



SOCIAL ASPECTS OF POPULATION AGING IN EURASIA

The aging of the population becomes one of the most significant and inevitable social challenges of this century, the consequences of which will affect labor markets, the production of goods and services, as well as the subtle scope of human interconnections. According to the report “World Population Prospects: The 2017 Revision” published by the United Nations (UN), it is expected that by 2050 the number of elderly people – aged 60 and over – will more than double, and by 2100 will triple, increasing from 962 million globally in 2017 to 2.1 billion in 2050 and 3.1 billion in 2100. The largest percentage of the population aged 60 and over currently resides in Europe. It is expected that almost all regions of Eurasia will reach the same share of elderly people (25%) by 2050.

It is well known that three demographic factors determine the size and age composition of the population: the birth rate, mortality and migration. Since 1950, a significant increase in life expectancy has been observed in all regions of the world. While declining fertility and increasing longevity are key factors in the aging of the population, international migration also contributes to changing the demographic patterns of the population. In the European countries that accept large immigration flows, international migration can slow the aging process, at least for a while, as migrants tend to be young.

During the first World Assembly on Aging in 1982, the UN General Assembly called for concrete action on issues such as the health and nutrition of older people, their protection, housing, environment, family, social security, income, employment, and education. These problems were formulated in the Vienna International Plan of Action on Aging. In 1991, the General Assembly adopted the UN Principles for Older Persons, enumerating 18 rights of older persons – with regard to independence, participation, care, self-realization and dignity. In 2002, the World Assembly on Aging in Madrid adopted the Political Declaration and the Madrid International Plan of Action on Aging. The Plan of Action calls for changes in approaches, policies and practices at all levels to ensure the enormous potential for aging in the twenty-first century.

Social aspects of aging, that is, changes in the roles and relationships of older people, are a concern of society, and, moreover, an indicator of the civilization level of society. If some society considers aging respectfully, elderly people will be more positive and active social-

ly than in a society that treats aging negatively.

There is no doubt that the attitude of society depends on different kinds of conditions. The rapid aging of the population means that fewer people of working age are employed in the economy. This leads to a shortage of skilled workers, lower productivity, higher labor costs, a slowdown in the economy and reduction of international competitiveness. Countries with a rapidly aging population should allocate more money and resources to their health systems. The combination of lower tax revenues and higher spending on health, pensions and other benefits is a serious test even for the developed countries of the Eurasian region.

The ways in which they try to solve the aging related problems are different. In a number of European countries, the strategy of encouraging older workers to stay longer in the workforce is common. A phased retirement entails a scheme, according to which older workers can choose fewer hours of work, but remain employed longer, including after retirement. Besides, gradual retirement may be useful in many respects for companies, employers and workers.

It is effective to attract older people to work in childcare, cooking and cleaning or to help other older people or people with disabilities. In addition, creative work related to painting, music or writing is stimulated and encouraged; it may also be useful for society and prevent social isolation. Art and crafts are taught in social clubs or community centers for older participants.

If some European countries encourage immigration to solve their demographic crises, such “old” country as Japan has instead developed an extraordinary range of high-tech products and services. In the society strongly opposed to immigration, robotic technologies are seen as a solution to the problem of labor shortage, and many countries like this Japanese alternative to immigration. Medical care provided at home through a computer, rather than at hospitals or nursing homes, becomes common, which in part helps Japan to control the growth in public health spending. Moreover, telemedicine is already a big business, although researchers have found that older people do not really like computer keyboards. It should be noted that many of the above-mentioned age programs being developed in European communities now exist in the countries of Central Asia, although in the

traditional form, and are perceived by society as something quite natural, since the age here is not so much a biological as a status characteristic. The main function of the elderly is not the participation in productive labor, but the storage and reproduction of traditions and control over adherence to them, that is, what is available to them by status and life experience. This is one of the distinctive features of the extended family type, which includes more than two generations of relatives. Younger generations should show maximum concern for elders; neighbors should help each other, and in many controversial situations the decisive word belongs to the elderly. State support in the form of pensions and health care are not ignored, but it is assumed that a family remains the main guarantor of a happy old age.

However, because of the gradual destruction of the patriarchal family model and the transformation of the Central Asian states into post-industrial societies, the role of government agencies in caring for the aging generation will increase. We observe this trend in Kazakhstan, where public policy is gradually becoming more oriented towards maintaining active longevity and healthy productive aging. This includes the pension reform, the shift of the emphasis to preventive health care, and a number of concrete projects under the “Active Longevity” Roadmap to support the older generation. Moreover, in the current economic situation, for many families, especially in rural areas, old-age pensions have become the only official source of income. In recent years, the Eurasian community has begun to realize that old age is not a synonym for illness or disability. Elderly citizens can create added value for society, and meeting their needs can become the driving force of economic growth. A new concept was born – the Silver Economy, which is an economy focused on the elderly. It encourages innovation and supports aging people, gradually losing their independence. According to the World Health Organization, the practice of involving pensioners in active life is the most effective tool for improving the quality and duration of their lives. The opportunity to get a job, communicate with each other and enjoy their time is not just an act of charity on the part of society, but rather an effort to ensure the right of elderly people to a decent life. In this context, the Central Asian governments have a long way to go to create favorable conditions for real economic participation and social engagement of elderly people.

