

THE LOWER REACHES OF THE VOLGA AND THE NORTHERN CASPIAN AT THE CROSSROADS: TIME AND PEOPLE, PAST AND PRESENT

Viktor VIKTORIN

*Ph.D. (Hist.), assistant professor,
Department of Oriental Languages,
Astrakhan State University,
advisor under the Governor's Administration
(Astrakhan, Russian Federation)*

From time immemorial migrations, ethnic migrations included (that were sometimes artificially encouraged or just as artificially restrained) have created and continue to create problems for old-timers and newcomers alike; by the same token the academic community was forced to conceptualize this rather complicated phenomenon. At the same time, "the great migrations of people" have left their indelible traces in world history. They are a vehicle of cultural exchange, a powerful stimulus of ethnogenesis and ethnic contacts that shaped and changed ethnic make-ups of limited and vast territories.

Sociologists have already pointed out that the turn of the 21st century is marked by landslide migrations all over the world. People move for natural reasons or are forced or provoked to migrate. Forced migrations were caused by the tragic end of the Soviet Union and the crisis of the Russian Federation's administrative structure. They reached their peak in the 1990s when huge masses of people moved to new places or returned to old homes long abandoned by their ancestors. (Exodus is probably an apt term to be used in this context.)

Sometimes natural and forced migrations coincide in time and place; in such cases their ethnic descriptions may become even more obvious or may complement the main features of such movements. There are points of attraction and points of transit migrations normally found along borders of neighboring states or along administrative borders inside a country.

The present situation is of critical importance for Russia; when dealing with the most urgent issues we should demonstrate well-balanced, bold and novel approaches.¹ The way these issues are treated in the Astrakhan Region has already attracted academic attention and invited several opinions about the processes and possible approaches.²

¹ See, for example: "Migratsionnye protsessy: regulirovanie i upravlenie (razdel 3)," in: A.A. Sharavin, S.M. Markedonov, *et al.*, *Tezisy po rossiiskoy natsional'noy politike*, Institute of Political and Military Analysis, Moscow, 2004, pp. 19-23.

² See: L.S. Ruban, "Razvitie konfliktnoy situatsii v Astrakhanskoj oblasti," *Issledovania po prikladnoj i neotlozhnoj etnologii* (Moscow), No. 86, 1995; V.M. Viktorin, *Mezhetnicheskaia situatsia v Astrakhanskoj oblasti: kul'turnye,*

The region found in the lower reaches of the Volga River has been part of the Southern Federal Okrug since 2000. It is neither large nor densely populated (population size is slightly over 1 million); its territory covers 44.1 thousand sq km, not more than 30,000 sq km of them are suitable for human settlement and economic activities. In the last 15 years the region recovered its former awareness of being “Russia’s southern outpost on the Caspian shores.” It is developing dynamically.

The local students of local lore, sociologists and political scientists of different schools have agreed to distinguish between the Astrakhan Region within its present limits and the Astrakhan Territory of the past that from time immemorial (at least as part of the Russian State) has been looking at Astrakhan as its cultural and administrative center.

sotsial'nye, politicheskie problemy, Astrakhan, 1998; S.E. Be-rezhnoy, I.P. Dobaev, P.V. Krayniuchenko, “Islam i islamizm na luge Rossii,” in: *Iuzhnoross. obozrenie TsSRiP IPPK pri RGU*, Issue 17, Rostov-on-Don, 2001, pp. 216-225; *Bezhen-sy i vynuzhdennye pereselen-sy: etnicheskie streeotypy (v sub'ektakh IuFO)*. *Opyt sotsiologicheskogo analiza*, Vladikavkaz, 2002, pp. 53-77; *Natsional'nye men'shinstva v kontekste politiki v regionakh luga Rossii. Pravovye osnovy i praktika obespeche-nia*, Moscow, 2003, pp. 82-127; A.V. Dmitriev, P.L. Karabush-chenko, R.Kh. Usmanov, “Geopolitika Kaspiiskogo regiona (Vzgliad iz Rossii. Fragmenty), Part I,” *Astropolis—Astra-khanskije politicheskie issledovania. Nauchno-praktich. zhur-nal* (Astrakhan), No. 2 (5), 2003, pp. 96-138 ff.

