

THESIS/DISSERTATION

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**Between Homeland and Host Nation: Russian Identity, Integration and Migration
Policy in Hungary**

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION AND RESEARCH FRAMEWORK

1.1: Introduction

In 2010 Angela Merkel publicly declared the failure of multiculturalism in Germany (Friedman, 2010). Only a few years later, in 2015, the European migrant crisis exposed the fragility of the European Union in addressing large-scale migration when hundreds of thousands of asylum-seekers, refugees, and economic migrants, primarily from outside the EU, entered its borders in search of protection or improved living standards. The sudden influx challenged Europe's capacity to manage migration flows coherently (MRI, 2016) and deepened divisions among member states, giving rise to nationalist movements that questioned the very foundations of the European project. As Apetroe (2016, p. 2) notes, this was "one of the biggest humanitarian disasters since the Second World War," not only for the directly affected countries but also for the EU as a whole, as it revealed structural weakness and political fragility.

Globalization, which is often regarded as a continuous and irreversible process of economic, political, cultural, and religious integration, has paradoxically strengthened the impulse to safeguard national identity, traditions, and economic sovereignty. National identity may be conceptualized as a composite structure of language, religion, cultural affiliation, and collective historical memory, and in psychological terms it embodies a shared "I am" that seeks to answer the questions imposed by society: Who are we? Where do we come from? What is our mission? A consolidated national identity tends to be associated with political stability and international standing, whereas its erosion often signals fragmentation, as illustrated by the dissolution of Yugoslavia. In the contemporary period, enthusiasm for cosmopolitanism has increasingly been replaced by ethnogenesis and renewed nationalism, with striking examples including Russia's annexation of Crimea, the COVID-19 pandemic, the Russian war against Ukraine, recurrent instability in the Middle East and the Israel-Palestine conflict, the rise of national-conservative movements in Eastern Europe, secessionist referendums in Scotland and Catalonia, and Brexit. Such developments underscore the persistence of unresolved twentieth-century conflicts, as well as the reactivation of historically rooted cleavages.

Localized conflicts and insufficient political governance have also reinforced the perception of uncontrolled migration as a defining challenge of our time. While policymaking has sought to mitigate risks, measures have often proved inadequate, leaving a vacuum filled by political

populism. This discourse prioritizes local over global concerns, foregrounding the protection of native communities, jobs, and values, and in so doing it fuels nationalist sentiment. Consequently, societies are confronted with a fundamental dilemma: whether immigrants should be assimilated into a dominant national lifestyle or whether states should embrace cultural pluralism. This tension is reflected in theoretical debates: should minority groups enjoy equal rights alongside majority groups (Kukathas, 1995), or should dominant groups set the normative basis for integration (Kymlicka, 1996)?

Within this wider context, the present research examines Russian migration to Hungary as a case study of European multiculturalism. According to the United Nations, there are approximately 10.5 million ethnic Russians living outside the Russian Federation, making them the fourth-largest diaspora globally after India, Mexico, and China (UN DESA, 2019a). The Russian case is of particular interest because, unlike the typical South–North economic migration pattern, many Russians migrate to Hungary, a country with a comparatively lower level of economic development. This prompts questions about their motivations: are they driven by pragmatic factors such as political disillusionment and the search for freedom, or by more personal reasons such as family, education, or cultural affinity? Moreover, the paradox of migration from a relatively wealthier to a poorer country opens space for introducing the notion of *immigration for love of the country and its culture*, whereby migrants relocate not only for instrumental reasons but also because of attachment to Hungary’s heritage or lifestyle.

Regardless of motivation, migration is inherently transactional, requiring recognition by both the sending state (Russia) and the receiving state (Hungary), mediated by the EU’s broader regulatory framework. Russian migrants in Hungary can be divided into two broad categories. The first includes those whose migration is primarily externally driven, for instance, through education programs or legal opportunities, who often face more rigid adaptation and frequently use Hungary as a transit state.

The second includes those whose migration is internally motivated, often linked to cultural factors or personal ties, and who undergo a softer adaptation process by engaging with the local culture, history, and language. This distinction underscores the importance of Hungary’s national identity and its integration policies in shaping immigrant outcomes.

The study thus pursues three main objectives: first, to identify the motives behind Russian migration (1); second, to analyze the transformation of Russian identity in the Hungarian context and evaluate the capacity for integration (2); and third, to assess Hungarian migration

policies and integration strategies within the EU framework, with a view to recommending models that selectively attract migrants who align with Hungary's national and economic interests (3). The author's own background as an ethnic Russian migrant provides both linguistic competence and experiential insight, further contributing to the quality of the research.

Overall, this research sheds light on the complexity of Russian migration to Eastern Europe, emphasizing both the diversity of motivations and the dual role of migration policy in filtering undesired flows while cultivating migrants who can integrate successfully and contribute to host societies. In this sense, the Russian case not only illustrates the tensions between globalization and nationalism but also demonstrates how national identity and state policy interact to redefine multiculturalism in contemporary Europe.

1.2: Background of the Study

Migration is a multifaceted phenomenon that occupies a central place in the study of anthropology, history, politics, economics, law, and sociology. Its complexity stems from the fact that it can be approached from multiple disciplinary perspectives and methodological frameworks, rendering it at once highly specialized and broadly diffuse. In this dissertation, migration is not explored in abstract generality but rather through the concrete case of Russian immigrants in Hungary. Within this focus, the analysis centers on questions of identity politics, immigrant integration, and the migration policy framework of Hungary, thereby situating the research at the intersection of individual experiences and state-level political strategies.

Although the emphasis of this work is on the Russian–Hungarian case, it is necessary to begin with a general overview of the theoretical literature in migration studies. This provides a foundation for the research by clarifying key concepts, identifying gaps in existing scholarship, and contextualizing contemporary debates. The broader discussion of migration theory not only informs the case study but also allows for the refinement of concepts relevant to identity and integration, thereby addressing the evolving conditions of international migration systems. In this sense, the dissertation seeks both to contribute to the literature on Russian migration to Eastern Europe and to engage more broadly with the theoretical challenges posed by globalization, nationalism, and shifting identity formations.

Several historical and political milestones are particularly relevant to this study. Hungary's accession to the European Union in 2004 and its entry into the Schengen Area in 2007 marked a decisive break from the legacy of the Warsaw Pact and the Soviet sphere of influence. EU membership symbolized political democratization and economic stabilization, while also positioning Hungary as an attractive destination for migrants and a particular responsibility taker in unified migration policy. At the same time, the trajectory of Russian–Hungarian relations since the collapse of the Soviet Union illustrates the fluctuating role of nationalism. In the immediate post-Soviet period, Hungarian nationalism was marked by strong anti-Russian sentiment, which diminished following EU accession, though later resurfaced within populist politics that increasingly identified Russians as one among several “others” in the immigrant population.

Nationalism in Hungary is a complex and multifaceted phenomenon. While it does not generally manifest in widespread extremism, it is characterized by a heightened sensitivity to issues of national security and collective identity. This sensitivity has roots in Hungary's historical experience of domination, territorial loss, and political subordination. Consequently, nationalism has often functioned as a means of reasserting cultural continuity and strengthening a collective identity that was disrupted by historical upheavals. In its contemporary form, Hungarian nationalism tends to emphasize boundaries of difference and applies these distinctions particularly to immigrant groups, reinforcing social distance in their treatment and integration.

Statistical data provides further context. According to United Nations migration statistics (1990–2019), the total immigrant population in Hungary is approximately 156,000. The largest groups of EU immigrants originate from Romania (86,252), Germany (8,179), and Austria (2,313). Among third-country nationals, the leading groups are from North Macedonia (20,451), the Russian Federation (16,919), and Ukraine (1,313) (UN DESA, 2019b). These numbers correspond to about 1–1.5% of the total Hungarian population, a modest proportion compared to other EU states such as Germany, where immigrants accounted for 26% of the population in 2019 (DESTATIS, 2020).

The relatively small size of Hungary's immigrant population highlights an important distinction between intra-EU and third-country migration. Migrants from EU member states carry an “EU identity” that facilitates their integration and positions them within the category of “us,” whereas migrants from outside the EU are often categorized as “them.” This aligns with

Koller's (2010) notion of multi-layered collective identities, where regional and supranational affiliations interact with, and sometimes supersede, national identity. In the Hungarian context, cultural and linguistic similarities among immigrants from Russia, Ukraine, and North Macedonia create a degree of ethnic and cultural affinity that distinguishes them from other third-country groups. This shared background has been described as part of a broader "Russian world" (Suslov, 2018), a transnational cultural sphere that both overlaps with and diverges from Hungarian society.

This dissertation draws upon theoretical literature on nationalism and collective identity in order to analyze Russian migration to Hungary. By situating individual migration experiences within the broader framework of identity politics, it seeks to illuminate the dual processes of immigrant integration and national boundary-making. The study argues that the Russian case in Hungary provides an opportunity to examine how national identity, migration policy, and multiculturalism intersect within the evolving landscape of European integration and rising nationalist politics.

1.3: Supporting Core Literature

The study of nations and nationalism has been significantly shaped by theoretical debates on their origins, functions, and implications for migration and identity. Ernest Gellner, in his classic work *Nations and Nationalism* (1983), presents nationalism as a distinctly modern phenomenon, inseparable from the processes of industrialization and modernization. For Gellner, nations are not primordial entities but political constructs that arise from the need to align culture with state structures in order to maintain social cohesion in industrial societies. This view situates nationalism as both a product and a requirement of modernity, rather than an eternal cultural form.

Eric Hobsbawm further elaborates on the constructed nature of national identity in *The Invention of Tradition* (1983), where he argues that traditions and, by extension, national identities are often "invented" through deliberate social engineering. Such traditions are practices governed by explicit or implicit rules of symbolic significance, which seek to instill values and norms through ritual repetition, thereby fabricating continuity with the past (Hobsbawm, 1983, p.1). Hobsbawm's perspective emphasizes that nations do not create states;

rather, states and ruling elites create nations by institutionalizing nationalist ideologies, often for political legitimacy.

Anthony D. Smith complicates this modernist position by foregrounding the role of ethnic identity in the formation of nations. In *The Nation: Invented, Imagined, Reconstructed?* (1996), Smith acknowledges the modern origins of nations but stresses the foundational role of *ethnie*, defined as communities with alleged common ancestry, shared memories, cultural elements, and territorial attachments (Smith, 1996, p.447). While nations incorporate these ethnic components into larger frameworks of myths, public culture, and legal-political institutions, Smith maintains that the persistence of ethnic ties explains why immigrant groups often remain only partially integrated into host societies. Thus, whereas Gellner and Hobsbawm underline the constructed nature of nations, Smith draws attention to the deep cultural resources upon which such constructions are built.

The normative and political implications of cultural difference are further debated in liberal theories of multiculturalism. Chandran Kukathas (1995), in *Are There Any Cultural Rights?*, raises the question of whether cultural minorities should be granted distinct rights, situating the problem at the intersection of individual liberty and cultural preservation. Will Kymlicka (1996), in *Multicultural Citizenship*, offers a more systematic framework, arguing that the dominant group's rights usually serve as the normative baseline. However, he distinguishes between immigrant groups, national minorities, and indigenous peoples, noting that each requires differentiated approaches. Both scholars contribute to an understanding of how migration challenges traditional notions of citizenship and national identity, and how liberal democracies struggle to balance equality with cultural pluralism.

The Soviet and post-Soviet experience provides further insight into the processes of identity formation. Francine Hirsch, in *Empire of Nations* (2005), examines how Soviet authorities institutionalized ethnicity while simultaneously promoting a supra-ethnic Soviet identity. Drawing on concepts of *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft*, Hirsch shows how the shift from collectivist to more individualist frameworks of belonging contributed to identity fragmentation in the post-Soviet era. These dynamics help explain the identity dilemmas faced by Russian emigrants, who navigate between Soviet legacies, ethnic affiliations, and new cultural environments in host countries.

Historical experiences of Russian–Hungarian relations also provide a crucial backdrop. Attila Kolontári's *Hungarian–Soviet Relations 1920–1941* (2010) traces the interwar developments

that shaped bilateral perceptions, laying foundations for the ambivalence and pragmatic calculations that continue to inform Hungarian attitudes toward Russia and, by extension, Russian migrants. While focused on the interwar years, Kolontári's analysis illustrates how broader geopolitical shifts intersect with the formation of national identity and migration policies.

Broader cultural explanations for migration and integration are also found in Samuel P. Huntington's *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (1997). Huntington argues that cultural and religious identity is the primary source of conflict in the post-Cold War world. Though often criticized for its essentialism, his thesis provides a lens for examining how cultural proximity or distance affects integration processes. From this perspective, Russian immigrants may find comparatively easier integration in European societies, where historical, cultural, and religious traditions offer greater points of contact than for groups with more divergent backgrounds.

Finally, Paolo Ruspini (2015), in his study *Russian Transnational Migrant Communities as Agents of Cooperation and Integration?*, provides an empirical account of Russian diasporic communities in Europe, particularly Switzerland. His analysis highlights both the Russian state's policies toward "compatriots abroad" and the strategies through which migrant groups act as agents of cooperation and integration within host societies. Although focused outside Hungary, Ruspini's findings are broadly applicable, offering comparative insights into how Russian migrant communities function and adapt in diverse European contexts.

Taken together, these perspectives provide a strong theoretical framework for analyzing Russian migration to Hungary. The interplay of invented traditions, ethnic persistence, multicultural policies, historical legacies, and cultural cleavages underscores the complexity of national identity formation and immigrant integration. Applying these theories to the Hungarian context allows for a nuanced examination of how Russian migrants negotiate their identities between homeland attachments and host-country expectations, and how Hungarian migration policy situates them within broader European debates on multiculturalism and national identity.

1.4: Research Basics

This study focuses on two subjects: Russian immigrants and their identity and Hungary as a destination country within the broader framework of migration movements. The key subjects

of analysis include identity politics, immigrant integration approaches, and Hungary's migration policies.

Conceptual questions in this case study contribute to the development of the literature review and serve as the foundation for defining research variables. The study seeks to answer the following questions:

1. Migration Motivations & Patterns

- a. What are the primary reasons for Russian immigrants choosing Hungary as a destination?
- b. How do political, economic, and cultural factors influence Russian immigration to Hungary?
- c. Are there significant differences in migration motivations across different waves of Russian immigrants (e.g., post-Soviet migration vs. recent migration due to political instability in Russia)?

2. Transit vs. Long-Term Settlement

- a. Do Russian immigrants in Hungary intend to stay long-term, or do they perceive Hungary as a transit state to other EU countries?
- b. What factors contribute to the decision to settle permanently or use Hungary as a temporary migration route?
- c. How do visa policies, employment opportunities, and residency laws shape the migration patterns of Russians in Hungary?

3. Integration & Identity

- a. Do Russian immigrants actively integrate into Hungarian society, or do they maintain strong transnational ties with Russia?
- b. How does the duration of stay impact the level of integration (e.g., language acquisition, employment, cultural adaptation)?
- c. What role does Hungarian national identity and societal attitudes toward Russian immigrants play in their integration?
- d. Are there significant differences in integration levels between Russian immigrants who settle permanently and those who plan to transit?

4. Migration Policies & Structural Influences

- a. How do Hungarian migration policies shape the experiences and trajectories of Russian immigrants?

- b. How does Hungary's historical relationship with Russia influence its policies and social perceptions of Russian immigrants?
- c. How does Hungary compare to other EU countries in terms of attracting or discouraging long-term Russian immigration?

This research primarily explores Russian identity and integration within the context of European multiculturalism. The study aims to analyse how Russian identity is constructed and whether Russian immigrants can integrate successfully into Hungarian society. Understanding these dynamics can provide insight into broader discussions on ethnic identity, identity politics, and their implications for immigration and integration in Europe.

The study also engages with the ongoing debate regarding immigrant integration: should host societies assimilate immigrants into a unified national lifestyle, or should they embrace multicultural diversity? Should minority groups be treated equally to dominant groups (Kukathas, 1995), or should the rights of the dominant group serve as the normative framework for minority integration (Kymlicka, 1996)?

Understanding the relationship between Russia, as the country of origin, and Hungary, as the destination country, is crucial. This includes examining Hungary's historical patterns of immigration, labor market demands, and institutional structures shaping immigration policies. Additionally, the study assesses Hungary's socio-economic, cultural, and political preparedness for integrating Russian immigrants, as well as public perceptions and treatment of Russian immigrants in Hungary.

