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Cross-border migration of Ukrainians and COVID 19: consequences for the national security of Ukraine

The spread of coronavirus disease in the world and the unprecedented measures taken by many countries to prevent its transmission and to overcome its negative consequences caused the changes of the number of migrants and the changes of the both international migration patterns and the cross-border labour migration of Ukrainians.

The influence of the above-mentioned changes on the demographic and economic dimensions of national security of Ukraine was investigated in the article; the mechanism of the increase of conflictogenity level of Ukrainian society due to the linking in the mass consciousness the Ukrainian labour migrants return and the problems the Ukrainian society faced because of the spread of coronavirus disease was examined. The peculiarities of the development of Ukraine acted as the preconditions of the national security system vulnerability to the migration processes in case they are affected by the unpredictable factor as well as by the factors that cannot be influenced by the state were revealed on the example of the coronavirus transmission context.

Key words: national security, cross-border migration, coronavirus disease, conflictogenity.

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The considerable number of international migrants and the patterns of their transboundary movement turn international migration into the influential security factor on the national, regional and international levels. However, the relevance of international migration to the national security issues has been recognized fairly recently as scholars stopped considering migration to be the internal affair of the state and, on the other hand, started considering security in a broad sense [1–5]. At the same time on the example of Ukrainian transboundary migration we can observe the COVID 19 can play the same role for the international migration, the September, 11, 2001 played for the international security system when it became clear that the security architecture and the measures to provide security had not been sufficient in a case of unpredictable asymmetric threat.

In order to prevent the transmission of the coronavirus disease the countries, including the ones that are popular among the Ukrainian labour migrants, implemented the number of measures, such as the suspension of economic activity in the number of spheres and the restrictions on entering the country for foreign citizens for the unspecified period of time. Ukraine also appealed to its citizens staying abroad to return to the country, then Ukraine stopped the transboundary regular passenger service. According to calculations based on the data from the daily reports from the State Border Guard Service of Ukraine, only from March, 15 to April, 9 approximately 420 thousand Ukrainian citizens entered the country [6]. The labour migrants accounted for approximately 300 thousand of them. It should be stated that more than 90% of Ukrainian labour migrants, mostly with the legal labour status, did not leave the host countries, as they concerned they would not be able to enter the host country again during the long and indefinite period of time [7].

The objective of the article is to examine the impact the COVID19-influenced migration flows and migration patterns on the national security of Ukraine. To our mind the demographic and socio-economic dimensions of national security will be the most affected ones, but taking into consideration the interconnection and interdependence of the security dimensions we can assume that the national security of Ukraine as a whole is going to be affected. Given that, to achieve the objective the following tasks should be done:

- To investigate the influence of the above-mentioned changes on the demographic and economic dimensions of national security, to analyze the peculiarities of the development of Ukraine that enabled such influence;
- To research the increase of the conflictogenity level of the Ukrainian society entailed by the COVID19-caused return of migrants.

The migration-related issues are intensively studied and there are a number of scientific papers devoted to the analysis of positive and negative consequences for the development of the country of migrants' origin as well as the host country. Bearing in mind the tasks that should be done we

used the scientific works of scholars who had examined the dependence of the national security on the public health [8–10], migration and demographic development nexus [11, 12], migration and social conflicts, migration and economic development or economic security, migration and national security nexus [1–5], etc.

The topicality of the migration processes issues even before the beginning of the COVID 19 pandemic is explained by their intensity and multi-vectoral nature. It is possible to identify three main peculiarities of migration in Ukraine – mass emigration of Ukrainians abroad, the internal migration of Ukrainians to Kyiv and other big cities, and the internal displacement of people caused by the conflict in Donbass. As for the cross-border migration the scientists stated its negative impact on the demographic development both because the permanent exodus of citizens whose average age is less and the average health status is better than the average for Ukraine [13], and because of the possibility of traditional and exotic infectious diseases to be brought to Ukraine [8, p. 7]. The scholars also emphasized the ambiguous impact of migration on the economic development of the country [14–18]. Inter alia, as the migrants' remittances contribute to the increase of the money supply in the country, they are usually spent on the current consumption by their families. So the remittances mostly tend to support the development of the commerce and services. In general, many researchers share the view that in spite of the positive consequences of migration the loss of the social capital caused by the mass emigration of the working-age citizens usually leads to the economic slowdown of the country of origin.