This area has preserved and is developing the feeling of togetherness, economic ties, kindred and friendly relations. The “common fate” is invariably emphasized at the top official level during mul-tilateral meetings, exchange of delegations and regular (since 1997) celebrations of the date the Astrakhan Gubernia was founded by Peter the Great.

Peaceful and generally calm situation in the multi-ethnic region is well known. Some people come here to study, to work and to develop its oil and gas fields; others seek refuge from sharp con-flicts in Russia and the CIS. The market relations did not disrupt the old trade contacts with other regions: they merely changed and received a fresh development impetus.

The region is a transit territory that attracts massive migrations flooding the South of Russia. Itself part of the South of Russia it receives new settlers, many of them arriving from other constitu-encies of the same federal okrug.

In the past, the lower Volga was a center of several mighty powers of a mixed (nomadic and settled) type. They left no trace except for archae-ological finds and folklore. Still, this territory can be described as “the Caspian fringe” (the term bor-rowed from Lev Gumilev) or as the Black Sea-Cas-pian “inter-maritime” and as an active periphery of Russia and the world in the process of development.

“Quasi-Autochthones” and “Migrants”

I have repeatedly stated in my publications and public speeches that “the absence of an obviously autochthonous population” in the Astrakhan area is one of the factors of peace and stability there, which means that no group can claim this fabulously picturesque territory as its own. From time to time, this statement invited indignation and rejection,³ while the mounting wave of migration to the region stimu-lated distinction between the “locals” and the “aliens.” The press and even the academic circles become involved.

Ethnic histories of practically all peoples, as well as histories of practically all territories know of “locals” and “migrants.” The concept of the “adjusting substratum” obvious in the mountainous areas is less obvious in the forest and forest-steppe zones and practically undetectable in (or widely spread across vast expanses of) the steppes, semi-deserts, flood-plains and the delta.

It was Tamerlane’s marches of the late 14th century that deprived the lower reaches of the Volga of its settled population; in the mid-16th century the nomads, the remnants of the “Tartars of the khanate,” moved to Azov under pressure of Russian troops. So far no traces of these ethnic groups (direct ances-

³ For more detail, see: V.M. Viktorin, “Tak kto zhe u nas glavny? Etnoistoria i ‘korenialism’ (Ob izdaniy ‘Astrakhanskije kazakhi’ v 2000 g. v otklikakh v obshchey i tatarskoy presse),” *Astrakhanskije izvestia*, No. 46 (617), 14-20 November, 2002, p. 4.

tors of Hazaria, the Golden Horde and Hajji-Tarkhan) have been detected. In the same way, no traces of an “aboriginal layer” (later absolutely stable and recognizable) that came back to these parts have been found.

As part of Russia the Astrakhan territory was build up by successive migration waves. The lower Volga polyethnic community was swelling with Russian servicemen (who came in the mid-16th century); Nogai-iurtovtsy (who moved here from the Ural-Djaek River in the mid-16th century) followed in the early 17th century by kindred groups of Djetisan-Nogais. A nomadic horde of Torgout Kalmyks arrived closer to the mid-17th century; they were followed by several Turkmenian waves between the 17th and 18th centuries; Tartars arrived from the middle reaches of the Volga in the 18th century; in the mid-18th century Karagashi Nogais migrated from Piatigorsk; late in the 18th century here appeared Armenians fleeing from Persian shahs; Don and Black Sea Cossacks came together with Kalmyks who adopted Christianity to join Russian troops in the 18th and early 19th centuries. Late in the 18th and 19th centuries Ukrainians who brought salt gradually settled in the lower reaches of the Volga; in 1801 there came numerous Kazakhs who belonged to the horde of Sultan Bukey; Ashkenazi Jews came in the 19th century; the so-called “Saxonian” Gypsies appeared after the war; the Volga Germans settled in Kharabali village in the mid-1950s; then came Russians from Turkey and Rumania, “Nekrasovtsy” and “Lipovane” (members of Russian Orthodox sects) followed later (in the 1960s); members of North Caucasian ethnic groups started coming in 1960s and 1970s, etc. Back in the 17th and early 18th centuries numerous Akkinty Chechens were already serving under Astrakhan military leaders. Their number in the Astrakhan Region increased rapidly when they were allowed to return from exile. While in 1959 there were 59 Chechens living in the region in 1989 there were over 8,000 of them; today, according to preliminary estimates, there are nearly 16,000. The destructive earthquake that took place in June 1970 in Daghestan forced many people, mainly Darghins and Avars, to move to Astrakhan.