1.4.1: Key Features of Russian Migration to Hungary

Several contextual factors in Russia help frame the analysis of migration flows to Hungary and outline the limitations of this case study:

1. **Ethnic and Cultural Diversity in Russia:** Russia is the largest country in the world and home to a diverse range of ethnic groups, including Eastern Slavs, Turks, and Finno-Ugric peoples. Despite this ethnic diversity, a shared political identity as "Russian" unites these groups. Exploring possible Russian-Hungarian kinship and ethnosymbolic similarities could provide insights into the integration process.
2. **Economic Factors:** Russia has a large and developed economy with an orientation toward Asian markets. Comparatively, Hungary's economy is smaller but has

historically been integrated into the European market. Prior to the war in Ukraine, Hungary maintained strong economic ties with the EU, but during the war, it adopted a more semi-closed market approach. Given these differences, economic incentives for Russian migration to Hungary may be limited, though individual cases still exist.

3. **Political Motivations for Migration:** Russian migration to Hungary may be driven by either cultural affinity or political reasons. While some Russians may migrate due to a personal appreciation of Hungarian culture, others may view emigration as a response to political pressures in Russia.
4. **Historical Relations between Russia and Hungary:** Russia was historically a dominant power, first as the Russian Empire and later as the Soviet Union. Hungary, as part of the Eastern Bloc, shares a Soviet past, which has influenced its political relationship with Russia. While past tensions remain, contemporary relations are evolving.
5. **Socio-Cultural Factors:** Russia's emphasis on traditional values, particularly regarding gender roles and social structures, may create commonalities between Russian immigrants and Hungarian society, potentially facilitating integration.

1.4.2: Problem Statement

The study of national identity and migration dynamics in Hungary presents a complex and multidimensional issue. One of the primary concerns revolves around the rise of nationalist movements in Hungary, particularly in response to immigration. This phenomenon has been amplified by historical tensions and linguistic considerations, particularly in relation to Russian-speaking migrants.

The historical context is crucial in understanding the underlying factors influencing contemporary nationalist sentiment. Hungary has experienced a long history of external political and cultural influences, including Ottoman occupation, Austro-Hungarian rule and influence, and Soviet domination. These historical experiences have contributed to the development of a strong national identity, which has been shaped through significant events such as the Revolutions of 1848 and 1956 (Bideleux & Jeffries, 2006). The post-Soviet period, particularly Hungary's accession to the European Union (EU), further complicated the national identity discourse by reinforcing European integration while simultaneously reviving unresolved identity gaps.

In recent years, the migration crisis following Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 has added another layer of complexity. Hungary emerged as one of the most accommodating EU nations in terms of hosting Russian businesses and their employees. Concurrently, it also received a significant number of forcibly displaced Ukrainian refugees, many of whom identify linguistically and culturally with the Russian-speaking world (Duncan, 2023). This duality may possibly lead to tensions within Hungary's nationalist discourse or become further political manipulation, as linguistic centrism and historical narratives influence perceptions of Russian-speaking migrants.

From a linguistic perspective, the Soviet-Hungarian relationship historically included mandatory Russian language education and cultural exchange programs, which left a lasting impact on Hungarian society (Fodor, 1999). The integration of Russian-origin words into the Hungarian lexicon, such as *zálog* (pledge) and *dacha* (summer house), serves as a linguistic marker of this historical relationship. However, nationalist movements often view these remnants with suspicion, associating them with past subjugation rather than cultural enrichment.

Another significant aspect of the issue is the impact of the Treaty of Trianon (1920), which resulted in substantial Hungarian ethnic communities living outside Hungary's borders. This historical loss continues to influence contemporary Hungarian policies, particularly concerning language rights. For example, Ukraine's education policies restricting the use of the Hungarian language in schools have generated further nationalist concerns (Kovács, 2021). This context has contributed to broader apprehensions regarding both Russian-speaking and other foreign migrants in Hungary, as preserving national identity remains a central political priority.

A fundamental issue in this discourse is the conceptualization of nationalism itself. From an anthropological and ethnolinguistic perspective, Hungarian nationalism can be examined through the lens of kinship, language, and collective identity formation. The modern Hungarian national identity has been constructed in part through political narratives and historical experiences, rather than purely through shared ancestry or linguistic heritage (Brubaker, 1996). This raises critical questions about the role of migration in shaping or challenging national cohesion in Hungary.

Despite the growing significance of Russian-speaking migration to Hungary, there is a notable gap in academic research concerning the identity, integration, and policy responses toward this population. Current Hungarian migration policies, including the 2024 policy update that

introduced the *Magyar Kártya* for select nationalities (including Belarus, Russia, Ukraine, and Serbia), highlight a selective approach to migration that prioritizes cultural affinity with Hungary (Hajnal, 2024). However, a more comprehensive and evidence-based policy framework is necessary to address the socio-political challenges associated with Russian-speaking migration.

By identifying these research gaps and problem areas, this study aims to contribute to the formulation of an immigration policy that balances national identity preservation with pragmatic integration strategies for migrants. Addressing these issues through an academic lens will provide valuable insights into the intersection of migration, nationalism, and identity politics in Hungary.

1.4.3: Research Questions

Based on these contextual factors, the study aims to answer the following research questions:

- What are the key motivations driving Russian immigration to Hungary?
- Do Russian immigrants perceive Hungary as a long-term destination or as a transit state?
- How does the length of stay influence integration into Hungarian society?
- What are the key factors in Russian identity formation that contribute to their integration in Hungary?
- How do ethnic identity, integration, and transnational ties interact, and what factors influence these interactions?
- To what extent do Russian immigrants maintain transnational ties with Russia, and what is the nature of these ties?
- Can Russian immigrants integrate successfully into Hungarian society, and does their political-ethnic background impact their integration?
- If integration levels vary, how can Hungarian immigration policy be optimized to support integration while benefiting national development?

1.4.4: Variables

- **Dependent Variable:** Russian Identity Formation, shaped by Russia's historical and political context.
- **Independent Variable:** Immigration Purpose, influenced by the voluntary decision to emigrate but constrained by immigration opportunities.

- **Dependent Variable:** Integration Outcomes, shaped by migration policies, societal attitudes, and immigrants' choices (e.g., asylum-seeker, economic migrant, student, family reunification, business-related migration).
- **Independent Variable:** Migration Policy Development and Identity Politics, influencing which immigrants are targeted and how they are integrated.

1.4.5: Hypotheses

1. Motivations for Migration

- H1:** Russian immigrants move to Hungary primarily for political and economic reasons, with recent waves of migration driven more by political instability than economic hardship.
- Alternative Hypothesis (H1a):** Russian migration to Hungary is primarily culturally driven, with immigrants selecting Hungary based on historical, linguistic, and ethnic ties rather than political or economic factors.

2. Transit vs. Long-Term Stay

- H2:** The majority of Russian immigrants use Hungary as a transit state to access other EU countries with better economic opportunities and political freedoms.
- Alternative Hypothesis (H2a):** A significant portion of Russian immigrants choose Hungary as a permanent destination due to its migration policies, cultural affinity, and quality of life.

3. Integration Process

- H3:** Russian immigrants who stay in Hungary long-term demonstrate higher integration levels, including language acquisition, employment, and social adaptation.
- Alternative Hypothesis (H3a):** Despite long-term residence, Russian immigrants maintain strong transnational ties to Russia and struggle with full integration due to linguistic and cultural barriers.

4. Impact of Hungarian Migration Policies

- H4:** Hungary's migration policies, particularly in light of evolving EU migration laws, significantly influence Russian immigrants' ability and willingness to settle permanently.

- b. **Alternative Hypothesis (H4a):** Hungarian migration policies have limited impact on Russian immigration patterns, as migration is primarily shaped by external factors such as political events in Russia and broader EU trends.

The study will test these hypotheses using statistical data, case studies, and an analysis of Hungary's evolving migration policies to evaluate their impact on Russian immigration and integration outcomes.

1.5: Justification and Significance of the Study

While most migrants choose economically favourable countries to move to, the reason for the resettlement of Russians to Hungary is not entirely apparent. In addition, Russian identity has not yet been systematically and deeply studied.

In 2019, the Atlantic Council Eurasia Centre conducted and published the study results on the problems of the new Russian emigration and its political background. The study's main results established the general 'image of the new Russian emigrant,' people aged 25 to 44 years (80.5%) with a completed higher education master's degree, candidate of sciences or Ph.D. (43%). Among the motivations for moving are the following: general political atmosphere (40%), lack of political rights and freedoms (33%), general economic situation, lack of economic prospects (32%), persecution and violations of human rights (29%), professional reasons (26 %) and education (24%) (Atlantic Council, 2019).

In addition, in 2019, the Levada Centre published the results of a study on the emigration sentiments of Russians, revealing that 53% of young Russians want to emigrate. This is the highest rate since 2009. The most frequently cited reasons for thinking about emigrations are the better life for children with a decent future abroad (45%); economic situation (40%) and political situation (33%) in Russia; high-quality medical services (35%) and high quality of education abroad (26%); opportunities for career growth abroad (28%) (Levada-Centre, 2019).

Along with previously mentioned statistics, the UN should conclude that the motivation for Russian emigration and immigration trends will only grow due to political instability, which means, perhaps, the future host countries will be European Union countries that do not know Russian identity.

The baseline figures suggest that future Russian immigrants may be beneficial to countries' national economies, as long as they are potential 'high-skilled immigrants.'

If we understand how Russian identity works, many countries will be able to visualise a model of migration, both for adopting human capital to grow the economy and without creating potential dangers to national identity.

This study's significance is built on the problem spots of a particular country (Hungary) but sees a broader scale for its implementation in the future.

One of the main features of science is not problem-solving but its prevention through analyses of possible problematic spots of the presence linked to the past, but aiming at the future.

Suppose we find out how Russian identity is constructed and whether Russian immigrants can be integrated into a destination country (Hungary). In that case, we can understand the political-ethical factors that cause the negativity and nationalism towards immigrants, how to create a right immigrants' strategy in the context of European multiculturalism and prevent nationalist movements, perhaps a government can use that information to effectively integrate immigrants in an immigrant destination country.

Besides, previously, migration studies were seen only from a problematic point of view (labour force) or from the point of view of political agenda and security (Martiniello & Rath, 2010). Nowadays, the migration study can be seen as the reverse case, when a country can select favourable immigrants by restraining migration policies based on the history, knowledge, and experience of contemporary migration.

1.6: Methodology

The first chapter examined general approaches and trends in migration. In the chapter, the basic concepts, global migration problems were considered, the foundations for the study were determined, including the concept, research questions, problems, specifications and ways of implementing the research plan. The methodology of research has become an equally important component. A brief description and prerequisites for use were given.

The special attention should be drawn to the current or the fifth wave (including 2.0) of migration, which is least studied, but nevertheless is a very important event in modern reality applied to global issues.

Methodological bases are built and interconnected within the following units:

1. state-building and identity, ethnicity, citizenship, migration, nationalism;
2. history of applied country, Hungary and bilateral relationships of Russia with it, cultural background;
3. Public Administration and the European Union and national migration-related regulations towards third-countries citizens.

The goal is to explain such a broad topic and narrow it to the core with subsequent layers, which are a single body of this dissertation and thematic unity.

From the mentioned background it is seen that we aim at conducting multi-disciplinary research with a centralized topic in Russian immigrants' identity and integration with a limited Post-Soviet, contemporary timeline.

As follows, there are several methodologies that should be applied: the case study supported by the semi-structured interviews, comparative and historical methods with a comparative and historical perspective oriented to analyse the migration patterns and policy development. In order to process and analyse the interviews, the decision was made to use the elements of grounded theory as the methodology that enables to seek out, conceptualise the latent social patterns and structures the area of specific research interest in multidisciplinary study. The author does not fully implement a grounded theory to the approach due to the limitation of samples and the lack of background study that focuses on Russian migration in Hungary, a case that covers contemporary trends and partly during the war period.

1.6.1: Case Study Approach

One might argue that the case study is not a research method and cannot be used as a methodology, and it should be discussed in this part of the research.

First of all, "case study research comprises two parts: a subject and an analytical frame or object" (Thomas, 2011, p.14). To defend the point, it should be mentioned that in the research, it can be applied to both, specifically, the case study of applied countries and the subject timeline of immigration (post-Soviet Union, modern timeline limitation from 2000).

The other point that supports the case study is that it does not apply limitations on using the other research methods. Moreover, it requires the use and need of the formation of a methodological base under one umbrella that would give the complexity of the research the

right direction aimed at specific, narrowed results. In this dissertation, which is linked to theoretical blocks and the development of hypothetical questions.

The case study uses many methods and sources of data and aims to look at relationships and processes: “the...case-oriented approach places cases, not variables, centre stage. But what is the case? Comparative social science has a ready-made, conventionalized answer to this question: Boundaries around places and time periods define cases...” (Thomas, 2011, p.11).

To sum up, the case study method in this dissertation investigates a unique phenomenon. Data collected and analysed many features of each case. It studies naturally occurring cases where the aim is not to control variables and quantification of data is not a priority (Thomas, 2011).

To start with the point that might be important for the research construction. We see the nature of objective reality as being socially constructed, and not existing independently of any human presence, e.g., that is why social constructivism over realism has been chosen. The school of social constructivism claims that reality is constructed in the human mind, so construction is related to a certain time and social environment, and what is called reality evolves as the social context changes. Constructionism asserts that there is no reality and no facts until they are conceptualized and shared by a group of people. Social constructivism is supported by the school of modernism in nationalism, namely constructivists Eric Hobsbawm, Benedict Anderson.

Adhering to conceptual unity, from all the variety of schools and methodology presented in the subchapter 1.6.2 “Interview Method and Grounded theory”, the most resonant and logical is considered to be constructivism. The constructivist form of grounded theory has been developed and advocated by Charmaz (1995, 1999; 2000; 2003; 2006; 2009), Bryant (2002), Thornberg (2012) and others. It is anchored in pragmatism and relativist epistemology. This viewpoint assumes that researchers generate facts and hypotheses as a result of their interactions with participants and developing analyses, rather than discovering them (Charmaz, 2006; 2009; Thornberg and Charmaz, 2012). Data is co-constructed by researchers and participants, as well as their socio-cultural backgrounds, academic expertise, and personal worldviews (Charmaz, 2009). This position strikes a balance between reality and imagination, it discovers multiple realities and multiple visions on it.

In the subchapters 2.2 ‘History and Classification of Migration’, 2.3 ‘Conceptualizing Emigration and Immigration’, 2.4 ‘Economic Factor in Migration’, 2.5 ‘Political Factors in

Migration’ introduced the basic concepts of migration. They serve as a base of support for strategy creation and interview implementation.

Chapter 2 ‘Theories and Factors Influencing Migration’ and its subchapters mainly were used for the interview pre-structure.

With the above-mentioned resources, the goal was to find Russian citizens living in Hungary for over twelve months (‘immigrant’ definition by UN). Why exactly Russian citizens? In connection with the political events between Russia and Ukraine before and after 2022 and national self-identification, an acute issue of ethical standards arose; therefore, in this study, it was decided to make an informal selection using a Russian or former Russian, USSR passport.

The entire strategy of the methodology is divided into four conditional stages, which include several other sub-stages:

Part I. Theoretical background study, where we prepare the core bases for further theoretical development and outline the research bases

Part II. Active data collection and case study development that includes the collection of Interview data, which includes the following process:

1. Search for Respondents and their validation.
2. Preparation and implementation of interviews, writing memos.
3. Interview transcript and its corrections (data reduction, data reorganization, data representation).
4. Beginning of interview analysis, development of categories, groups, codes and comparative analysis of interviews in the process.

Part III. Thematic narratives that target the specific qualitative data analyses.

Part IV. Migration policy analyses applied to the case study.

1.6.2: Interview Method and Grounded Theory

1.6.2.1: Interview

For this research, twenty semi-structured interviews were conducted. From this total, four interviews were selected as a representative sample. These cases then guided the subsequent analysis, which involved narrowing the focus to the narratives of former students who initially

migrated to Hungary for the legal purpose of study. The analysis sought to explore their actual motives for migration beyond the formal grounds of admission.