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Politics, Foreign Affairs and Security

- During his official visit to Washington, President of Uzbekistan Shavkat Mirziyoyev met with President of the United States Donald Trump to discuss prospects for developing bilateral strategic partnership in order to pursue shared interests and address emerging challenges. The parties also discussed trade, investment, and regional security issues, including the situation in Afghanistan. Within the framework of the visit, over 20 major business deals between the companies of the two countries worth almost \$4.8 billion were signed.
- During his official visit to Tbilisi, Foreign Trade Minister of Uzbekistan Jamshid Khojayev met with First Vice Premier of Georgia, Minister of Economy and Sustainable Development Dmitry Kumsishvili to discuss prospects for increasing railway and road freight turnover both between the two countries and within the framework of the existing transit routes.
- During his official visit to Baku, Chairman of the State Military Industrial Committee of Belarus, Major-General Oleg Dvigalev met with Defense Minister of Azerbaijan, Colonel-General Zakir Hasanov to discuss the results of joint activities of the two countries in the military and military-technical spheres. In addition, the parties outlined the areas for the implementation of new projects aimed at increasing the fighting capacity of the Azerbaijani army.
- During his official visit to Brussels, Foreign Minister of Azerbaijan Elmar Mammadyarov met with EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Federica Mogherini to discuss the issues of cooperation in energy, trade and other areas of mutual interest. In addition, the parties exchanged views on the settlement of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict.
- During the meeting of the foreign ministers of France, Germany, the United Kingdom and Iran with EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Federica Mogherini, the parties tried to determine whether the sides would be able to fulfill their commitments under the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action after the United States' withdrawal from the agreement.

- During his official visit to Sochi, President of Syria Bashar al-Assad met with President of Russia Vladimir Putin to discuss the fight against terrorism in Syria and the political settlement process, including the ongoing work on the country's new constitution, humanitarian issues and rebuilding the Syrian economy.
- President of Ukraine Petro Poroshenko signed a decree to enact the decision of the National Security and Defense Council on the permanent termination of the country's participation in the statutory bodies of the Commonwealth of Independent States.

Economy, Finance and Energy

- According to the veterinary and phytosanitary watchdog of Russia Rosselkhozadzor, 1.23 million tons of Russian grain were delivered to China's market from July 1, 2017 to May 15 of this year, which is a two-fold increase compared to the same period of the previous agricultural year from July 1, 2016 to June 30, 2017.
- According to the BP Azerbaijan, the country produced about 2.7 billion cubic meters of gas and 0.6 million tons of condensate at the Shah Deniz field in January-March 2018 compared to 2.4 billion cubic meters of gas and 0.6 million tons of condensate in the same period last year.
- The Russian state-owned bank Vnesheconombank and the Bank of Industry and Mine of Iran signed a contract for financing a major project for electrifying Iran's northern railway system. The electrification of the 450-kilometer-long Garmsar-Inchek Boroun railway in northern Iran with a credit line worth €1.2 billion will be implemented in cooperation with Russia in 2018.
- According to Minister of National Economy of Kazakhstan Timur Suleimenov, the Eurasian Economic Union (EEU) and China inked the trade and economic cooperation agreement. The agreement is non-preferential by nature and does not imply a cancellation of duties or an automatic reduction of non-tariff barriers. At the same time, the agreement will create conditions for improved access of EEU-produced goods to the Chinese market through the simplification of trade procedures stipulated in the document.
- According to Chair of the EEU Economic Commission's Board

Tigran Sargsyan, a temporary agreement on establishing a free trade zone was signed between the union and Iran. It was noted that the arrangement would last for more than three years to allow for a full-fledged deal on a free trade zone.

- According to the National Statistics Committee of Belarus, the country's industrial output stood at 35.2 billion Belarusian rubles in January-April 2018 in current prices, or 108.8% in comparable prices as against January-April 2017. The country's mining industry expanded by 2.8%. The processing industry reported a 10.2% increase. The supply of electricity, natural gas, steam, hot water, and conditioned air went up by 4.4%. The industrial output growth rate in water supply, collection, processing and treatment of waste, and clean-up activities totaled 1.1%.

Society and Culture

- According to Chairman of State Migration Service of Azerbaijan Vusal Huseynov, 1,500 foreigners a day apply to the Azerbaijani Migration Service for the registration at places of their stay in the country. It is noted that 50-60% of applications are submitted in the electronic form.
- The Constitution Day was celebrated in Turkmenistan on May 18. The holiday was marked by a ceremony of laying flowers to the monument of the Constitution. Moreover, the concerts of masters of art and poetry took place in the cities of the country.
- According to the Agency for Road Transport of Uzbekistan, the regular bus connection with Tajikistan has been resumed since May 15, 2018. The bus connection between Uzbekistan and Tajikistan was discontinued in 1992 with the outbreak of the civil war in Tajikistan. The length of the route is 174 kilometers, with the journey taking 4.5 hours.
- According to the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, the Russian urban population will increase by 3 million people and exceed 110.6 million by the middle of the 21st century. The number of rural residents will plunge to 22.1 million from 36.8 million by 2050.