This shows that the experience of migrations and settlement of new groups of people has been accumulating for many centuries. New realities started taking shape in the 1980s-1990s.

General Ethnic Statistics

Late in the 1980s the Astrakhan Region, like many other Russian regions, welcomed victims of the Karabakh conflict (Armenians, Azeris, and mixed families). Later 1,500 Meskhetian Turks arrived and fit well into the village of Pady in the region’s north, the village of Raznochinovka (near the city of Narimanov, not far from Astrakhan) and the Bol’shie Isady District of Astrakhan.

According to the figures of the migration control structures, not less than 1 to 1.5 million migrants (more than the region’s permanent population) crossed the region in the 1990s. About 25,000 of them were registered as permanent dwellers; experts are convinced, however, that the real number was at least 3 to 4 times greater; about 14,500 were registered as forced migrants. They all came mainly from Chechnia (Russians, Germans and Jews, on the one hand, and a more or less equal number of Chechens, on the other). In 2002-2003, the sources of migration changed because the situation in Chechnia had normalized and because practically all Russian-speakers wishing to migrate from the republic and the neighboring regions had done so. In addition, tension had increased along the border with Afghanistan. By that time railway communication between Moscow and Dushanbe had been replaced with the Dushanbe-Astrakhan line. Because of this and certain other reasons, this line brought from Central Asia to Astrakhan transit migrants and those who wanted to stay in the region (Tajiks and Pamiris, Uzbeks, Muslim Gypsies, the so-called Liulù from the city of Termez).

There are also seasonal migrations from Central Asia to the Astrakhan Region and up north to Russia as well as migrations of those wishing to settle (from the Southern and Northern Caucasus). The former become permanent and stable, something that earlier was more typical of the latter. There is also “edu-

ational” migration: it is for a long time that neighboring and even more distant regions regarded education in Astrakhan as highly prestigious.

Migration from the Far Abroad has just started—in some cases it is re-emigration of Germans and Jews who had been lured by “ethnic” political calls and the hope of acquiring security, stability and future (if not for themselves then for their children and grandchildren) in the community they were prepared to accept as kindred.

The Astrakhan Kalmyks (the Steppe and Fishing groups of Torgouts) nearly stopped moving to the neighboring Kalmyk Republic, the number of those who do move away is much lower than that registered by the 1959-1970 population censuses. This says a lot about the currently favorable ethnic climate in the region. The ethnic composition of migrations to our region is different from other regions: we have practically no Kurds and no Yezidi who settled in large communities in the Volgograd and Saratov regions (in the latter there are practically no Iranian-speaking Talyshes from Southern Azerbaijan). Their business contacts along the Kazakhstan border brought them in large groups to Novokuznetsk and Astrakhan.

The recently introduced migration cards for the foreigners arriving in Russia made it possible to establish that 96 percent of foreigners who come to Russia as seasonal migrants or intend to settle arrive in Astrakhan and the region. They are mainly people from the former Soviet Central Asian republics. It is much harder to trace migration flows inside the country, yet general numerical assessments of them are possible.

The composition of newcomers who settled in the Astrakhan Region is the following: migrants from Chechnia, about 30 percent; from Kazakhstan, 20 to 25 percent; Tajikistan, not less than 10 percent; from Daghestan, about 8 percent; from Uzbekistan, 6 to 7 percent; from Azerbaijan, up to 7 percent; from Armenia, 5 to 6 percent; from Georgia, 3 to 4 percent; from other places, up to 2 percent. Their ethnic composition is the following: Russians, 75-76 percent; Tartars, 6-6.5 percent; Chechens, about 5 percent; Azeri and Talyshes, not less than 4.5 percent; Armenians, up to 3 percent; Ukrainians, 2 percent; others (Avars, Darghins, Tajiks, Uzbeks, Georgians, Germans, Jews and Tats) up to 4 percent. A number of children of mixed marriages among the newcomers is large: this group suffers more than others in ethnic conflicts.