While most questions were prepared in advance, flexibility was maintained to allow participant-driven narratives to emerge. Each interview lasted between thirty and fifty minutes and concentrated on the participants' migration experiences, motivations for leaving Russia, the process of relocating to Hungary, their experiences of life in Hungary, and their future aspirations.

Participants were recruited through the Facebook group 'Русский Будапешт' [Russian Budapest], utilizing elements of netnography. A pre-screening questionnaire was used to collect preliminary data on participants, obtain interview consent, and address anonymity preferences. Following this, participant profiles were reviewed, and interviews were scheduled. Both face-to-face and remote (telephone) interviews were conducted, with most Budapest residents preferring in-person interviews, while participants residing outside Budapest opted for telephone interviews.

The general trend indicated a high level of openness among migrants in discussing even politically and economically sensitive issues. However, one interview was excluded due to the interviewee providing only monosyllabic responses. Interview questions were primarily open-ended, with occasional structured choices to enhance clarity. During interviews, clarifying questions were asked to ensure transparency and to capture the subjective yet experience-driven nature of the migrant narratives.

At the outset of each interview, participants were informed about research ethics, potential platforms for data usage, and the right to decline answering any uncomfortable questions. Notably, no participants in the initial sample refused to answer any questions.

Many interviewees referenced elements of Russian culture or phenomena, which were annotated with explanatory notes in brackets during transcription. The technical aspects of the interview process included audio recording, with most interviews conducted in Russian. For the accessibility, transcriptions were subsequently processed using MacWhisper (application that utilizes OpenAI's Whisper technology to transcribe audio files into text) and AI machine translation with manual corrections. To ensure accuracy, a collaborative agreement was made between the interviewer and interviewees regarding the final approved versions of transcripts.

After each interview, a memo was written, serving as an informal note from the researcher reflecting on preliminary insights. These memos underwent iterative revisions to refine theoretical sampling. A total of twenty interviews were conducted, and at present, the data analysis is in its fourth phase, analysis and coding. The studies, including coding and decoding, categorisation and pattern extract were conducted using the original language, Russian.

Different approaches to narrative analysis were employed, guided by two key principles: (1) examining participants' storytelling structures and performative aspects, and (2) employing 'narrative cognition' to represent findings as individual stories, potentially supplemented by thematic data presentations (Flick, 2014, p.10). Grounded theory serves as the foundation for shaping these interviews. It is essential to note that interviews were conducted before 2022, and thus, they provide a crucial foundation for subsequent qualitative insights.

1.6.2.2: Grounded theory

Grounded theory was firstly introduced by sociologists Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss in 1967 (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) and it has been further developed and reshaped in different schools, e.g. Glaserian (Glaser, 1978; 1992; 1998; 2001; 2003; 2005), Straussian (Strauss, 1987; Strauss & Corbin, 1990; 1998), constructivist (Bryant, 2002; Charmaz, 2000; 2003; 2006; 2009; Thornberg, 2012; Thornberg & Charmaz, 2012), Clarke's postmodern version or situational analysis (Clarke, 2003; 2005), and multi grounded theory (Goldkuhl & Cronholm, 2010).

Grounded theory belongs to the group of qualitative research methods, and is at the intersection of case studies, ethnographies, phenomenological studies and content analyses (Leedy & Ormrod, 2015). It is the mixed approach. On the one hand, it belongs to a group of inductive approach, e.g. it systematically proceeds the analyses of qualitative data collected (Thomas, 2006). On the other hand, the elements of abduction can be found since the generation, selection and construction of hypotheses take place during constant data collection and constant comparative analyses (Thornberg & Charmaz, 2014).

Despite the ambiguous views on this methodology, it has a fundamental set of principles that allows it to be effectively used in multidisciplinary research in the study of a certain social phenomenon or event with a limited amount of information in the field of study (Goulding, 2002). Therefore, some researchers choose grounded theory as a methodology due to the lack, shortage, or complete absence of information on the research topic since the methodology

allows for collecting data from sources such as interviews, questionnaires, or mixed methods design, generating hypotheses through theoretical sampling until theoretical saturation.

Some scholars dispute whether it is ‘a must’ to incorporate a theoretical framework into earlier chapters, replacing it with a literature review (Leedy & Ormrod, 2015) or using theoretical sample implementation during or after active data collection (Jaccard & Jacoby, 2010; Glaser, 1978; Goulding, 2002). On the one hand, the logic of emergent theorists’ states that theory construction is impossible with a blank slate (Jaccard & Jacoby). On the other hand, the invention of grounded theory and its use guarantees the emergence data generation of hypothesis or a theory construction that can be further tested empirically. Given the awareness of both points of view, we believe that the grounded theory approach allows to a researcher choosing whether he or she prefers either ‘top-down’ approach with some generalisation before the actual discovery and then narrowing to the point or ‘bottom up’ approach, which is like a skeleton on which additional layers or parts are built up during the ongoing study itself.

Thus, when using grounded theory, the researcher, based on the area of knowledge, competence of supervisors or personal interests, identifies and proposes a problem statement, conceptual, research question on the studied phenomena and a strategy for the implementation of the study. In contrast, the debated issue of literature or theoretical background use ‘before’ or ‘after’ data collection is timely determined by the researcher’s way of thinking, information availability and plan.

The creative part of the grounded theory can also be seen in the possibility of mixed-methods research that mixes or combines quantitative or qualitative data collection methods (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2002). It is not limited to a single data collection method. Additionally, it gives a certain flexibility in methodology, reducing the risk of a researcher’s failure in conducting and/or personalise the design of methodology to the problems addressed.

Considering the fact that qualitative research methods are being frequently criticized for subjective data collection and analysis, the opportunity for a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods in one study may bring the research to another level. One of the examples of how it can be is rooted in the research of Louise Marie Roth “Selling Women Short: Gender and Money on Wall Street (2006)”, where she examines gender inequalities in the workplace. She was curious about the wage disparity between men and women among high-performing Wall Street MBAs. So, in the frame of grounded theory she incorporated both open-ended questions as a qualitative approach, and close-ended questions as a quantitative method in in-

depth interviews (Hesse-Biber, 2010). That decision allowed her uncovering not only gender inequality but also proving gender wage gap and creating the set of strategies for equal work opportunities.

As Goulding notes, drawing on Glaser's work, the grounded theory approach, while particularly well-suited to fieldwork and qualitative research, is not restricted to these domains. Rather, it can be employed as a general analytical method across a wide range of data collection techniques, including surveys, experiments, and case studies. Moreover, its flexibility allows for the integration and combination of different methods within a single research design, thereby enabling it to transcend the limitations of any one specific data collection strategy (Glaser, 1978, cited in Goulding, 2002, p. 56).

The grounded theory is not limited in the choice of working methodology, but also in its mix. It has already been suggested above that it might be a survey, experiment, case study and the list can be continued on. However, one of the most popular methodologies is in-depth interview since it allows studying social patterns of a selective group of people on a stated problem.

If one could mention the advantages of the interview as a research method then that definitely would be flexibility, in-depth analyses, cost-effectiveness. Contrary, it is being mainly criticized for the lack of transparency in sampling strategy, questions offered, analyses that include coding and decoding, and the time consumption on the technical side (from the collection of information to its decryption and correction). Undoubtedly, the mentioned disadvantages call into question the use of this method in the research design. However, their awareness and recognition allow preparing for better strategy and interview questions, and the process can be automated if there is a budget for it. On the other hand, the presented advantages distinguish this method over others. For example, comparing mainly the interview and the questionnaire within the framework of a social phenomenon, one can find that the questions of the questionnaire can lead the respondent to a point of view with which they partially or completely disagree due to the lack of flexibility of the question (partially human factor). The idea is perfectly given in the interview definition as an "interchange in which one person... attempts to elicit information or expressions of opinion or belief from another person or persons" (Maccoby and Maccoby, 1954, as cited in Young et al., 2018, p.11).

The key development of interview stages may vary but still reflects the classical model that includes research questions identification, interview type selection, initial interview questions

division, sampling, ethical review, interview pilots, process of interview, coding, analyses and dissemination (Young et al., 2018).

It is important to note the role of the interview in the grounded theory itself, since in addition to the classical stages of the interview, it also includes a comparative analysis of the data (its abduction) of the interview and the reform of further strategy in accordance with the data obtained, which makes possible to think ahead while doing theoretical sample.

A special role is writing a memo or a kind of field notes, informal comments of the researcher about the interview. Usually it is written immediately after the interview, and is a kind of mental map or the researcher's insights about the interviewee. Memos are defined as "the theorizing write-up of ideas about codes and their relationships as they strike the analyst while coding" (Glaser, 1978, p.83); or "documentation of the researcher's thinking process and theorizing from data" (Thornberg, 2012, p.254).

1.6.3: Comparative Historical Analysis

One of the methodological approaches in the dissertation is a comparative and historical research method from a comparative and historical perspective applied to migration policy analyses and changes in the case study.

In the book 'Comparative Historical Analysis in the Social Sciences', the article 'What We Know about the Development of Social Policy' by Edwin Amenta notes that the development of social policy influenced by historical timeline, i.e., history in general dictates the needs and conditions for the development of policies.

Comparative historical approaches explain why some countries succeeded at implementing some policies and others failed: "comparative and historical scholars have developed methodological approaches, in particular, by synthesizing comparative and historical and quantitative techniques in individual projects" (Amenta, 2003).

In the dissertation area, the historical method will take a place as well since we analyse Hungarian Russian identity, relationships and immigrants' perceptions within the timeline.

The historical method, in this case, helps to conduct theory-building, building knowledge and policies developed in the context of local, regional and level of the European Union.

One might argue that the regional policies do not take a major place in immigration management since the European Union policy domination and using the historical method helps to prove the opposite referring exactly to historical and political events and development of selected ethnicity nationalism in Hungary and perception of Russian immigrants due to the existence of previous bilateral relationships (Warsaw Pact that impacted post-soviet space and further cooperation and relationships).

In this case, the empirical contribution of comparative and historical research can be applied. As it was mentioned “comparative historical social scientists reconceptualize the problem, ask the large comparative questions – why democracy or revolutions occur here and not there, and so on – scour historiography on several countries and time periods regarding the surrounding issues, and then produce more comprehensive explanations that account for development across the countries” (Amenta, 2003, p. 97).

Such foundations of historical and comparative methodology form a solid foundation of a theoretical base on the basis of which it is possible to suggest the development of selective Hungarian nationalism towards some ethnicities and to form opinions and predictions in the society in relation to Russian immigrants, the Russian language and Russian culture as a whole.

That refers to the national level of policies-making and regulations towards immigrants of third countries and possibilities of Russian people to enter and settle in the country legitimate question wise and possibilities for integration with a country’s integration immigrant policies.

The historical approach, in this case, refers to former relationships between countries and time-limitation. By the comparative analyses meant to be the studies that address the experience of two or more country cases (Amenta, 2011). It is important to mention that in this dissertation we exclude a holistic understanding of the case, so the study applies to the cross-national analyses.

The study will be made in a narrative form of causal argumentation based on sequences of events that will attempt to explain serious historical differences and trajectories. The study will include previous research on a related topic. New theoretical arguments will be developed refining theoretical argumentation along the way and uncover new empirical facts as a result of both.

The comparative approach based on policy research and historical context will answer the questions: why some countries accept refugees or immigrants and others are not or to be more

specific, what is the Hungarian approach and perception of immigrants (namely, Russian immigrants). Is it positive or negative and why?

On the other side, the argument about institutionalization will be given. How local, regional and European level policies affect each other and influence the third-countries migrants that try to access Hungary with granted access to the European Union. How the lack of policy or adoption of those policies can cause an effect on Russian immigrants and how it can be referred to as the international pressure of migrants' movement to the European Union?

The historical and comparative approach helps to generate theoretical arguments to be tested on larger data sets.

1.6.4: Limitations

Some delimitations have been already shaped by the methodology that can be found in interdisciplinary and its clarity that means that the researched topic includes micro and macro elements that make the study complex. However, the core of it is strictly limited to the mentioned disciplines.

Additionally, delimitations are applied to objects and subjects of the study.

First of all, immigration is limited to generations that refer to the historical timeline and nationality. The selection of immigrants for the initial netnographic survey was based on the following parameters: Russian nationality is confirmed by a Russian or Soviet passport, its former possession, or dual citizenship (Russian-Hungarian). This strict requirement aims to provide accurate results in studying Russian identity. However, we also reserve a right to include Ukrainian passport holders in the case of unsuccessful immigrants mapping and the lack of numbers for the survey. Perhaps, these measures will introduce a certain inaccuracy in the study, but the proportional number of Russian immigrants will still exceed the rest and there will be group results redistribution and explanations given on final results.

Secondly, limitations on collective identity formation linked to generations of immigrants, including Soviet time, which built the socialism identity and reflected on the post-Soviet identity (will be given in the concept of "gemeinschaft" in general characteristics), and post-Soviet time, which formed post-Soviet (modern) and contemporary identities.

Thirdly, the milestones of Russian-Hungarian bilateral relations will be mentioned briefly and as such, they are not an object, not a subject of this study, but a connecting link in the analysis.

Last but not least, the timeline limitations can be applied; while this research is primarily focusing on post-Soviet time with modernity, it mostly covers the timeline of 2000-2022. Although limited, it nevertheless encounters further historical development and includes notes on the events of February 2022 as a cumulative moment not only in migration movement development but also in the policy of the destination country. Thus, gives many researchers a ground for further studies development that includes social policy and realism in global migration studies.

CHAPTER 2: THEORIES AND FACTORS INFLUENCING MIGRATION

2.1: Introduction

Migration, in its many forms, has been a defining aspect of human history, influencing societies, economies, and political landscapes for centuries. As both a personal and collective experience, migration is shaped by a complex interplay of factors that range from individual aspirations to broader socio-economic and political forces. This chapter delves into the multifaceted nature of migration, exploring the distinctions between emigration and immigration, as well as the underlying motivations that drive individuals to leave their home countries in search of better opportunities. While migration is often seen as a response to economic, political, and environmental conditions, it is also deeply influenced by personal circumstances, including family ties, identity, and aspirations for a better life.

The phenomenon of migration is further complicated by the policies of both sending and receiving countries, which may either facilitate or hinder the movement of people across borders. These policies not only determine the legal status of migrants but also impact their ability to integrate into new societies. Central to this discourse is the concept of citizenship, particularly the issue of dual citizenship, which has significant implications for both migrants and the countries involved. The chapter also examines the historical trajectory of migration, from its early biological and survival-driven roots to the more complex and intentional migration flows of the modern era.

By analysing migration from both a historical and contemporary perspective, the chapter aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the causes, patterns, and consequences of migration in the globalized world. Through this exploration, we gain insight into the socio-economic and political factors that shape migration processes, as well as the challenges and opportunities faced by both migrants and the countries that receive them. The following sections will further unpack the various theoretical frameworks, historical events, and policy considerations that have shaped the migration phenomenon, setting the stage for a deeper analysis of its impact on the global stage and gradually leading to the analyses of Russian migration and its motives.

2.2: History and Classification of Migration

Population migration is a significant component of important processes of our time, but the phenomenon of migration itself appeared long before modernity.

Migration was a natural process in the history of sapiens and from the point of view of human biology, the primary needs and instincts of self-survival were directly related to several factors, ecologically pleasant and suitable conditions for settling, including the temporal, resourcefulness of the territory and safety (e.g., the absence of tribal enemies, mythological evil spirits and dangerous animals).

The resettlement of peoples at that time was a communal necessity, dictated exclusively by vital biological needs. Then there were no state or country borders, but there was a prerequisite since often the territories were occupied by other tribes.

Migration of peoples continued in ancient times, it was then that the first prerequisites for the raids and conquests of the lands of other peoples appeared with the aim of ultimately settling in a place favourable for habitation with vast natural resources. A little later, at the same time, the first prerequisites for the national identity of peoples began to form, which consider themselves as a single whole, speaking a common language, creating the legends and myths that lead to a culture formation. People of one tribe linked by biological blood ties and common cultural features.

The milestone of the rise in the history of human migration is considered to be the XVI-XVII centuries when the flow of emigration significantly increases, it becomes an individual conscious decision.

At the same time is the enlightenment of nationalism and the initial preconditions for the final formation of a meaningful national identity based on symbols, common political nationalities, a common language that is used both orally and in written (printed) form. In addition, the country's geographical borders are also becoming politically sovereign.