At the same time the mass emigration of Ukrainians as labour migrants, that increased after the establishing of visa-free regime between Ukraine and the European Union member-countries, supported the economic activity in Ukraine in difficult economic circumstances. Besides, the labour migration lessened the unemployment rate and gave the opportunity to leave the country for those who were not satisfied with the socio-economic and political situation in Ukraine. So the above-mentioned factors were reducing the social tension.

Measures taken by Ukraine in March 2020 with the aim to prevent the transmission of coronavirus disease, such as the suspension of the regular passenger service and the reduction in the number of the border-crossing points together with the quarantine measures taken by the most of the Ukrainian labour migrants' host countries caused the mass return of the Ukrainian migrants from the epidemiologically insecure countries and regions. Just among these people during their stay in Ukraine the first ones with the coronavirus syndrome were identified, and the coronavirus infection was laboratory-confirmed. Besides, some oblasts that border with the European countries, have the biggest number of infected people. The great number of people, that entered Ukraine during the above-mentioned period, made it impossible to test all of them for COVID 19 and control their self-isolation.

Looking at the public health situation as at the element of the national security of the country [8, p.7], we can state that the huge amounts of cross-border labour migration of Ukrainian citizens, the circular nature of migration and its geographic diversification acted as one of the factors of the coronavirus infection transmission and, respectively, as a threat to the national security of the state. Besides, we can assume that it is young people who do not have their own families in Ukraine and can more easily integrate into the new society who will more likely stay in the host country and will even try to obtain the host country citizenship as they are afraid in case they leave the host country they will not be able to enter again for the indefinite period of time. It will also deteriorate the demographic development of Ukraine. Unfortunately, the absence of information about the age of those who returned during the period mentioned above and of those who stayed does not give us the opportunity to prove or refute this assumption. By the way, we can provide one more consequence of migration that played its indirect part in the context – the loss of medical specialists as a result of a long-time labour migration.

The economic aspect of the research issue is no less important. The economy of Ukraine significantly depended on the labour migrants' remittances, meanwhile the migrants themselves did not benefit from the state welfare system. According to the official data only, that is provided by the Ukrainian National Bank, the total remittances from abroad constituted 180,386,351 thousand hryvnas in 2019. Right away we can observe the reducing of remittances – in March 2020 the total amount of remittances was 13,331,392 thousand hryvnas comparing to 15,012,423 thousand hryvnas in March 2019. The massive return of the labour migrants to Ukraine and the loss of opportunity for them and for the Ukrainian citizens who were in Ukraine during the implementation of the restrictive measures to migrate again during the indefinitely long period of time is happening during the suspension of enterprises and organizations of some economic spheres in Ukraine in the context of COVID 19 transmission prevention and the dismissal of employees. In its turn it is going to lead to the income loss by the households, high unemployment rate and the increasing pressure on the state welfare system.

Given that, the prevalence of the commerce and services in the structure of Ukrainian economy that were nourished by the migrants' remittances preserved its dependence on the Ukrainian labour migration. As a result of the policy that encouraged and contributed the Ukrainians labour emigration now in the conditions of the unpredictable border closures and return of migrants the increasing economic problems are observed and, respectively, the threat to the economic security is emerging. According to art. 3.4 of the Strategy of National Security of Ukraine the economic crisis, exhausting of the resources of the state, the deterioration of the living standards of population are determined as the ones that threaten the national security [19].

Taking the above-mentioned into account, we can state that the peculiarities of the transboundary migration processes on the one hand and the factors that cannot be influenced by the Ukrainian state, for example the spread of the coronavirus disease in the world and the closing of borders for foreign citizens by the other countries on the other hand, enabled the changes in the migration processes. These changes in turn posed the threat to the demographic and economic security of the state.

