
URBANIZATION, MIGRATION AND DECLINING FERTILITY TRANSFORMING NORTH CAUCASUS

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Over the last two decades, the rapid urbanization of many of the peoples of the North Caucasus, their migration to other parts of the Russian Federation, and declining albeit still high fertility rates have transformed these peoples from archaic to modernizing nations, according to Konstantin Kazenin.

The Caucasus specialist at the Russian Academy of Economics and State Service told Sergey Markedonov in an interview for the Prague-based Caucasus Times that it is a fundamental but widespread misconception to continue to call these peoples archaic

In reality, Kazenin says, while the North Eastern Caucasus continued to be distinguished from peoples in other parts of Russia, over recent decades this very system has changed essentially as a result of urbanization, migration and declines in the number of children per woman over a lifetime.

The process isnt over □ it normally takes a minimum of two generations, Kazenin says □ and it is accompanied by stresses that can tear a society apart and lead to the emergence of radicalism of various kinds, especially when the first generation to have left the village reaches adulthood, something that is happening just now in this region.

In support of this argument, Kazenin suggests that when the history of the Arab Spring is written seriously and not at the level of Churchill dreamed this all up in 1918, people will find that in a number of the countries involved, protests were preceded by decades of intensive migration from villages into the cities.

They will also find that the migrants often are at loose ends while the traditional clans in the villages are able despite the loss of population to control more things, something via political alliances and sometimes via the criminal world. That has certainly been the pattern in Dagestan, for instance, the Moscow scholar says.

At the same time, Kazenin argues, clans today in Dagestan are not that different from family groups elsewhere in Russia, although they assumed a much larger role in the first years after the disintegration of the USSR when the federal authorities were present there only nominally and to a certain extent they have maintained that large position.

Outmigration has also played a role in changing the social structure and values of the northeastern Caucasus, he continues. But especially important has been the decline in the fertility rate in its societies. In the 1960s, most women there had four children, while in Russia even then it was fewer than two. Now the North Caucasian women have fewer although not as few as Russians do.

This change not only affects overall demographic numbers. It typically goes in parallel with very serious changes in the private life of the ordinary individual because if the average family has many children, the roles of women and men remain traditional because a woman who bears four children is out of the workforce for a long time and must defer to her husband.

With fewer children, she can get an education and hold a job more easily; and she is thus in a better position to challenge traditional family patterns, Kazenin says. When fertility rates fall, the requirements of looking after children cease to serve as the cement holding the traditional family and more broadly society in place.

That leads to dramatic changes in gender roles and in social structures, he continues. Our field research in Dagestan finds, for example, a reduction in the share of marriages concluded at the initiative of older relatives and the growth, although still slow, of the fraction of marriages between people of different nationalities.

And even those aspects of fertility in the northeastern Caucasus which set it apart from other regions of Russia such as early marriage and an early start of maternity should not be considered today as a mechanic following of some archaic pattern. In most cases, these are a conscious and religious choice rather than a blind reproduction of norms.

What is even more important, Kazenin suggests, is that people in the region are beginning to

discuss that which in the past was not talked about: family violence, forced marriages, and the serious psychological barriers between daughters and relatives * Twenty years ago, there simply wasn't any language to talk about these things in public.

Now such a language exists, and women as well as men are using it. That is a hundred times more important than almost anything else in promoting the continuing transformation of these societies, Kazenin concludes.

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