The transport system plays an important role here, which facilitates migration and activates the flow of volunteer migration. Since this milestone, migration is gaining ever greater coverage.

In the 20th century, there are at least two events that triggered global, to some extent, uncontrolled migration. It was the end of the Cold War and the collapse of the Soviet Union. Migration at this time is especially interesting for its political and economic effect. It was at

this time that most of the sound-related theories for migration were created, as well as the tightening of the resettlement policy of countries.

One can assess such a rapid increase in global migration in different ways, but the most objective way is to take a retrospective and consider each new surge in migration as a response to past events.

So, if in the 20th century it was historical events that became the trigger, then it can be assumed that the prerequisites for these events were such milestones in human history as industrialization and the formation of empires, which later ceased in strong economic and political states, as a consequence, the emergence of a gap between developed and developing countries, and the formation of the national identity of peoples, their needs in economic and political security, similar to the survival instinct.

Population migration is a significant component of all the most important processes of our times. The existence of the migration process is based on state borders and concepts of national security, differences in cultural values and linguistic differences, climatic, and natural features of different parts of the planet. Migration is a complex social process that affects many aspects of the socio-economic, political, and cultural life of society, migration is an object of international regulation. Attracting foreign workers in priority specialties in accordance with the needs of the state is a necessity for economic development.

However, one should admit that the problems of population migration are also political since they are associated with the crossing of national borders by a significant number of people, as well as with the formation of often large communities with unstable migratory behaviour on the territory of the country, which contributes to an increase in social tension.

The history of migration in the 21st century has become even more acute. Here at least two triggers can be disclosed. First, it is the military instability of the Middle East and south-central Asia regions, including the war in Lebanon and Syria; Israel and Palestine; Afghanistan. Secondly, the economic poverty and political instability of the African and Asian regions.

Both events happened as a result of the cumulative effect. On the one hand, that is the ignorance of the global community of a fact acknowledgment in the existence of political conflicts in the Middle East region and inaction in mediation and intervention. On the other hand, it is a consequence of postcolonial dependence and inaction of countries-colonizers in helping the development of post-colonized regions.

Migration as a phenomenon has been further exacerbated by the complexity of structural institutions and created entities. If earlier the phenomenon of migration was considered as a conditional process of movement of human capital from the sending to the receiving country, accordingly, the migration policy included the regulation of two parties, i.e. the sending and receiving countries. Under these conditions, appropriate models of migration between the agreed parties could be projected, in which limited reasons and quotas for migration would represent economic supply and demand and ensure the control of organized migration.

Among the most attractive countries for migration in our time are the United States, Canada, the United Kingdom, Japan, Singapore, Hong Kong, and all the countries of the European Union.

This division is primarily due to the economic development of these countries in general terms. If the listed countries are considered in a detailed context, then additional features can be distinguished, such as: the rapid development of information technology, start-up businesses and power of economy in the USA; attractive resettlement policies in Canada's multicultural context; rapidly growing Asian economies and entry into the Asian business market in Japan, Hong Kong, and Singapore. While the first two countries can cause some political-democratic mistrust and instability, Singapore is characterized as a multicultural, democratic, economically developed, and stable country; the countries of the European Union are especially popular because of their developed democratic freedoms, the vastness, and unity of the economic market, and the free movement of goods, services, capital and people (also known as four fundamental freedoms of the EU).

Such a limited list of developed countries creates an excess interest of the vast majority of emigrants who aim at resettling with economic and political benefits. Most potential emigrants come from economically and, most often, political, disadvantaged countries and are unskilled or low-skilled workers in its majority.

One of the most common migrations is international labour migration. According to the International Labour Organization, a UN specialized agency, "migrant workers contribute to growth and development in their countries of destination, while countries of origin greatly benefit from their remittances and the skills acquired during their migration experience" (ILO, 2020).

Any act of movement can be endowed with pathos and viewed from the point of view of subjectivity. However, considering objectivism and liberalism as an opportunity and a trend dictated by the globalization of economic and political systems, it is important to note that in this case, subjectivism is the opposition and contradiction of the objective reality of the modern world.

International labour migration is, first of all, a voluntary act (if it was non-violent with the participation of a third party) of temporary or permanent resettlement from a permanent habitual place of residence to a country of destination in order to generate income.

International labour migration is subdivided into legal and illegal. Its status depends on the country's need for migrant workers and the act regulating these movements, recognizing their legal effect. Illegal immigration is described as a violation of current legislation of a state by foreign citizens or forced relocation to a country without its consent and approval.

The seriousness of the problem of illegal immigration is associated with the difficulty of determining quantitative parameters of this phenomenon, which significantly exceed the officially registered data on migration that is a particular threat to national unity and security as well as an economic one.

The effect of uncontrolled migration, observed in the 21st century, is associated with the complexity of the phenomenon of migration at all its stages from migrating residents, the number of immigrating foreigners, their national and cultural identification, the purpose of staying in the country, their duration of residency, the country's ability and policy in integrating and assimilating, control and movement of legal and illegal immigrants in the country.

In 2020 the United Kingdom withdrew from the European Union. One of the key campaigns of Brexit had been the reduction of immigrants from the European Economic Area since it imposed challenges on the UK educational system, including the research area, and national security. Despite the simplicity of campaign objectives, the immigration problem has had a real impact since back to the time the UK was a major colonizer.

The foreign policy of the UK that has been established back to the time had a tremendous effect on the immigration flow to the country since the 20th centuries that has been continued and overlapped with the European Union policies and cooperation in immigration area since the amount of uncontrolled immigration has been unbearable even for the developed country such as the UK.

The problem of the migration of the 21st century, compared to the previous stages of migration history, gained perhaps the ideological character that can be seen at the preservation of a national identity of a country and ensure the transparency of elections giving the primary right of decision for indigenous citizens.

The aim of cultural preservation and heritage can be seen as the post-production of national identity or invented traditions (Hobsbawm, 1983), thus it's not mentioned as the fundamental for the creation of a national identity that has already been formed earlier.

Particular attention should be paid to the general problems of the European Union, which will be the key to understanding subsequent cases. The idea of the European Single Market was to create a common unhindered space for organizing business and trade processes between the participating countries, which also involves residents and citizens of the European Union. European culture implies the geographical proximity of the countries of Europe, the key moments of history and culture, shared by all members to one degree or another as initial data.

The European Union means economic and political unification, an organization with an interethnic superstructure while preserving to some extent the national interests of a particular country of the EU.

Returning again to the concept of multilayer identity, it is important to note that migration flows within the EU by the EU citizens are quite normal practice and are considered as a part of an integration process.

However, the experience of the EU on the example of the UK shows that the admission of new members and their economic imbalance in comparison with stronger economic countries can lead to a recurrent division of identity when within the union itself a division into the concepts of “we” and “they” can appear.

In this case, an even greater impact is exerted on immigrants from third countries. It is difficult to control movements within the EU and such miscalculation in numbers can significantly affect both the national economy and harm the national security of those countries that are not ready to accept “other” immigrants based on national interests and resources. Such a complex institutionalization of the EU system and its inaccuracies create the basis for illegal immigration.

In most cases, illegal immigrants target more economically developed countries in order to obtain an economic advantage, but the situation may change and free movement within the

Schengen Area and the EU may serve to create and support the underground economy at a higher level.

2.3: Conceptualizing Emigration and Immigration

Migration as a phenomenon can be seen as a two-sided process. The term of emigration can be applied as the act of moving from a country of acquired nationality either by *jus sanguinis* or *jus soli* that is considered to be a country of origin and departure by term to another country that is considered to be permanent or temporary residence within an international border. The temporary residence or short-term term migration is not defined by impermanence but indicates a duration between three and twelve months permanently residing in a destination country, according to the UN (UN Refugees and Migrants, 2020)¹.

The term of immigration is reversed to emigration and describes the perspective of a country of destination or arrival in the perception of a migrant that becomes a resident.

Despite the fact that the UN sees a migration process as both voluntarily and involuntarily move, including the cases of smuggling or abduction of a person, migration caused by climate or political disruption (UN, 2020)², in this dissertation migration is researched as a voluntarily motivated act dictated by the set of reasons of an immigrant and the legal status of an immigrant in a destination country.

In this work, migration is viewed as a causal relationship, where a limited number of reasons serve as a trigger for migration.

From the point of view of the original country, this may be the political and economic ineffectiveness of the policy that impacts the quality of life. From the point of view of a

¹ Migrant – “while there is no formal legal definition of an international migrant, most experts agree that an international migrant is someone who changes his or her country of usual residence, irrespective of the reason for migration or legal status. Generally, a distinction is made between short-term or temporary migration, covering movements with a duration between three and 12 months, and long-term or permanent migration, referring to a change of country of residence for a duration of one year or more.”

² Migrant – “The UN Migration Agency (IOM) defines a migrant as any person who is moving or has moved across an international border or within a State away from his/her habitual place of residence, regardless of (1) the person’s legal status; (2) whether the movement is voluntary or involuntary; (3) what the causes for the movement are; or (4) what the length of the stay is”.

destination country are a favorable environment and a number of legal terms, conditions, and reasons for an immigrant.

The policy of a destination country can aim at immigrants' attraction or just give a historical, political, economic, or educational opportunity for migration. The study also accounts for ancestry-based residence, migration by blood belonging, family-reunification, and transnational marriages but doesn't evince significant pragmatic motives.

As an important part of the sided process states' role in promotion or limitation of international migration should be designated objectively in policies and citizenships variety given. "The acquisition of citizenship in the destination country has implications for one's rights and entitlements, socioeconomic integration, and prospects for their family members. It also affects the links of migrants with their countries of origin. When the countries of origin and destination do not allow dual citizenship, migrants are compelled to make a decision regarding their choice of citizenship" (UN DESA, 2013, pp. 70-71).

Although it applies to one of the last stages of immigration and it takes years to acquire citizenship of a new country in most of the cases, one needs to remember that a decision about dual citizenship policy has to be made and approved and accepted by both governments. The policy of dual citizenship has its pros and cons, but, above all, it guarantees the establishment of friendly political and economic ties between countries and the free movement of citizens while preserving their rights and freedoms to self-determination both in the identification and in a place to live. In this case, governments should rely on several preferential factors such as

1. *Identical* that includes similar ethnic and cultural identity or common elements formed by collective identification without the threat of destruction and domination of one another;
2. *Common political values* and the absence of current contradictions between countries, including on ethnic and national grounds;
3. *Economic integration of markets*, including cooperation and mutual assistance, while the size of the economies of countries also matters, but does not play a decisive role for the unimpeded movement of goods, services, capital, and labour.

It is important to mention that if a dual citizenship policy isn't settled then it creates a possibility for an immigrant to return to a country of origins within the return policy and benefits.

2.4: Economic Factors in Migration

One of the methods for analyzing migration as a process is that migrants are viewed as a human resource placed in the conditions of the economic system.

Commonly, emigrants are driven by macroeconomic factors. Based on this, the terms 'low-skilled' and 'high-skilled' migrants were created in order to specify the migrants' groups and their contribution to a receiving country's economics.

Shughart, Tollison and Kimenyi (1986) see three interest groups in immigration policy enforcement: workers (migrants), capitalists (producers), and landowners going through the business cycles and economic growth.

Considering the country's economics, the supply and demand of migrants are changing both within workers themselves and capitalists and landowners. Policymakers count these shifts for immigrant policies.

In this regard, the interest of the above-mentioned parties should be listed. Migrants pursue higher wages, capitalists in contrast aim at the reduction of production costs due to low worker's payment. Landowners benefit from migrants and rent increase due to higher interests in properties and the real estate market boom.

This is reflected in the neoclassical economic theory, which considers an individual (consumer, entrepreneur, employee) as an economic being and studies a behavior, aimed at maximizing profits and minimizing utilities (Weintraub, 1985).

Massey integrates world systems theory, segmented labour market theory, social capital theory, and neoclassical macroeconomics to explain the socioeconomic behaviour and motivations of international migrants in the context of globalizing economy: "in the short run, international migration does not stem from a lack of economic development, but from the development itself" (Massey, 1999, p.304).

On the one hand, migration studies objectively single out two historical events that triggered the flow of migrants from 'sending countries or countries of origin', namely the end of the Cold War and the collapse of the Soviet Union (Frejka, 1996).

On the other hand, host countries for migrants and events related to economic attractiveness should be mentioned, this may include the post-Cold war environment and economic rise of

countries such as the USA in the modern world, the creation of the European Union, and globalization of economics in the contemporary world.

Such a parallel historical division is necessary, first of all, for comprehending changes in the economic space and trends in the migration of the economic context.

Secondly, this is a change in academic thought and school in the analysis of migration processes, which consider the migrant from a different angle, not only from the point of view of economics.

Thirdly, this is a change in the immigration policy itself and its subdivisions, associated with political instability and events in the modern world, which, as a result, introduces additional terms for migration, such as a political refugee, asylum seeker, stateless migrants.

Thus, it can be emphasized that the mentioned scholars and their outstanding followers of economic international immigration were able to highlight the lobbying interests of states in accepting migrants on a labour basis, but did not foresee the turbulence of the 21st century and, as a result, the shifted angle of migration processes.

Despite the transition from modern to contemporary migration processes, several criteria extracted from the previous theoretical backgrounds can be identified, transformed, and used in further migration analyses and immigration policy-making.

Labour market segmentation. According to Gordon, “the role of labour migration appears to be simply one of equilibrating the geographical balance of aggregate labour supply and demand through responses of potential migrants to differences between areas in attainable real incomes” (1995, p.140).

Social Capital and International Migration. The social network of immigrants is a special type of social ties between visiting compatriots, as well as their contacts with compatriots who have remained at home; the characteristics of these connections, in general, can be used to interpret the social behaviour of the immigrants involved in the network, and the structure of social networks reflects the nature of the relationship between them. “Migrant networks are a set of interpersonal ties that connect migrants, former migrants, and nonmigrants to one another through relations of kinship, friendship, and shared community origin” (Palloni et al, 2001, p.1964).

Low-skilled and high-skilled immigrants differently influence economics. The study “The economics of Immigration” by Borjas sets up the timeless definitions and variables given in mathematical formulas and conclusions: “immigration also generates a sizable redistribution of wealth in the economy, reducing the incomes of natives who are now competing with immigrant workers in the labour market and increasing the incomes of capitalists and other users of immigrant services” (1995, p.19).

International migration is characterized by inconsistency, the complexity of the process, and positive-negative consequences in trends for both sides of the socio-economic process. If we consider the benefited side of a ‘*sending*’ country, then the following advantages can be found (Rakovskaya et al, 2013):

- The export of labour helps to reduce tensions in the national labour markets, reduces the level of unemployment and the cost of its social services;
- Citizens working abroad transfer most of their earnings to their homeland;
- Some of the emigrants return home, bringing capital with them for starting a business.

On the contrary, considering the indicator of the non-return of the migrant to the homeland, the following disadvantages can be found (Rakovskaya et al, 2013):

1. The expenditure and investment of GDP resources on human capital and the nurturing of the labour force is considered as an ineffective allocation of state funds as an investor;
2. emigration of the most competitively capable and enterprising workers weakens the country’s business environment and the national economy as a whole, including at the international level;
3. the outflow of highly professional, scientific and technical specialists known as brain-drain negatively affects the innovative development of a country. Moreover, it potentially creates high competitiveness on the international scene with a high concentration of intellectual immigrants in another county (Rakovskaya et al, 2013).

From a ‘receiving’ country perspective the following advantages and disadvantages can be listed, depending on the short and long-term run. In general, the demographic situation in a host country improves, since migrants either can be considered as additional labour force (low-skilled) or innovative, intellectual entrepreneurs (high-skilled), i.e. if in an applied designated triangle with workers (migrants), capitalists (producers) and landowners, the expectations of

capitalists can be minimized or reversed in a case when an immigrant-worker becomes a producer, then the expectations of the benefits of landowners and the real estate market will tend to a single benefit of a host-country.

However, the widespread use of low-skilled migrants labour leads to the conservation of a low level of wages, dishonest practices in the domestic labour market, the creation and further development of a segmented market that possibly may affect citizens of host countries if the number of low-skilled immigrants are correlated to low-skilled citizens, together it creates a higher unemployed rate and market segmentation in certain industries and regions.

