undocumented labour migration. It has not only legalised the status of foreigners and ensured their legal access to the labour market, but also reduced migration-related crime and corruption, as well as migrant exploitation. No return to the pre-pandemic situation in interstate migration relations is expected. Obviously, the scale, directions and types of migration will not be what they were before.

Another scenario of interstate migration relations may include a prolonged decline in the incomes of labour migrants' households and the unwillingness of economies at home to remedy the situation. In this case, the need for jobs outside the country will grow, and workforce supply from labour-exporting countries will increase. But will there be matching demand for workforce in the importing

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<sup>21</sup> Cherez koronavirus migranti v Polshi vse menshe dumayut pro zarobitki v Nimechchini: doslidzhennya [Due to the coronavirus, migrants in Poland think less and less about earning money in Nimechchini: research], 2022, Nash vybir, URL: <https://naszwbybir.pl/doslidzhennya-cherez-koronavirus-migranty-v-polshhi-vse-menshe-dumayut-pro-zarobitky-v-nimechchyni/> (accessed 15.02.2022).

countries? To what extent will the structure of demand for certain professions be met by the supply? The transformation of migration policy tools and mechanisms in all the partner countries will depend on the answers to these questions. Both scenarios and developments in each of them need to be taken into account by all the borderland countries in Eastern Europe, as well as Russia and the EU, when devising national migration policies.

Against the background of Russia's special military operation in Ukraine, about 5m Ukrainian have left the country, most of them to the EU<sup>22</sup>. The system of migration flows in the European part of the post-Soviet space is changing. Unfortunately, the unpredictability of the development and results of the current crisis in Russian — Ukrainian relations impedes any forecasts about its consequences, particularly as regards migration dynamics in the region. It is equally impossible to provide recommendations on migration policy measures. The architecture of relations and ties between these countries is undergoing fundamental change.

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<sup>22</sup> From other countries, 549805 people arrived in Russia; 426964, the Republic of Moldova; 23759. Belarus. UNHCR. Operational data portal. Ukraine refugee situation, URL: <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/situations/ukraine/location?secret=unhcrrestricted> (accessed 19.04.2022).



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