There are still no official results of the 2002 population census yet one can say that the migration flow has not irrevocably changed (contrary to what many prefer thinking) the region’s ethnic composition, yet it has left its imprint on it. I have in mind the larger number of the slightly dominating Russian population that keeps its share more or less at the same level: between 1970 and 1989 its share dropped from 77 to 72 percent; the expected result for 2002, 70-71 percent. The share of the second largest ethnic group, Kazakhs (the so-called Bukeevskie Irredentists) and the number of people with higher education among them increased from 13.5 to 15 percent. The share of the Tartars that somewhat dropped when the Nogais had identified themselves as such (earlier, officially they were all registered as Tartars) is currently stabilizing. The expected dynamics for the Tartars is from 7.2 to 7.0-7.1 percent. The mountain peoples of the Northern Caucasus will become the fourth largest ethnic group (up to 3 percent) to be followed by Ukrainians (2 percent) and Kalmyks (0.8 percent). Over 1,000 Uzbeks and Tajiks will overcome the reference index of 0.1 percent. Negligible by itself migration of 200 Nogais from the valleys of Chechnia and Daghestan will strengthen the already existing Nogai ethnic group in the Astrakhan Region.

The share of Muslims of various trends has increased from 22-23 to over 25 percent. Today, Sunni-Shi’a Islam that came from Daghestan and Chechnia (and its Murid, tariqat, branch) functions together with the local Turkic Sunni-Hanafi School (in 1989-1990 mosque No. 3 on the city marketplace was transferred to the local Shi’ites). Confessional differences lead to stiff competition among trading groups of recent Avar migrants. Some of the migrants who came from Daghestan (the older generation of the Omarov family arrived in early 1970) left the tariqat branch to set up a community of “pure Islam” (jama’at of mukhmins) numbering 60. They were misnamed Wahhabis or “peaceful Wahhabis” because of their adherence to strict discipline and old Islamic code of behavior and clothing.

There are small groups of radical renovation (jihadists) that preach the use of force; they, normally, do not last long.⁴

The local Shi'a community was restored when Azeris and Talyshes resettled in Astrakhan and when the region restored its old (pre-Soviet) contacts with northern Iran. Today they are cooperating in the sphere of education and commerce through the newly opened Iranian consulate in Astrakhan. The Shi'ites peacefully blended into the Astrakhan muftiat. In the mid-1990s a group of about 100 Judaic Tats (so-called mountain Jews) came to Astrakhan from Chechnia and Daghestan. At first, they had found it hard to cooperate with the local synagogue and the Judaic community. Later, the differences were completely settled. In 2001 a small Armenian Gregorian church was restored in the old part of the city close to the national-cultural Arev society.

The "index of migration" of our region is 1 : 12, which is very much below those of the Krasnodar and Stavropol territories, yet it is noticeable in the local conditions, therefore the region can be described as a "problem" one but not "conflict-prone."

Ethnosociology of Migrations

L.S. Ruban, a sociologist from Moscow, born and educated in Astrakhan, has dated the "ethnic conflict in Astrakhan" to the late 1980s and predicted its rapid escalation (very much in line with other conflicts in the former Soviet Union). She believed that migration from the Caucasus would accelerate the conflict together with the internal instability typical of the period of transition.⁵

I have been always convinced (and stated my conviction in the 1990s) that the author failed to distinguish between the "everyday," "commercial" and "regional" conflicts. The latter never happened; according to the recent ethnosocial studies, there is no direct threat of it.

After several flair-ups of 1992-1993 (that could be observed elsewhere in Russia) the situation in the ethnosocial sphere stabilized that led L. Ruban to believe that "the unresolved conflict became a latent one."⁶ She guided herself by the vague answers supplied by 600 respondents. I have to say that "latent conflicts" can be detected in any polyethnic territory.