Immigrants stimulate production growth and additional employment in the host country with their qualitative and quantitative ratio. However, if there is an imbalance in migration policy and the bulk of immigrants come from poor countries and fill niches in the lower segment of the labour market, they concentrate at the bottom of the social pyramid, which leads to their marginalization.

Additionally, regardless of the qualifications of a migrant but considering the quantitative balance, entire sectors of the economy either trade (high-skill) or construction (low-skill), with long-term use of migrant labour, become dependent on them.

Frequently, businesses that rely on cheap immigrant labour lose incentives to improve working conditions and qualify workers. However, it has another side, using economic immigrants as cheap labour, allows medium and small businesses to remain competitive, thus increasing the availability of goods and services for low classes of citizens, i.e., to some extent it reduces poverty.

The characteristics listed above are given in general terms and may vary from country to country. The presented data provide a generalized view of the work of the socioeconomic apparatus of migration. For accurate forecasting, a direct model of migration needs to be created and analysed, which will be specific for a certain country.

One of the overlooked elements of the socioeconomic model itself is a migrant, with one's feelings, difficulties, and contradictions. It takes quite a long time to adapt to new living and working conditions in a new country.

2.5: Political Factors in Migration

Considering the global economic emergence and globalization in general, there is no doubt that labour migration is one of the most dominant among international migration trends.

Even though the globalization of the economy has created a significant gap between developing and developed countries, this is not a reason to believe that migrants are fleeing poverty in their own countries. Migration itself has a psychological- identical factor, related to complex dissatisfaction with residence in the ‘sending’ country.

If the psychology of migration can be studied deeper, it will be acknowledged that key factor in migration is directly related to a complex identical crisis, when an individual, regardless of blood and land belonging by birth, finds oneself lost and becomes ‘a stranger among one’s own’ or ‘one’s own among strangers.

An identity crisis can also be accompanied by political dissatisfaction and persecution in the country, which is directly related to the conflict of identical interests of both an individual and a collective majority in the case of the transgender, gay, religious identity, and the quantitative and qualitative minority and majority in relation to state policy or disagreement of an individual with a qualified majority.

Frequently, migration patterns from a migrant’s position have intermingled motives that include a variety of reasons: “indeed, the impact of war, political oppression, and environmental degradation in many countries, often in association with worsening economic conditions, are also major contributors” (Yeoh et al, 2020, p.93).

Changes in the position of various groups of the population predetermine civil and political behaviour, and also entails significant shifts in the structure of society and changes the level of relations between its members, sharply activates their migratory moods, accelerates the formation and implementation of migration attitudes, which constantly increases the percentage of non-organized or voluntarily migration in the structure of international migration.

“Brain drain” is the irrevocable emigration of highly qualified specialists, including examples of specialists (students, graduate students, trainees), due to the special policy of the countries of immigration, which, as a rule, has negative consequences for the countries of emigration.

Migration from a ‘sending’ to a ‘host’ country is a triple-sided social, economic, and political phenomenon since it impacts three sides. ‘The climate’ for migration should be encountered

since it shapes migration policies based on previous political-historical sending-receiving countries' ties, for example, military occupation, colonial past; or current trade and investment flows.

Besides, migration flows are directly connected with the national security of three parties. Spatially related migration with displacement with people between the two poles of movement: sending and accepting countries, already in the first approximation represents a real or potential security challenge.

Analytically, the problem of "migration and security" breaks down into two sub-problems: the security of the people themselves, who form migration flows, and the security of society and the state affected by migration flows.

It is becoming clear that the link between migration and security is two-sided. At the same time, both from the point of view of the safety of migrants and any environment that they leave or into which they are introduced, structural characteristics are extremely important.

First, the difference between life circumstances, which the freedom of choice of a migrant is not limited, and those which do not have freedom of choice, i.e., the level of safety is largely determined by what aspects of safety are available to everyone, to what extent and in what range.

At the same time, thinking carefully about a migrant's circumstances or emotionally reacting to them, a person proceeds from personal experience and the concepts of security that's been assimilated.

One needs to notice that the choice of a migrant is limited from the beginning and while choosing a country for emigration, a potential emigrant has the objective set of legal reasons for immigration; resources and capabilities, including skills, financial safety; desire and interest towards the host country as a psychological motivating factor.

So, migrants' choice is forcibly narrowed and that requires the need of personal security endowment and its contribution.

Although the security threats that are relevant for them in the country of departure, as a rule, are removed or noticeably weakened due to the very fact of displacement, other ones await them in return in a host-country since it can be unpredictable. That incompleteness of

subjectivity (for example, language barriers, cultural characteristics, etc.), with which they are forced to face during immigration impose some new challenges at all aspects of migrants' life.

The situation with societies is different. Since for them migration, even regulated, inevitably turns into excessive tension in social relations, they tend to perceive it not so much as a challenge, but as a potential internal (in the country of departure) or external (in the country of arrival) threat to their security.

Moreover, closed communities with their developed group self-awareness, such as a separate state, regard immigration as a rather constant threat.

The opposition between “newcomers” and “indigenous” is especially negative when migrants, really sharply distinguishing themselves by their appearance and norms of behaviour, do not immediately accept the adaptation model, which assumes the fastest getting used to the environment and rapid dissolution in it.

Migration can pose real or potential threats to almost any aspect of security. Society can face threats to economic and political security, such as the problem of “brain drain”, focal deformation of the demographic, territorial, and socio-professional structure.

The problem of brain drain can also be in their circulation (known as “brain drain circulation”) when a highly-skilled immigrant returns to the country of origin, offered by the governments the set of opportunities for return that can include unique trade and business opportunities (Yeoh et al, 2020).

An important role in this phenomenon is also played by the social network of the immigrant and a connection with homeland country: “network ties to the host country can thus facilitate the job search, provide initial housing, and serve as insurance to mitigate the enormous risk associated with migration” (Klabunde & Willekens, 2016, p.3).

Considering migration flows as a phenomenon with three active participants, namely the ‘sending’, ‘receiving’ country and the migrant himself, it should be noted that the final decision in this chain is made by the immigrant, who can be guided by both objective and subjective factors when making a decision.

In order to assess this decision-making, migration imitation models are used as a flexible tool to reproduce a wider range of stylized facts and prediction-models (Rehm, 2012).

CHAPTER 3: NATION, NATIONALISM AND NATIONAL IDENTITY: THEORETICAL APPROACHES

3.1: Introduction

In the scholarly discourse surrounding nationalism and its associated concepts, such as nation and ethnic group, a significant lack of consensus exists regarding their definitions. This ambiguity can be attributed to a complex historical trajectory concerning their philosophical, political and legal uses. For instance, in several European nations, including Hungary, contemporary legal documents frequently avoid using terms such as nation, nationalism, etc. Furthermore, the debate surrounding these concepts can be traced back to the 18th century. Throughout the debate, various social, political, and economic factors have impacted the definitions proposed by theorists.

Numerous researchers and theorists have highlighted the terminological chaos surrounding key concepts such as nation, nationalism, state, and ethnic group (Connor, 1994). To illustrate this complexity, it is proposed that several definitions be examined. Acknowledging the prevalent terminological chaos, Connor defines a nation as a collective of individuals who perceive themselves as ancestrally related. This perspective states that the national bond is fundamentally psychological rather than rational, deriving from a deep-seated sense of kinship and an intangible essence. Consequently, this definition prioritises the emotional dimensions of nationhood over economic, political, and instrumental considerations. Simultaneously, Connor distinguishes between the emotional connection to a nation and the more conventional sense of loyalty often associated with nationalism. He further differentiates a nation from an ethnic group by asserting that a nation is characterised by self-identification – defined by the individuals who recognise their belonging to it – while an ethnic group may be defined externally. Thus, if a nation is inherently self-defined and its bond is rooted in emotional rather than rational terms, the application of the concept cannot be appropriately extended to inhabitants of a country, that is, citizens.

Conversely, Karl Deutsch (1966) suggests a definition of nation-building, particularly in the context of decolonised state-nations in Africa and Asia. He posits that nations are constructed by nationalist leaders who establish institutions that embody the principles of a civic nation, thereby aggregating the interests of citizens and translating them into effective political action.

This perspective underscores the inherently political nature of nations, wherein the state functions as a reflexive institution that monitors and facilitates the formation of a cohesive political community. In contrast, Anthony Smith (1998) offers an alternative conceptualisation of a nation, defining it as a collective of individuals who share common and distinctive cultural elements, a unified economic system, and citizenship rights that extend to all members. Furthermore, he emphasises the emergence of solidarity, which arises from shared experiences and a collective sharing of a specified territory. Smith's approach highlights the interrelated cultural, legal, political, and economic dimensions that contribute to the identity and cohesion of a nation. So, these definitions illustrate complexities in understanding the concepts of nation, nation-building, and nationalism.

Given the inherent complexities surrounding the concepts of nationalism and nations, it is pertinent to undertake an overview of the main theoretical approaches. This chapter is structured in the following way. First, it concentrates on the history of nationalism theories, tracing them back to the 18th century. Then it proceeds with an overview of the two main theoretical schools of nationalism: essentialism and modernism. The chapter concludes with an overview of theoretical approaches comprehending the concept of national identity.

3.2: History of the Debates on Nationalism

The initial debate on nationhood and nationalism found its roots in the 18th century in various contexts across Europe. A notable contribution to this debate came from the Anglo-Saxon context, particularly through John Stuart Mill, who suggested a connection between the existence of nations and the establishment of free institutions. He argued that the presence of diverse nationalities within a single state poses a challenge to the sustainability of those institutions. Contrarily, Lord Acton countered this viewpoint by asserting that the coexistence of multiple nations within one state serves as a vital test of freedom and a safeguard for it.

The contributions of German Romantic thinkers further enriched the discussion of nationalism, particularly through their theorisation of the concept of community (*Gemeinschaft*) as a foundational element that binds individuals. Johann Gottfried Herder, a prominent figure within this intellectual movement, rejected the universalist implications of Enlightenment thought by emphasising the significance of language in fostering communal identity. Herder argued that language distinguishes humans from other species, believing that it can only be acquired within

communities that possess unique modes of thought. Consequently, he claimed that language reflects the communal and, by extension, the national essence. Furthermore, Immanuel Kant highlighted the importance of individualism and self-determination, deeming these principles central to nationalism.

In the French context, Ernest Renan offered a different interpretation of nationhood. He stated that a nation embodies a “soul.” He argued that this soul comprises both a rich legacy of shared memories and a contemporary desire for collective living. Renan placed particular emphasis on the significance of a heroic past and historical glory, positioning these elements as crucial components of the social capital necessary to form a cohesive national identity.

In the 19th century, Marxism, alongside various other theoretical frameworks, significantly influenced the nation and nationalism debate, exhibiting an ambivalent stance towards these concepts. On one hand, the process of nation-building directly contradicts the principle of proletarian internationalism, which is a fundamental objective of Marxist ideology. Conversely, Marxism recognises the potential benefits of nation-building and nationalism when these processes serve to advance the struggle against capitalist systems. Consequently, Marxists perceived the emergence of modern nations as a necessary stage in the progression toward internationalism while simultaneously positing that both nations and nationalism would ultimately disappear in the future.

In the aftermath of World War I and, particularly, World War II, historians increasingly drew their attention to the phenomenon of nationalism in their efforts to understand the underlying causes of these conflicts, their unfolding, and the resulting human and material losses. While the author of this thesis recognises that numerous typological frameworks of nationalism have been proposed, this research will emphasise only a select few that are particularly relevant to its focus (for further typology discussion, see, for example, Hobsbawm (1992) and Hutchinson and Smith (1994)). Hans Kohn (1944) offers a typology that distinguishes between two types of nationalism based on the developmental disparities observed between Western and Eastern contexts:

- Western nationalism: Characterised as modern, rational, and voluntaristic, this form of nationalism underlines the virtues of individual liberty and self-determination.
- Eastern nationalism: Conversely, this type is portrayed as less developed and inferior, manifesting organic and deterministic traits. It is often marked by a lack of self-

assurance, which may be compensated for by an excessive emphasis on collective identity.

Hugh Seton-Watson (1964), a historian specialising in Russian studies, proposed the following typology of nationalism that distinguishes between:

- Old, continuous nations: These nations existed before 1789, characterised by continuous nationalist ideologies and movements. In these countries, the formation of national identity was a gradual, slow, and obscure process, influenced by multiple actors and contributions over time and reflecting complex socio-political dynamics.
- New nations: These nations emerged due to nationalist efforts within a relatively brief timeframe. The emergence of national identity in these contexts is often marked by leveraging linguistic and cultural politics, thereby facilitating a rapid consolidation of national consciousness among diverse populations.

The evolution of thought surrounding nations and nationalism provided a substantial foundation for subsequent theorisation and debate, particularly since the 1950s. The theories can be categorised into two principal schools: essentialism and modernism, with each school further subdivided into distinct lines of thought.

3.3: Essentialism: Primordialism, Perennialism, and Ethno-Symbolism

Within the essentialist school, there are three distinct lines of thought: primordialism, perennialism, and ethno-symbolism. Pierre van den Berghe (1981) is part of a school of thought known as biological primordialism, believing that nations emerge as extensions of kinship groups. He asserts that races can be understood as outcomes of individual reproductive drives and emphasises the significance of culture in defining group identity among individuals of the same nation and race. In this context, van den Berghe proposes that genetically related individuals can be identified through various cultural markers, including language, religion, customs, dress, and social manners. In parallel, cultural primordialists, notably Clifford Geertz, underscore the importance of cultural factors in shaping ethnic identity. Geertz (1963) articulates the concept of primordial attachments, asserting that these deep-seated connections arise from the fundamental aspects of social existence. He contends that such ethnic affiliations are not predicated on rational choice; instead, they are ingrained in the cultural fabric of a

community. Unlike van den Berghe, Geertz perceives ethnicity as a quasi-kinship relationship rooted in cultural expressions such as language, customs, and religion.

Anthony Smith (1998) challenges de Berghe's assertion that cultural markers serve as reliable indicators of nationality and race, arguing that such markers are fundamentally non-biological in nature. He contends that historical processes such as conquest, migration, and intermarriage compromise the notion of biological purity, thereby complicating the use of cultural markers for the identification of racial affiliation. In light of broader critiques of primordialism, instrumentalist theorists suggest that primordial attachments are not static; instead, they are subject to change throughout an individual's life. For instance, the emotional ties associated with one's place of birth or kinship can diminish over time (Brass, 1991). Consequently, from an instrumentalist perspective, ethnic identities may be adopted or transformed, particularly in migration contexts or driven by rational considerations.

Perennialism – another school within the broader framework of essentialism – emphasises the historical continuity and enduring characteristics of nations, stating that there is no significant distinction between the concepts of nation and ethnicity. While it acknowledges that nationalism, as both a political movement and an ideological construct, emerged in modernity, perennialists assert that the notion of nationhood possesses deep historical roots. For instance, Adrian Hastings (1997), a Roman Catholic priest and historian, finds the emergence of national sentiment in late Medieval England, highlighting the role of vernacular translations of the Bible and the impact of Protestantism in shaping a cohesive national identity. Hastings argues that the nationalism that manifested in the wake of the French Revolution represents a secondary expression of nationalism, suggesting that the essence of nationhood predates these developments. Additionally, other scholars within the perennialist tradition have identified early manifestations of national identity in ancient Israel and the pre-Columbian Americas, where religions served as unifying forces for populations (Grosby, 1991), as well as in 16th-century England (Greenfield, 1992). So, their findings underscore the argument that the concept of nation is not a novel phenomenon but rather a continuation of historical processes that span centuries.

Ethnosymbolist theories propose that the formation of nations is rooted in historical developments rather than modernity. Armstrong (1982), adopting an “extended temporal” perspective, traces the historical underpinnings of group identities, suggesting that ethnicity and nationhood are continuous phenomena. This approach distinguishes ethnosymbolism from

perennialism by emphasising the significance of symbols, communication, and myth; Armstrong states that mental attitudes regarding identity have proven to be more enduring than the material aspects of existence. Contrastingly, Smith (1998) approaches the concept of nations from a modern perspective, seeking to understand the nature of nationhood by examining its historical context. He defines ethnic communities as “a named human population with shared ancestry, myths, histories, and cultures, having an association with a specific territory and a sense of solidarity” (Smith, 1998, p. 125). By focusing on cultural affiliations rather than mere kinship ties, Smith distinguishes his theory from that of primordialists. Notably, Smith acknowledges that ethnic identities are susceptible to transformation due to external influences, such as war and conquests; however, he maintains that these identities tend to remain relatively durable over time. Regarding the definition of a nation, Smith formulates it as “a group of human beings, possessing common and distinctive elements of culture, a unified economic system, citizenship rights for all members, a sentiment of solidarity arising out of common experiences, and occupying a common territory” (Smith, 1998, p. 14). So, he highlights the legal, political, and economic dimensions of a nation and national identity, emphasising their integral role.