The linking of labour migrants and the spread of COVID 19 in the mass consciousness can become the precondition for the increase of the conflictogenity level and for the internal destabilization of the country. The evidences of the latent conflict can be found in the social network posts and in the comments under the news about the COVID19-related issues in Youtube and so on. The latent conflict can turn into the real one provided that the triggers or contributing factors take place. It actually happened on February, 20, 2020 in Novi Sanzhary, where the evacuees from Wuhan had been taken.

As we analyze the social networks we can infer people link not only the spread of coronavirus disease but also the economic problems with the return of labour migrants. That is due to the preventing measures, such as the suspension of a number of economic areas, the income loss, the necessity to follow the quarantine regime, etc. In particular, even now in social networks posts and comments it is possible to find the accusation of the authorities that at a time when the strict restrictive measures are being implemented inside Ukraine, Ukrainians continue entering the country from the epidemiologically insecure countries. There are the statements that these people had been working for another country and paying taxes there, but as soon as they lost their income because of the quarantine measures in the host country they decided to return to Ukraine.

In the conditions when many of the countries popular among Ukrainian labour migrants closed their borders for foreign citizens for the unspecified period of time, many of those labour migrants who returned will face the necessity to be employed in Ukraine. It is the matter for concern that taking into account the current economic recession and the suspension of some economic spheres, the labour migrants who returned might be accused in the expected increase of the unemployment rate.

Therefore, in the current circumstances the increase of the conflictogenity level of Ukrainian society as a consequence of the COVID19-caused changes of the migration processes is supposed to turn into the additional challenge for the demographic and economic development of Ukraine and, respectively, for the national security of Ukraine as a whole.

One more aspect that is related to the psychological well-being of the part of Ukrainian society and that is connected

with the staying of the majority of Ukrainian labour migrants abroad should be mentioned. On the one hand the inability for them to come to Ukraine because of the indefinite period of time the host countries will keep their borders closed and, respectively, the fear to lose the source of income and, on the other hand, the inability of their family members to come to see them in the host countries are able to cause the frustration among both migrants staying abroad and their family members in Ukraine. It will be able to strengthen the state of anxiety and psychological stress arising from the spread of coronavirus disease and from the financial and economic problems that caused by the COVID 19 preventing measures.

Under the prevailing circumstances additionally to the measures that are already taken in Ukraine in order to overcome and to prevent the negative consequences of the COVID 19 transmission, the following ones should be taken: the hate speech towards the citizens that returned should be avoided and must not be tolerated, as well as the accusation of migrants in the problems Ukraine has faced; the government programme to provide the employment of citizens should be developed and implemented. Account must be taken of the fact that in the conditions of the joblessness the different levels of employment between labour migrants who returned from abroad and people who stayed in Ukraine will become the complementary precondition of the increase of conflictogenity level.

The influence of the spread of coronavirus disease has proved to be more substantial for Ukraine and for its national security as a significant number of Ukrainian citizens work abroad and the labour migration of Ukrainians has circular nature and is geographically diversified. In particular, the great number of labour migrants that returned from the epidemiologically insecure countries contributed to the spread of coronavirus disease. The dependence of Ukrainian economy on the remittances became the prerequisite of its vulnerability to the changes of the international migration processes. The linking in the mass consciousness the labour migrants and the problems that Ukraine and Ukrainians faced threatens by the destruction of social cohesion and the increase of conflictogenity inside the Ukrainian society.

Therefore, in spite of the ad hoc nature of such impact on international migration and on the national security, it should be thoroughly studied both to predict the development of the migration processes and their consequences in case of the unforeseeable and unregulated factor and to react on them in a timely manner. Moreover, the impact of such factors can encourage the awareness of the need of implementation the measures for creation the satisfactory employment conditions and the decent standards of living for Ukrainian citizens inside the country.

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