The project Position of Ethnic Minorities in the Border Regions realized in 2002 in some of the Volga and Urals regions by the Center for Ethnopolitical and Regional Studies, RAS (Moscow) together with the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation produced interesting even if debatable results. It aroused active discussions on all key issues. Astrakhan academics and especially those practically dealing with the ethnic problems object to introducing "foreign, or Western" terminology as applied to Russian problems. The term "ethnic minority" ("old" and "new") has no local correspondences; it excludes Russians, who while being in the majority in the region as a whole are in the minority in a couple of districts.⁷ One can hardly accept the term "discrimination against the migrant ethnic minorities" as applied to the Astrakhan realities and, consequently, the attempts at "experimenting" with it.⁸

There are doubts whether the 1994 and 2002 samplings were representative enough and whether experiments in ethnic sociology can be accepted as ethical: in 2002 the "provocation method" was used (false attempts at finding employment or renting a flat); in 1994 the question "Are there ethnic groups that you dislike?" suggested an answer—something that should not be done.

⁴ For more detail, see: V.M. Viktorin, "K probleme povolzhsko-prikavkazskogo 'obnovlenchestva' v mirnoy i radikal'noy formakh (na materialakh obshchiny v g. Astrakhani v 1990-2000-kh gg.)," *Evrasiiskoe prostranstvo v postsovetskiy period: enokul'turnaia spetsifika sotsial'nykh i politicheskikh protsessov. Ezhegodnik TsRTI VGU*, Issue 1, Volgograd, 2001, pp. 46-59.

⁵ See: L.S. Ruban, *Razvitie konfliktnoy situatsii v Astrakhanskoj oblasti*, pp. 4-5, 11 and the diagram.

⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 11-12.

⁷ The present author repeatedly expressed these doubts at the summarizing conference of the project Ethnic Minorities in the Russian Federation (TsEPRI and the J.D. and C.T. MacArthur Foundation, the Rudomino All-Russia State Library of Foreign Literature, Moscow, 2-3 June, 2003).

⁸ Described in the collection: *Natsional'nye men'shinstva (v kontekste politiki v regionakh Iuga Rossii). Pravovye osnovy i praktika obespechenia (Astrakhanskaia, Volgogradskaiia, Saratovskaiia, Samarskaiia i Orenburgskaiia oblasti)*, Moscow, 2003, pp. 119, 121-125 (and diagram on p. 123).

It seems that L. Ruban and E. Pain were too much enthusiastic of the “positive discrimination” term coined in the English-language sociological writings published in the Netherlands. L. Ruban suggested that “positive discrimination” should have been introduced against the main, in her opinion, population group by creating official privileges and preferences for the “minorities” (at whose expense, I wonder?). The 2002 team referred to the case when a Russian had been denied employment for sake of a Tajik as a case of “positive” (read: “useful, or commendable”) discrimination (!).⁹

Significantly, this project failed to identify serious threats in the region and worsened problems; this was confirmed by recent works *Monitoring obshchestvennogo mnenia po mezhetnicheskim otnosheniam* (Monitoring of Public Opinion on Ethnic Issues) (by the Committee of Soldiers’ Mothers and human rights activists of the Astrakhan Region together with the Republican Party of Russia and the Soros Foundation); *Negativnye etnostereotipy v otnoshenii vynuzhdennykh pereselentsev* (Negative Ethnic Stereotypes in Relation to Forced Migrants) (by a group of experts from various departments of regional administration and the Vainakh Society together with the Caucasian and Danish Refugee Councils).¹⁰ They have identified certain potential problems that can also be regarded as favorable and hopeful. Students from various higher educational establishments were also involved, thus learning how to study this very topical problem.

The gathered materials show that the situation in the region is far from simple yet stable—it is not easy, though possible, to unbalance it. Continued stability depends on how well the administrative team and the polyethnic community will work and cooperate.

Eighty percent of the respondents pointed out that they had never encountered ethnic intolerance; 10 percent had had this experience (6 percent of them had been encountered with ethnic intolerance quite often—normally at markets and in other everyday situations) and 10 percent were undecided.