The critique of ethnosymbolism has been articulated by one of its proponents, Anthony Smith, who states that an emphasis on historical narratives constitutes a form of retrospective nationalism. Furthermore, several scholars, including Breuilly (1993), have argued that ethnosymbolism underestimates the significance of institutional frameworks – such as education and religion – that play a crucial role in shaping and reinforcing ethnic and national identities. Özkirimli (2000) further challenges the ethnosymbolist perspective by suggesting that it fails to distinguish between modern nations and pre-modern ethnic communities, contending that it is problematic to discuss the concepts of nation and nationalism within the pre-modern context.

3.4. Modernism: Ernest Gellner, Uneven Development, Constructivism, and the Coexistence of State and Nation

Modernism represents another main school for examining issues related to the nation, nationalism, and ethnicity. Within the modernist framework, it is possible to identify four distinct lines of thought: the theories proposed by Ernest Gellner and his followers, theories of

uneven development, constructivist approaches, and theories addressing the coexistence of state and nation.

Gellner (1983) believes that nations are instrumental in the process of industrialisation. He defines nationalism as a political principle wherein ethnic and political boundaries are aligned. Consequently, he argues that nationalism cannot emerge without a state. According to Gellner, nationalism arose historically as humanity reached a plateau of industrialisation. Thus, it was largely absent during the agrarian phase, characterised by highly stratified societies lacking a standardised culture. During industrialisation, the increasing complexity of labour divisions necessitated a mobile and educated population. This, in turn, fostered a demand for a high standardised culture, which was primarily possible through the institution of mass education, a central component of modern society. The state assumes a pivotal role in this educational paradigm, as it has unique resources and power to provide standardised education on a large scale. As a result, the state acquires the authority to impose a new cultural framework upon its population. Gellner (1983) further asserts that the state selectively utilises the pre-existing and historically inherited diversity of cultures, often transforming them significantly. This includes reviving dead languages, inventing traditions, and reconstructing fictitious notions of pristine cultural purity. In this context, nationalism emerges as a form of social organisation fundamentally rooted in culture, which is internalised through the mechanisms of education.

Gellner's theory of nationalism has been subject to criticism from scholars such as Smith (1998), who argue that Gellner's framework is limited by its reliance on the German Romantic interpretation of nationalism while neglecting the broader spectrum of nationalist expressions. Smith emphasises that Gellner fails to adequately account for the origins and proliferation of nationalism, particularly in contexts where nationalist sentiments predated industrialisation. He cites examples from Serbia, Ireland, and Japan, where pronounced forms of nationalism emerged independently of industrial development. Conversely, in Denmark, the modernisation of agriculture catalysed the rise of nationalist sentiments. So, this evidence suggests that nationalism can manifest across diverse socio-economic contexts. This critique is echoed by Özkirimli (2000), who illustrates that nationalism may also arise within highly industrialised societies, as evidenced by the cases of the Basques and Catalans in Spain. Furthermore, Smith challenges Gellner's hypothesis that national identity is linked to identification with universal high culture, suggesting that the nation serves as an expression of this connection. Smith argues

that high cultures do not invariably function as embodiments of power, as demonstrated by the failures of communist regimes that struggled to achieve effective mass cultural indoctrination.

Theories built on uneven development, a strand of modernist thought, recognise the disparities in development between nations, particularly in the context of imperialism. These theories focus on the centre-periphery dynamics that emerge from capitalist systems, as scholars such as Nairn (1997) theorised. They frequently draw upon historical case studies from the 19th century, including Germany, Italy, Scotland, and Catalonia, among others. In this framework, the West, positioned as the centre, has historically exploited the peripheral regions' labour and resources, thereby maintaining distinct technical and economic advantages. In response to this exploitation, peripheral elites recognised the necessity for mobilisation among the masses, leveraging local languages and cultural identities to forge a nationalist agenda. This endeavour involved a reconstruction of local culture facilitated by the intelligentsia, who strived to establish a distinct identity separate from that of the centre.

Hechter (1975) contributes to this theory by introducing the concept of internal colonialism, which he bases on the socio-political dynamics of the British Isles. He argues that nationalism arises as a reaction to the failings of regional development, suggesting that uneven modernisation has resulted in varying levels of advancement among different groups within state boundaries. In this internal colonial model, a "core" group exerts political and economic dominance over peripheral regions, leading to what Hechter describes as a "cultural division of labour." This paradigm implies that certain cultural and ethnic groups are systematically barred from accessing specific occupations—not due to a lack of skills or knowledge but rather as a consequence of cultural norms and values. Hechter posits that this oppression fosters the emergence of nationalism among marginalised cultural groups. However, he also emphasises the critical role of communication in facilitating the formation of a coherent nationalist movement within these oppressed communities, highlighting the connection between cultural identity and socio-political mobilisation.

In contrast, Smith (1998) contends that nationalism is a dependent variable shaped by the dynamics of uneven development, as it engenders the formation of a distinct identity and collective destiny in opposition to the economic and political "core." While Nairn's model elucidates the emergence of decolonising nationalism in regions such as Asia and Africa, it is less effective in accounting for the more ethnic and genealogical manifestations of nationalism. Moreover, Smith critiques Nairn's interpretation of the role of the intelligentsia as problematic:

Nairn states that nationalism is essentially a populist movement initiated by the intelligentsia and transmitted to the masses in a top-down manner. Smith argues that this perspective is Eurocentric, as evidenced in contexts like Eritrea, where elite groups were mobilised even in the absence of widespread mass involvement, leading to divisions among intellectuals into rival nationalist factions. Greenfield (1992) further asserts that the origins of nationalism were not confined to peripheral regions but instead emerged prominently from metropolitan centres, thereby underscoring a limitation in Nairn's framework that primarily addresses nationalism in former colonies.

Additionally, Greenfield critiques the simplification inherent in the core-periphery dichotomy, arguing that the relationship is far more complex, with the periphery simultaneously existing within core regions and featuring developed areas within what are traditionally viewed as peripheral zones. Likewise, Hechter's theoretical contributions have faced scrutiny, notably from Özkirimli (2000), who argues that Hechter's framework is reductionist. Specifically, Özkirimli posits that the theory overly simplifies the complexities of cultural cleavages and ethnic sentiments by attributing their emergence solely to economic and spatial factors.

Constructivism emphasises the significance of tradition in the understanding of nationalism. Proponents of this perspective introduce the concept of "invented tradition," which refers to a set of practices characterised by rules that may be explicitly stated or implicitly understood, often of a ritualistic or symbolic nature. These traditions are designed to instil specific values and norms of behaviour through repetitive engagement, thereby creating an illusion of continuity with the past (Hobsbawm & Ranger, 1983). Invented traditions can be classified into two categories: those that reference historical precedents and those that establish a simulated past through quasi-obligatory repetition. The emergence of such traditions is particularly pronounced during periods of modernisation, which frequently precipitate rapid social transformations that undermine existing social frameworks. In such contexts, pre-existing traditions often fail to address the evolving needs of society, prompting the creation of new traditions. As Hobsbawm asserts, "existing customary traditional practices are modified, ritualised, and institutionalised for new national purposes" (Hobsbawm & Ranger, 1983, p. 6). Notable examples of invented traditions include celebrating May Day, the Olympic Games, and alums associations.

Hobsbawm highlights the inherent paradox of nationalism, whereby nations strive to project an image of antiquity despite being relatively recent constructs. He argues that nations must be

understood as socially constructed entities closely associated with modern symbols and tailored discourses, such as “national history.” In this context, he emphasises that the national phenomenon cannot be comprehensively analysed without an examination of the “invention of tradition” (Hobsbawm and Ranger, 1983). Hobsbawm identifies the period from 1870 to 1914 in Europe as a time characterised by the mass production of traditions and the rise of mass politics. In response to the forces of mass democratisation, ruling elites employed strategies of inventing traditions to bolster their authority and legitimacy. This era also witnessed advancements in primary education, the invention of public ceremonies, and the establishment of public monuments, all of which were managed by the state. Consequently, nationalism emerged as a means of fostering social cohesion. Nevertheless, Hobsbawm claims that nations are constructed both from above, through elite-driven initiatives, and from below, through the active participation of the population within democratic frameworks. So, this dual dynamic shows the complexity of nationalism as both a top-down and bottom-up phenomenon.

Smith (1998) identified several critical limitations in the constructivist approach to nationalism. First, constructivists struggle to formulate the reasons behind the emergence of specific nationalist constructs, the factors contributing to their resonance with the masses, and the variability in the success of different nationalisms. Second, there is a neglect of the complex interplay between established and emerging traditions within constructivist discourse. Third, the term “invention” suggests a fabrication process, as in creating something from nothing; however, these traditions often maintain connections to historical contexts. Finally, Hobsbawm’s framework does not adequately account for the intense passion that, in its most extreme manifestations, can result in individuals’ willingness to sacrifice their lives for their country.

Benedict Anderson (1991), identifying as a constructivist, aims to address the limitations inherent in Eric Hobsbawm’s approach to nationalism by highlighting the cultural and subjective dimensions of the phenomenon. Anderson defines the nation as “an imagined political community – and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign” (Anderson, 1991, pp. 6-7). He believes that a comprehensive understanding of nations and nationalism can be achieved through two key concepts: immortality and language. Anderson argues that the emergence of print capitalism was crucial to developing nationalism, as it facilitated the creation of print languages that laid the groundwork for national consciousness. The 18th century marked an era in which historical narratives became accessible to a broader audience

through the proliferation of dictionaries, history books, and other literary forms. In the 19th century, producers within the print market not only unearthed ancient histories but also idealised “golden ages,” making these narratives available to a diverse consumer base, including “the families of the reading classes - not merely the ‘working father,’ but the servant-girded wife and the school-age children” (Anderson, 1991, p. 75). Regarding the concept of immortality in nations and nationalism, Anderson asserts that a shared linguistic heritage transcends time, creating a continuous language community. Engaging with a language through historical novels or contemporary newspapers enables individuals to participate in the same community that spans over time.

Smith (1998) identified several shortcomings in Anderson’s theory of nationalism. Specifically, he argued that the constructivist perspective implies that any social construct is subject to deconstruction; consequently, nations may ultimately be perceived as mere cultural representations. Moreover, Smith states that the notion of imagination alone is insufficient to explain the complexities of nationalism, which is fundamentally rooted in individual agency and voluntarism. Additionally, while Anderson emphasises the role of language in shaping national identities, Smith points out that other critical factors – such as ethnicity, religion, and race – are absent from Anderson’s analysis.

Lastly, the modernist framework also encompasses theories that advocate for the coexistence of the concepts of “state” and “nation,” considering that both emerged simultaneously, particularly in the context of Western Europe, where the phenomenon of the nation-state is prevalent. Scholars adhering to this paradigm draw upon Max Weber’s definition of the state as a political entity characterised by its “administrative staff successfully upholding a claim to the monopoly of the legitimate use of physical force in the enforcement of its order” (Weber, 1978, p. 54) within a specified territory. Anthony Giddens (1995), a leading figure in this line of thought, defines nationalism as a “primarily psychological phenomenon,” while the nation is “a collectively existing entity within a demarcated territory, which is subject to a unitary administration, reflexively monitored by both the internal state apparatus and those of other states” (Giddens, 1995, p. 116). Giddens believes that the formation of nations is intricately tied to processes of state centralisation. Hence, the development of nations is a direct consequence of “centralisation and administrative expansion.” Within this approach, nations generate nationalism rather than the reverse; the former can shape the latter. Drawing upon the notion of European nation-states, Giddens outlines the multifaceted characteristics of

nationalism as comprising political, ideological, and psychological dynamics alongside symbolic content. Furthermore, he states that nation-states possess resilience even amid the forces of globalisation. Giddens does not exclude the possibility of the emergence of a cosmopolitan nation in the future – one in which national identity will be reconstructed, characterised by diminished territoriality and a reexamination of historical narratives.

In contrast, Smith (1998) argues that not all forms of nationalism aspire to independent statehood, as evidenced by groups such as the Scots and Catalans, who may prefer varying degrees of autonomy instead. He emphasises the importance of cultural nationalism, asserting that it should not be overlooked; this type of nationalism can offer alternative frameworks when political nationalism encounters obstacles. Furthermore, Smith critiques Giddens' definition of nationalism as overly reductionist. Thus, since nationalism and the concept of the nation are linked to the modern state, there is insufficient justification for a separate theoretical framework for nationalism. So, Smith appeals to historical examples, such as 19th-century Poland, where nationalism and national identity persisted despite the absence of an independent state.

John Breuilly is a theorist associated with the perspective that advocates for the coexistence of the state and the nation, and he has elaborated a significant political theory of nationalism. He defines nationalism as “an especially appropriate form of political behaviour in the context of the modern state and the modern state system” (Breuilly, 1993, p. 1). So, according to Breuilly, nationalism encompasses political movements that seek to acquire or exercise state power, justifying their efforts through the framework of nationalist arguments. The political doctrine articulated by Breuilly rests on three aspects:

- There exists a nation characterised by distinctive and explicit traits.
- The interests and values of this nation take precedence over all other interests and values.
- The nation should strive for as much independence as possible, which typically necessitates the achievement of political sovereignty.

In contrast to some other theorists discussed previously, Breuilly emphasises the role of sub-elites – such as mid-level bureaucrats, military officers, professionals, traders, and intellectuals – in shaping oppositional nationalisms, especially within colonial contexts. He acknowledges that nationalism has also been expressed among peasant and labour classes, notably during significant historical events like World War II. Thus, Breuilly believes that it is a misconception

to perceive nationalism solely as a phenomenon driven by professionals or intellectuals; instead, he argues that many social groups influence these intellectuals.

Smith (1998) points out that Breuilly dismisses the notion of nationalism as a language or ideology, aiming instead to offer a comprehensive historical and social analysis. Breuilly further critiques the concept of cultural identity, intentionally excluding primordial or irrational elements from his theoretical framework. In contrast, Smith states that any genuine discourse on nations must encompass cultural factors, as culture is integral to the notion of authentic national identity. Consequently, a significant weakness in Breuilly's approach lies in his failure to recognise that nationalism operates as a complex interplay of both political and cultural dimensions.

3.5: Theorisation of National Identity

The overview in the previous sections of this chapter illustrates that the debate on the concepts of nation and nationalism is both rich and contentious, often characterised by a lack of consensus. This complexity is mirrored in the theorisation of national identity, which encompasses not only the "national" component but also the notion of "identity." So, the literature offers various approaches towards understanding national identity. For example, as stated by social identity theory (Tajfel, 1978), individuals are motivated to cultivate a positive social identity, a process that is fundamental to the cohesion and endurance of the community. Individuals typically forge such identities by aligning themselves with a "majority" group that shares familiar historical narratives, customs, and norms. This alignment is inherently driven by the pursuit of positive associations, as the significance of national affiliation becomes questionable when founded on less favourable feelings or values.

Furthermore, Deutsch (1966) asserts that the emergence of national consciousness needs a collective awareness among the members of an ethnic group, emphasising the shared experiences that contribute to this awareness. Concurrently, Brubaker (1996) contends that national identity is not fixed; rather, it is inherently fluid, capable of transformation in response to evolving political, social, and economic contexts. This fluidity underscores the dynamic nature of national identity and the various factors that contribute to its continual redefinition.

The social identity theory suggests that acknowledging one's group inherently necessitates the recognition of other groups, thereby allowing individuals to form opinions about these external

groups. This theory articulates that “real-world ethnocentrism is in-group bias,” signifying the propensity to preferentially evaluate and behave positively towards one’s group (Turner et al., 1979, p.38). This in-group favouritism does not require an actual conflict of interest between groups, which reveals its pervasive nature. As individuals discern distinctions between their group and other groups, these differences must be critically analysed. Herein lies a pivotal challenge: individuals may inadvertently attribute negative characteristics to out-group members, leading to generalisations and the formation of stereotypes.

An example of this might be the stereotype that “Hungarians are gifted and highbrow,” juxtaposed against the perception that other groups are “lazy and lowbrow,” thereby positioning Hungarians as superior. Such assertions represent the initial emergence of ethnocentric sentiments, as Sumner (1906) discussed. The essence of ethnocentrism lies in an exaggerated valuation of one’s in-group, accompanied by a corresponding devaluation of out-groups. However, it is critical to distinguish between ethnocentrism and nationalism. Nationalism arises when ethnocentric perspectives permeate the actions of an entire community, evolving into a system-building ideology. Under such circumstances, the national political orientation and behaviour are predominantly shaped by nationalist ideals, which influence economic, foreign, and cultural policies. Further, Hogg and Williams (2000) propose that categorising individuals into groups is a necessary process for depersonalisation, facilitating a transition to a group-level identity. This transition significantly shapes behaviours and attitudes towards both in-groups and out-groups within social contexts.

Henk Dekker proposes a model of national identity as a structured repository of knowledge composed of cognitive and affective components (Hagendoorn et al., 2000). This identity is systematically developed and organised into a coherent framework that reflects a hierarchy of interrelated elements. Similarly, György Csepeli (1997) introduces a pyramid-shaped model illustrating different levels of these components, with their organisation signifying both prevalence and intensity within a societal context. At the foundational level of national affiliation lies spontaneous emotional identification, which fosters an individual’s sense of belonging to a community defined by shared national characteristics. Building upon this emotional foundation, individuals construct a range of attitudes, motivations, values, and ideologies that further shape their identities. The concept of the nation as a social group evolves into a comprehensive construct that provides individuals with a psychological framework for identification. This process begins with instinctive feelings and progressively becomes more

conscious through various mechanisms, such as categorisation, attribution, and the use of stereotypes. Additionally, elements of ethnocentrism and nationalism may emerge as part of this identity formation. Cognitive and affective mechanisms include a wide range of themes – from engagement with the natural environment to the reconstruction of historical narratives – and extend to encompass significant cultural, political, economic, and moral questions.

Scholarly debate emphasises the interaction between language and culture, particularly regarding its influence on national identity. For instance, Ákos Jarjabka (2012) adopts the cultural framework, which defines culture as a collection of deeply rooted values, in which language constitutes a fundamental component of explicit culture. Within this paradigm, language serves as a foundational element for national identity, anchored in a shared history, collective values, and symbolic narratives, such as common origin myths, great heroes, and significant tragedies and accomplishments. These components collectively form the symbolic institutions and spaces that underpin national consciousness, providing an ideological link between the population and their geographical homeland (Taylor and Flint, 2000). Thus, the interrelationship between culture, identity, and geography is pivotal; culture functions as a medium that connects the nation to its spatial context, thereby acquiring indirect significance. Conversely, specific geographic elements can actively shape and inform identity, emerging as crucial constituents in its formation (Nora, 2003). So, this interaction is bidirectional.

Geert Hofstede suggests that culture can be defined as “the collective programming of the mind that distinguishes the members of one group or category of people from others” (Hofstede, 2001, p. 9). This definition suggests the existence of both in-groups and out-groups, closely mirroring concepts found in social identity theory. Hofstede’s model of national culture is structured around six dimensions, each representing a distinct aspect of cultural variance:

1. Power Distance Index: This dimension measures the extent to which members of a collective expect power to be distributed equally. It does not indicate an objective difference in actual power distribution but rather reflects cultural perceptions of power dynamics within the society.
2. Individualism versus Collectivism: This dimension assesses the degree to which individuals are integrated into groups. Cultures that lean towards individualism prioritise personal autonomy and self-reliance, while collectivist cultures emphasise group cohesion, loyalty, and interdependence among members.

3. **Masculinity versus Femininity:** This dimension concerns the distribution of emotional roles between genders within a culture. Masculine cultures tend to value attributes such as competitiveness, assertiveness, material success, ambition, and power. Conversely, feminine cultures prioritise relationships, quality of life, and nurturing values.
4. **Uncertainty Avoidance Index:** This dimension reflects a society's tolerance for uncertainty and ambiguity. It indicates the extent to which members of a culture seek to mitigate anxiety through structured procedures and step-by-step planning. Societies with high uncertainty avoidance often display heightened emotional responses to uncertain situations.
5. **Long Term Orientation versus Short Term Normative Orientation:** This dimension contrasts societies that embody a pragmatic approach oriented towards future rewards – characterised by perseverance and adaptability – with those that value traditions and norms related to the past and present, such as national pride, respect for history, and the fulfilment of social obligations.
6. **Indulgence versus Restraint:** This dimension captures the degree to which individuals in a culture feel free to indulge in basic and natural human desires related to enjoyment and leisure. Indulgent societies facilitate the expression of such desires, while restrained societies impose stricter social norms that limit gratification.

Despite facing criticism – such as that articulated by McSweeney (2002), who argues that the model implies a simplistic causal relationship between national culture and individual behaviour – this framework remains extensively employed in the comparative analysis of cultures and the examination of national identities. This is particularly relevant when acknowledging that culture is a fundamental component of national identity, enriching the understanding of how these identities are constructed and experienced.

3.6. Migration, identity, and cultural coexistence

Given that this thesis addresses the phenomenon of migration, it is essential to examine how migration is theorised within the framework of cultural co-existence. Although cultural pluralism historically preceded multiculturalism, distinguishing between these frameworks remains essential (Salins, 1997). When placed along a spectrum of integration approaches from full assimilation at one end to complete cultural preservation at the other, cultural pluralism

represents an intermediary position. It stands between the assimilationist “melting pot” model and the more inclusive ideal of multiculturalism. As noted by Jane Barnes Mack (1994, p. 67), “cultural pluralists stress what unites a culture rather than what divides it. They stress the ‘unum’ over the ‘plura’” (Mack, 1994, p. 67).

The nexus between multiculturalism and national identity presents a complex analytical challenge. Multicultural societies often encourage the coexistence of multiple national affiliations, which can enable the development of stable, dual identities. This phenomenon is elaborated by sociologist Károly Nagy (2009), who suggests that cultural identity is inherently shaped through engagement with multiple cultural environments. According to Nagy, individuals internalise aspects of various cultures through both primary and secondary socialisation, leading to the emergence of a multicultural sense of self. He distinguishes between those who are passively multicultural, that is, those who selectively adopt cultural elements such as music, literature, or entertainment, and those who actively integrate diverse norms, values, languages, and behaviours into their daily lives. This deeper engagement involves a sustained negotiation between multiple cultural frameworks.

Although Nagy defends dual identity as a natural and often enriching process, he also acknowledges that it can create internal and social tension, particularly in cases where cultural systems come into sharp conflict. Such dissonance may intensify in times of interethnic or international conflict, as exemplified by the wartime internment of Japanese Americans during World War II. This case demonstrates how intercultural disputes may provoke broader societal conflicts or individual crises of identity (Nagy, 2009).

Traditional models of assimilation, such as the straight-line theory, contend that integration into a host society inevitably results in the erosion of one’s original ethnic or national identity (Sandberg, 1974). According to this framework, the more deeply an individual adopts the culture of the host society, the more their original identity diminishes. Conversely, a strong attachment to one’s cultural roots may hinder successful integration (Isajiw, 1993). Milton Gordon (1964) outlines seven dimensions of assimilation, four of which are central:

- Acculturation: cultural or behavioural assimilation,
- Structural assimilation: integration into social institutions,
- Marital assimilation,
- Identificational assimilation: subjective affiliation with the host society.

Gordon states that structural assimilation forms the bedrock upon which the other forms rest, arguing that individuals must first be accepted into the dominant social structures before complete cultural and identificational assimilation can occur.

This linear conceptualisation was critiqued by Marcus Lee Hansen, who, in his study of third-generation immigrants, proposed that acculturation does not proceed in a straightforward, irreversible trajectory. He stated that “what the son wishes to forget, the grandson wishes to remember” (Hansen, 1938, p. 9), suggesting that later generations often rekindle an interest in ancestral cultures. His findings among various immigrant communities, such as Germans and Scandinavians, indicate a pattern of cultural revival in subsequent generations, a phenomenon later referred to as the “third-generation return” (Bakalian, 1993, p. 42).

Herbert J. Gans (1979) offered a counterpoint to Hansen’s notion of cultural resurgence. Rather than interpreting third- or fourth-generation expressions of ethnic heritage as genuine revivals, Gans introduces the idea of “symbolic ethnicity.” He suggests that such expressions often lack deep-rooted cultural knowledge or sustained engagement and function more as lifestyle choices or leisure activities. Richard Alba (1990) further developed this idea by comparing symbolic ethnicity to a hobby, something individuals may engage with sporadically, such as participating in holiday parades, without committing to a thorough understanding of their ethnic heritage.

From the 1990s onward, a body of scholarship began to question the inevitability of the zero-sum logic underlying traditional assimilation theories. Several researchers, including Aghanian (2007), Bakalian (1993), and Jendian (2008), propose that integration and the retention of ethnic identity can co-exist. In her empirical studies, Bakalian (1993) finds that ethnic identification often persists through various stages of assimilation without impeding socioeconomic advancement or diminishing familial cohesion. Similarly, Isajiw (2003) emphasises that assimilation need not equate to the erasure of ethnic identity. His study in Canada with German, Italian, Jewish, and Ukrainian communities reveals that individuals actively combine elements from both their heritage and the host society to construct hybrid identities. He argues that ethnic self-awareness does not necessarily hinder participation in mainstream institutions.

Jendian (2008) offers a parallel framework that he terms the “bi-cultural model of assimilation.” This model critiques the conventional binary of assimilation versus cultural preservation as a false dichotomy. Rather than assuming that individuals must choose one over the other, Jendian states that people often blend identities across multiple cultural dimensions. He advocates for a

view of assimilation that recognises the possibility of integration alongside the maintenance of ethnic distinctiveness.

Another valuable analytical tool for understanding identity among migrant populations is the concept of long-distance nationalism, introduced by Benedict Anderson (1992). This perspective examines how migrants, although physically removed from their country of origin, remain actively engaged in its political and social processes. Anderson's analysis of the Khalistan movement, which was driven mainly by diaspora communities, illustrates how technological communication enables activism without direct physical risk.

Nina Glick Schiller (2005) expands this framework by categorising the different modes through which long-distance nationalism operates. These include support for anti-colonial struggles (as in Gandhi's activities from South Africa), separatist efforts (such as those of Yugoslav nationals abroad), attempts to overthrow existing regimes (as with anti-Castro Cubans), and various forms of remote political participation, including lobbying and funding political parties. Schiller emphasises that these forms of activism are oriented toward imagined or idealised conceptions of the homeland. Migrant communities, often structured as exile groups, seek to shape political outcomes back home, maintaining strong emotional and ideological ties despite their geographic displacement.

This overview demonstrates the complexity of research in identity construction in migratory contexts. Whether through assimilation, symbolic affiliation, bicultural synthesis, or transnational engagement, identity is not a static entity but an evolving process shaped by cultural negotiation, generational change, and political dynamics. Theorising identity in migration thus demands a comprehensive understanding of the interplay between personal, cultural, and structural factors.

CHAPTER 4: THE PROBLEMS OF RUSSIAN EMIGRATION STAGES IDENTIFICATION AND STUDY

4.1: Introduction

Throughout history, large-scale migration has typically been triggered by moments of social and political crisis, whether caused by war, economic collapse, or systemic transformation. Russia in the twentieth century provides a particularly vivid case: a century marked by revolutions, global conflicts, ideological confrontation, and structural change, all of which gave rise to successive waves of emigration. These departures reshaped not only Russian society but also the diasporic communities that formed abroad. The present chapter situates Russian emigration within these broader historical, political, and economic contexts. At the same time, it introduces an interdisciplinary framework for analysing migration, paying special attention to emigrants' motivations and to the economic consequences for both sending and receiving societies.

In the literature on Russian migration, scholars generally distinguish several distinct “waves.” The most widely cited typology identifies three. The first wave, associated with the aftermath of the 1917 Revolution and the Civil War (1910s–1920s), brought aristocrats, political opponents, and intellectuals into exile. The second occurred in the 1940s, connected to the consequences of the Second World War and the displacement of soldiers and civilians across Europe. The third wave unfolded during the Cold War, particularly from the late 1960s through the early 1980s, when increasing ideological rigidity and restrictions on freedom of movement drove out dissidents, scientists, and members of persecuted groups (Matveeva, 2017; Aleksenko, 2020).

Other scholars argue for a four-wave model that better reflects Russia's political turning points (Aleksenko, 2020). In this version, the collapse of the Soviet Union constitutes a fourth, distinct stage. As Beyer (2013) notes, the dissolution of the USSR marked not just a political rupture but also a profound change in mobility: Russians were suddenly able to cross borders freely, creating what he terms the “Fourth wave.” Unlike its predecessors, this exodus was less about political persecution and more about economic opportunity. In fact, it is often referred to as the “economic wave” (BBC News, 2012), since globalisation enabled individuals to pursue careers,

education, or business abroad while maintaining ties with Russia, in many cases holding residence permits in multiple countries simultaneously.

More recently, researchers have begun to describe a Fifth wave of emigration, beginning in the early 2000s and extending to the present. Although still under-analysed, this phase has drawn significant attention in both scholarship and public discourse. It is frequently described as the “emigration of disappointment” (Medvedev, 2019), reflecting disillusionment with the political trajectory of the Russian state. Yet there is no single interpretation of its causes. At least three analytical positions can be identified.

First, many emphasise political motives. The increasing authoritarianism of Vladimir Putin’s regime, accompanied by restrictions on rights and the erosion of liberal freedoms, pushed politically active citizens to seek opportunities abroad. The Bolotnaya Square protests of 2011–2012 are often cited as a turning point (Vladimirov et al., 2018; Medvedev, 2019). Second, others stress economic motives and global opportunities. According to this perspective, the Fifth wave reflects not only disillusionment but also the opportunities created by globalisation, producing circular migration in which individuals pursue education or employment abroad without severing ties to Russia (TASS, 2017). Finally, a third perspective sees these motivations as intertwined. While few Fifth-wave emigrants were directly persecuted, political discontent interacted with economic aspirations and global mobility opportunities, producing a hybrid set of reasons for departure (BBC News, 2012; Bushuev, 2019).

Alongside conceptual debates over the timing and nature of these waves lies a persistent methodological problem: the difficulty of measuring migration flows. Statistical data are critical for assessing both the scale and the consequences of migration, yet figures vary drastically depending on the source. Russian agencies such as Rosstat, the Federal Migration Service, and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs publish their own statistics; international organisations including the UN, IOM, ILO, and OECD collect data globally; while destination-country statistical offices report inflows of Russian migrants.

The discrepancies between these sources are striking. They reflect not only different definitions of migration but also divergent counting methods and reference periods (Palnikov, 2007; UNECE, 2011). For example, one study on Russia’s demographic challenges found enormous gaps between Russian and foreign records. German statistics suggested immigration from Russia was 22 times higher than Russian figures; Spanish data exceeded Russian numbers by 28 times; Austrian statistics by 18; and Canadian figures by as much as 46 (CSRHR, 2017,

p.62). One reason, as Ryazantsev and Pismennaya (2013) point out, is that Russian statistics often count only those who formally depart “for permanent residence,” while host countries also record temporary stays and in some cases estimate irregular migration.

For some countries, official numbers barely capture the phenomenon at all. Palnikov (2007) highlights Eastern Europe as a case in point: in Hungary, for instance, no official data were available on Russian permanent residents, leaving researchers reliant on partial Russian figures that are widely considered inaccurate.

Taken together, these problems illustrate why the study of Russian emigration is so complex. Not only is there disagreement about how to define and periodise the waves, but there is also deep uncertainty about the scale of movement. Moreover, the process is ongoing: while the first four waves have been extensively studied, the Fifth remains an open field for research, particularly regarding its motivations and its economic and social impact on both Russia and receiving countries.

It is important to situate these discussions in the wider context of globalisation. Migration is not an anomaly but a normal feature of an interconnected world. Historically, people have moved in search of safer conditions, higher income, education, medical care, or political freedoms. Russia’s emigrants, whether of the early twentieth century or of today, form part of this larger human pattern of mobility.