Over 70 percent of the polled were quite positive about “ethnic cooperation” (the best models being: “friends and neighbors,” “colleagues” and “relatives”). Over 25 percent preferred to deal with “their own people”; up to 50 percent of permanent settlers inclined to trust “their own environment” more (among the recent arrivals the share of them was from 60 to 70 percent).

Over 60 percent of respondents believed that the “Astrakhan experience” could be used in other regions (nearly all of them were prepared to act as mediators).

Only 27 to 32 percent of the respondents are critical of the structures of power acting in the ethnic sphere, which means administrative efforts are quite effective; over 50 percent would like to know more about these efforts.

The respondents believe that the Russian and local media are doing a lot to resolve (or fan) ethnic problems; 60 percent is critical of their inability to discuss the issue (that only superficial observers regard as simple) and of their efforts to camouflage their inability with “bombastic” headlines and insulting comments.

Much attention was paid to the migration issue; the respondents in the categories “already dwelling in the region” and “recent arrivals” gave similar yet not identical answers; 80 percent sympathizes with the refugees and migrants (something that gives hope); over 20 percent regards the fact of mass migration as a positive one; 8-15 percent thinks of it as negative, while others do not think of it at all.

Some of the polled spoke about the need to introduce migrant quotas; about responsibility of the newcomers and about deporting those who failed to comply with the local “behavior code.” Over 60 percent approves of the law enforcement structures’ efforts to control the newcomers (10 percent among them are newcomers); not less than 20 percent condemns such measures.

Not all of the newcomers adapted themselves to the Astrakhan environments and wanted to stay. Many of them are loyal supporters of ethnic traditions and naturally want to return to native parts. The newcomers from the Northern Caucasus and the Meskhetian Turks would like to permanently settle in

⁹ For the facts and figures, see: L.S. Ruban, *Razvitie konfliktnoy situatsii v Astrakhanskoy oblasti*, pp. 14-15; *Natsional'nye men'shinstva ...*, pp. 123-124.

¹⁰ About them, see: *Nauchnyy vypusk Astrakhanskogo filiala Volgogradskoy akademii gosudarstvennoy sluzhby*. Collection of works by lecturers. Issue I, Volgograd, 2003, pp. 42-56 (studies by post-graduate student E.Sh. Idrisov and others.)

their new homeland; over 80 percent of the Chechen men would like to go back home to Chechnia; surprisingly, Chechen women would like to remain in Astrakhan.

People from Central Asia are less willing to remain: their bad command of Russian is one of the problems that they share with those who came from the Southern Caucasus; both groups want to earn as much as they can and go home.

Such polls are not regular yet their results are highly illustrative. We may conclude that the process of fitting in the new social environment (the process the ancestors of the present population experienced in the past) has involved those who resettled between the mid-20th and early 21st centuries. The families who arrived in the 1950s-1960s and are now raising the second or third generations of "new inhabitants of Astrakhan" serve as the best example.

Conflicts between the old-timers and newcomers are inevitable: their mentalities differ; they are oriented toward different sets of values ("Oriental" among the newcomers and "semi-Oriental" among the local people).

The first migration wave (that arrived when the Astrakhan Territory was first included in the Russian state) consisted of freedom-loving people; not infrequently, young people once outside their own area tend to forget moral norms and rules of conduct.

The local people are highly displeased with wild competition in the commercial sphere where the newcomers protected by their closely-knit clans fight fiercely for their niches. Somewhere else an explosion would have been inevitable: it is impossible in a region with no "title" nation; it is improbable in the Astrakhan Region that has accumulated positive experience and traditions.

The elders and veterans of the recently settled groups play an important role and exert positive influence on the younger generations; the same can be said about the active members of the national-cultural movements (Daghestan and Vainakh societies, the Uzbek and Tajik public organizations, and Payvand, an association of Iranian peoples).

It seems that the press and the law enforcement bodies are gradually abandoning the absolutely unacceptable term "person of Caucasian nationality." There is much less talk about "ethnically tinged crime." Indeed, criminal groups are normally polyethnic and should be described as "regional." According to experts, the criminal community as a whole tends to "natural cooperation," the "division of labor" and "turnover of commodities": the local people prefer traffic of illegal weapons, while transit traders are engaged in drug trafficking. In this sphere ethnic and confessional affiliations are unimportant.

The Astrakhan World and Its Future

In 1997, at the suggestion of a group of local lore students the region celebrated, for the first time, the date of the foundation of the Astrakhan Gubernia (in 1717) by Peter the Great. This has become a tradition that the local people actively support. It promotes the region's contacts with its neighbors deeply rooted in the past. In May-June 2000 it was made part of the Southern Federal Okrug of the RF, together with the Volgograd Region and the Republic of Kalmykia. In Astrakhan this is regarded as a continuation of the old administrative traditions and an embodiment of new realities and new contacts of the border regions.

The regional idea rooted in the past and looking into the future is taking shape; social and ethnic stability, an ability to reach agreements and to keep one's word have become the fact and an ideological aspect that organizes and regulates everyday life.

People are proud of their region; they are aware of its riches and its special role in the Caspian and in the border areas that help it to develop and move away from the commonly accepted image as a source of the best water-melons, tomatoes and expensive fish and caviar and to acquire a new image of a modern dynamically developing region. We have to protect our landscapes and the unique natural reserve, histo-

ry, archaeology and architecture together with the old and newly formed traditions. At the same time, we should maintain industrial growth; use our natural riches so as to raise the living standards and make the region even more attractive and more stable. This is where the local codes of behavior and moral rules should be applied.

The region, which is home to many diasporas and an irredenta for many ethnoses should use its traditions to improve its image, develop external contacts. This is what the local administration is doing; much is done to preserve and study local tongues and cultures so as to offer better future for well-educated young people raised according to the old traditions and taught to love its homeland.

Not infrequently, local people stem possible ethnic squabbles with a stern admonition: “We are in Astrakhan here; stop brandishing your nationality.”

The region received a huge migration wave—time has come to assess the results. One thing is clear, though: the region has acquired new colors, new ethnic and cultural traditions and people skilled in many fields (managers, engineers, medics, academics, teachers, and creative workers). The Uzbeks who came to the region late in the 1990s are involved in experimenting with growing cotton, while the Meskhetian Turks in the village of Raznochinovka having built a mosque funded a project of a Christian Orthodox church.

Migrations are hard to correct, yet it should be forecasted and channeled in the best possible directions (since the region’s employment capacities are limited). Experts believe the migration potential across the CIS and from the Far Abroad to the South of Russia and across it has not yet been exhausted. In certain political contexts Russian speakers now living in the former Soviet republics may start moving away. We should be prepared to this possibility as well as to other unexpected changes in ethnic and migration fates of countries and nations. For example, developed ferry communication across the Caspian will certainly bring more Russian-speaking migrants from Turkmenistan (so far, there were few of them) to our region and further on to Russia.

In one of his speeches A. Guzhvin, Governor of the Astrakhan Region, called the region the “Caspian crossroads”—the image that speaks volumes of ethnic migration, ties it to the past, explains the present and outlines our common future.

Prospects and Suggestions

For the sake of Russia’s future development and stability of its regions the so-far uncontrolled migration flows should be forecasted and regulated to the maximally possible extent. We need state programs coordinated with the regional programs; we should rely on the experience of ethnic mapping of the Volga Federal Okrug so as to map real and potential migration flows.

We should pay more attention to the factors causing migration (living standards, commercial contacts and money flows), we should monitor the opinions and sentiments of those who are either prepared to migrate or have already arrived at the new place of residence.

The experience of stormy migrations of the 1990s dearly bought with the “trail-and-error” method when the regions were left to cope with the problem single-handedly should be taken into account. Regions should exchange their experience, help each other and warn against destructive phenomena and problems.

The Astrakhan Region is a particular yet typical example of ethnic migrations. It was migrants who build up this area; it is migrants who are an important factor today. Its potentials should be translated into reality by concerted efforts of all Russian citizens of the south of the country, all neighboring regions and all those who wish to join us to work together for our common future.