The remainder of this chapter proceeds as follows. First, it introduces a conceptual framework distinguishing between circular, return, and permanent migration, and considers the notions of “gain” and “loss” for both sending and receiving societies. The second section traces the historical waves of Russian emigration, applying the framework to explore their motivations and consequences in greater depth. The chapter concludes by summarising the main findings and reflecting on their implications for the study of Russian migration in Europe.

4.2: Circular, Return, and Permanent Migration

As briefly mentioned in the introduction to this chapter, one of the principal difficulties in estimating migration flows lies in the discrepancy between *de jure* and *de facto* cases. The former encompasses exclusively those movements that are formally registered and legally recognized, while the latter also includes irregular or undocumented forms of migration. The

challenge, however, is that the boundary between *de jure* and *de facto* migration is often ambiguous, given the lack of universally shared definitions of migration categories. Nevertheless, it is important to emphasise that migration—regardless of its form—represents the right of individuals to choose their place of residence, provided this decision is compatible with the regulatory frameworks of both the country of origin and the host society.

The absence of clear, universally accepted definitions complicates attempts to differentiate between circular, return, and permanent migration. In the scholarly literature, several conceptualisations of circular migration are found. For instance, Bustamante (2002) describes it as the repeated movement between a country of origin and a destination until final settlement is achieved, often due to age or family reunification. O’Neil (2003) identifies circularity in migrants’ repeated returns to their country of origin over time, while the European Commission (2007) situates it within the EU framework, referring to non-EU nationals who alternate between residence and work or study abroad and their home country. Other institutions and scholars extend the definition: EMN (2011) frames it as repeated legal movement across borders, IOM (2011) highlights the fluidity of voluntary movements linked to labour needs, Posel and Marx (2013) stress dual household membership, and Schneider and Parusel (2015) reduce the notion to repeated travel between locations.

Among these perspectives, Fargues (2008) offers a particularly systematic typology, distinguishing types of circular migration according to multiple criteria: temporary residence permits, renewal options allowing multiple entries, regularity of movement between origin and destination, the legal dimension, protection of migrants’ rights, and labour market demand in the host country. His model also emphasises the developmental potential of circular migration when migrants return with enhanced skills, new knowledge, and expanded networks, thus mitigating the negative effects of brain drain. For the purposes of this thesis, Fargues’s approach is adopted, as it is one of the most comprehensive and nuanced conceptual frameworks.

A related concept is *spontaneous circular migration*, described by UNECE (2016) as self-determined mobility in which individuals autonomously decide when to migrate, how long to stay, and whether to return. This form of mobility demonstrates the increasing role of globalisation in creating competition among states for highly skilled human capital. Even though such migration is highly individualised and shaped by psychological factors, it highlights broader global dynamics in which states compete to attract talent.

Return migration, similarly, remains conceptually contested. It encompasses a wide range of practices: voluntary return (including self-initiated relocation and repatriation) and forced return (such as deportation or removal) (Carling et al., 2015). For clarity and consistency, this research follows the definition of the International Organization for Migration (IOM 2019), which frames return as the act of going back—or being taken back—to the point of departure, whether from a destination or a transit country to the country of origin.

Permanent migration is equally debated. Different organisations and scholars apply different criteria. The OECD (2018) defines permanent inflows as regulated movements that imply settlement, while UN DESA (1998) treats residency exceeding one year as long-term settlement. The IOM underscores the legal aspect, describing permanent migrants as non-nationals holding the right of permanent residence. Meanwhile, Bell and Ward (2000) emphasise long-term relocation, minimal seasonal variation, and the absence of intent to return. More recently, Chen (2023) defines permanent migration as the expectation of final settlement, based on either official registration or the migrant's stated intentions. Importantly, taxation can also serve as a decisive indicator of permanence: the country where migrants pay taxes often reflects their legal and administrative incorporation into the host society.

Given this conceptual complexity, migration should not be understood exclusively as a challenge but rather as a mutually beneficial process. For receiving states, it provides labour supply, human capital, and opportunities to regulate mobility through permits and social security schemes. Sending states can benefit from reduced labour market pressure, skills upgrading, and remittances, as well as new trade and investment networks. Migrants themselves gain flexibility, the chance to enhance qualifications, create networks, and participate in community-building both abroad and at home (Dayton-Johnson, 2007).

Thus, by assessing the consequences for three actors, (1) the migrant as the carrier of human capital, (2) the sending country, in this case Russia, and (3) the host countries, particularly Hungary can develop a theoretical model of “gains” and “losses” within international migration dynamics.

4.3: The Dual Impact of Migration: Sending and Receiving Countries

In contemporary migration studies, the question of “who benefits” from international mobility remains highly contested. The debate around migration as a process of “gain” and “loss” is far

from resolved, largely because the outcomes depend on a wide set of shifting conditions. These include demographic trends, the temporal dimension of migration (temporary, circular, or permanent), the skill profile and qualifications of the migrants, the economic development levels of both sending and receiving states, the degree of legal regulation, and even broader questions of identity politics and integration models.

Some economists argue that migration, at least in its basic form, does not generate significant net effects for those who remain in the sending country. Grubel and Scott (1968, p. 545), for example, propose that if individuals are compensated at their true marginal social product, then their departure does not affect the incomes of those who stay behind, except in terms of redistributive government measures such as taxation or welfare spending.

This perspective contrasts with research suggesting that the outflow of highly skilled workers may directly harm the developmental prospects of the sending country. Johnson (1967) and Lundborg (2006) argue that emigration of the educated and qualified leads to a reduction in overall welfare growth. This phenomenon is often referred to as “brain drain,” one of the most frequently cited negative outcomes of emigration, with some scholars even proposing an emigration tax to compensate for these losses (Bhagwati & Hamada, 1982). Later work by new growth theorists (Miyagiwa, 1991; Haque & Kim, 1995; Wong & Yip, 1999) reinforced this concern, suggesting that the removal of skilled individuals undermines both human and financial capital accumulation in the country of origin, thereby impeding long-term productivity.

Yet the debate is not one-sided. Other contributions point to possible benefits of migration for the home state, particularly in cases of return migration. For example, Stark et al. (1997) and Domingues Dos Santos and Postel-Vinay (2003) note that education and professional experience acquired abroad can enhance domestic development once migrants return, transferring both advanced skills and innovative practices. Dustmann and Kirchkamp (2002) further highlight the entrepreneurial potential of returnees, who can broaden business networks and facilitate transnational trade. Such processes suggest that “brain drain” may under certain circumstances transform into “brain gain,” depending on whether and how migrants reintegrate.

A more comprehensive approach is presented by Panagariya (2006) in his study *Migration: Who Gains, Who Loses*. The author conceptualises migration through a one-good, two-factor model that analyses exchanges between a sending and a receiving country, focusing on human capital transfers of both high- and low-skilled labour. According to this framework, the migrant

herself or himself almost always benefits. For the countries involved, however, the effects vary. In contexts of small-scale migration, where migrants possess no significant capital, the overall welfare of both societies is largely unaffected. By contrast, permanent migration has a redistributive impact: the sending country generally experiences a welfare loss, while the host society gains, as incoming labour contributes to wealth creation that can subsequently be redistributed domestically. Thus, migration shifts resources in ways that strengthen the host community but may weaken the developmental capacity of the origin state.

Taken together, the literature demonstrates the complexity of linking migration to outcomes of gain and loss. It also underscores the need to distinguish between different migration types—circular, return, and permanent—since each has different implications for both individual migrants and states. At the same time, these theoretical models tend to operate at a high level of abstraction. Real-world migration decisions are driven not only by economic logic but also by family reunification, educational aspirations, cultural factors, and political circumstances, all of which reshape the “gain–loss” equation in practice.

Moreover, the existing body of research tends to privilege the experiences of highly skilled migrants, thereby underestimating the effects of low-skilled migration and largely overlooking the dynamics of irregular migration. In addition, structural changes in the global labour market, including the digitalisation of economies and new modes of remote employment—are rarely integrated into these models, despite their growing relevance for shaping migration flows and opportunities.

4.4: History of Russian Emigration

4.4.1: General Characteristics of the Waves of Russian Emigration

As analysed earlier, various waves of Russian emigration have been identified in the literature. When analysing Russian emigration, the term “waves” is commonly used to define flows, periods, and stages. When studying the motives behind people leaving Russia, three are often distinguished: political, economic, and religious. In addition to the classically accepted model of three to five waves, one can also find an approach when waves are considered in the context of motives for emigration. For example, Pushkareva ultimately singles out seven waves of political, three waves of economic, and three waves of religious emigration (Pushkareva, 1996).

Here, instead, the question is whether these motives are really objective or it is still worth considering the waves from the point of view of the possibility of emigrating both during the political repressions and dictatorship of the Soviet Union and based on the migration policies of the host countries, as a formal agreement of at least one country to satisfy desires and needs of the Russian emigrant. Another exciting aspect that does not contradict this approach but calls it into question is the Russian diasporas, which were created not in connection with the motives for emigration but against the dictatorship of the Soviet power for the most part as a primary goal and mission abroad.

Since the periods of emigration are easier to integrate, creating some connection between the periods of emigration, rather than trying to understand the cause-and-effect relationships of changes in more extended time periods, this work will adhere to the approach of Five waves of emigration. Another reason in favour of this approach is the historical, political and societal changes that Russia has undergone and, as a consequence, changes in the national identity and belonging of the Russian migrant (for the discussion on Russian identity, see Chapter 5). So, adopting the approach of Five waves allows to contextualise each of them, especially in terms of the social, political, and economic context of the sending country. Thus, if the Fifth wave was not considered separately but as part of a classically defined Fourth wave, its length could be extended over several decades. In turn, it would hamper the analysis of the motives to migrate, the demand of a migrant in the labour market, the contingent of the Russian migrant himself/herself and, in general, his/her opportunities for integration because all of them would be very different from what could be seen at the beginning and the end of the extended Fourth wave.

At least two Russian emigration waves are concentrated around global major historical events such as the Russian Revolution, World War I, Civil War and World War II. There is certainly an undeniable connection between wars and migration. Since wars are a form of violent conflict, they create different migration trajectories in one case and no migration in the other (Knudsen et al., 2013). The combination of World War I, the Civil War, and the Russian Revolution provoked high migration activity, making it possible to assume that the first Russian refugees, prisoners of war and émigrés appeared precisely during these periods. It should also be noted that with the First wave of Russian emigration, two terms were introduced into international use, one of which still applies to international migrants. For the first time, the word “refugee” was used in 1922 when forming an agreement on refugee issues in the League of

Nations, where it was decided to issue identity cards to Russian refugees (Sarashevsky, 2000; UNHCR, 1951). The other one was the “émigré” that was applied explicitly to Russian refugees who planned to return to Russia when the situation stabilised there, but in fact, it would never happen.

Historical events are objective milestones in Russian migration, but in addition, there are relatively subjective micro-events that can play a rather important role in analysing the motives of Russian emigration, such as family reunification, returning to the ancestral homeland (especially in the case of Jews or Volga Germans), and so on. Besides, subjective motives to migrate are in a complex interplay with objective political, social, and economic events. So, they can include but are not limited to, the change of political regime and events followed within the country even when there are no military operations on the territory of the country, which can provoke the feeling of insecurity; the globalisation of the world, open migration policies of destination-countries, the acceptance and perception of Russian migrants as the human capital of the host country, which may serve as an incentive to emigrate in search of better opportunities. They are labelled as subjective from the point of view that, in many ways, partly, migration is associated with the mobility of the world; that is, the prerequisites for migration come from both sides. So, subjective perception plays a crucial role in migration. On the part of the emigrant, the prerequisite can be an unwillingness to put up with the political regime, living conditions and circumstances in the country of birth and default of residence, that is, non-violent emigration or emigration at will to improve. On the part of destination countries, they include the readiness and demand for migrants based on national, economic, political, religious, and demographic interests. It is important to note that there are prerequisites for controlled and voluntary migration. However, such conditions do not always meet two ends, as shown in more detail in the remainder of this section.

4.4.2: The First Wave of Russian Emigration

The first massive wave of modern Russian emigration occurred at the beginning of the 20th century and was marked first by the First World War and then by the Russian Revolution and Civil War. It is interesting to note that Robert Williams considers the period of the first wave of Russian emigration between 1881 and 1914 (Fialkoff, 1973). Among other historians, it is generally accepted to count the First Russian wave of migration from the beginning of the twentieth century (Raeff, 1990; Harold, 2015). The First wave of emigrants can be considered

the face of Russian emigration in general since it set the tone for the subsequent waves. It was unique, not only in its mass character but in its originality, the unification of Russian-speaking emigrants according to shared values. Their love for the country and unwillingness to put up with the regime were the driving forces behind progress and outstanding achievements in their countries of residence.

Both events, the Russian Revolution and the Civil War, caused a national, social and political split in society. This period is characterised as the end of the Russian Empire and the beginning of the Bolshevik regime, known as the ditch period in the country's history. The Civil War and its aftermath became the cause of the so-called "white émigré"³ that was also known as "ideological dissenters". The First wave of Russian emigration was not homogeneous regarding reasons to exit the country. Some became victims of political and religious persecution; others left on their own accord due to a negative attitude towards the new government, and some ended up on the territory of other countries, such as Finland or Estonia, due to the transfer of some Russian territories into the possession of other countries.

The official estimate of Russian emigrants in the First wave differs from source to source. It is generally accepted that there were around 2 million Russian exiles worldwide (Stone and Glenny, 1991). However, according to other estimates, it was around 1 million (Huntington, 1931; Marrus, 1985). The main centres of Russian emigration were Paris, Prague, Berlin, Constantinople, Sofia, Belgrade, and Harbin. Table 1 shows how the First wave of Russian emigration was distributed across various countries (Appendix 1).

It could be pertinent to discuss how the geographical choice of Russian emigrants has historically been formed based on locations from the First emigration. Russian emigration was divided into two cardinal points, namely "European" (western) and "Asian" (eastern), as could be observed from Table 1. The West was more politically progressive regarding the production of thought and opposition. On the east side, there were both supporters and opponents of the Soviet regime, and in many ways, it lagged in progress when compared with the West. Perhaps it is worth hypothesising that the West has been historically associated with a more liberal and

³ The term refers to the opposition between the White (supporting the Tsarist family and the Russian Empire) and Red (fighting against the Empire and for the Bolshevik regime) Armies.

freer world, opened for the creativity and thought of the Russian people, combined with the relative political stability in this region after WWII.

In terms of identity, it should also be noted that Russian culture and the Russian state did not officially recognise racial or national discrimination since, in the regime of imperial Russia, everyone had the right to their own ethnic identity and religion, which was indicated in their passports (Sotnikov, 2010). Simultaneously, Russia was a single empire, just like the people of the empire themselves; from that, the identity of the Russian émigré of the First wave was unified and self-identical in its diversity – they were Russians.

It is important to note that the term “Russian emigrant” did not mean an ethnically Russian person but any person involved in the physically existing Russian Empire, which refers to the different identities one may observe today. So, the emigrants of the First wave were proud to call themselves Russians on a nationalistic rather than ethnic basis. Perhaps it was the soft cultural nationalism that was the hallmark of the identity of the Russian émigrés, which later helped in the creation of an imaginary community outside of Russia.

With the First wave of emigration, the first Russian communities were born outside Russia (Horowitz et al., 1993). They were divided along several lines based on the emigrants’ identities. The concept of “Russia Abroad” or “Russia beyond the borders” appeared to constitute the society in exile and projected the image of the pre-Soviet Russian Empire that served the needs of émigrés to carry a culturally creative country beyond its original borders (Raeff, 1990). For example, a prototype of the civil community consisted of a re-grouping of the remaining White Army or an association of intellectuals and professionals on behalf of artists, scientists, and writers. So, Community building (diaspora formation) abroad served mainly as culturally identical divisions. Despite the common roots, there was a split in the community between those who supported the Soviet regime, culturally nourished Soviet propaganda, and advocated independent cultural development from abroad (Horowitz et al., 1993). The split became especially evident at the beginning of World War II and the Great Patriotic War, as discussed in more detail in the next section.

The Russian community abroad and its activity partially reflected the idea of Imagined Communities proposed by Benedict Anderson. Although the theory appeared much later than the First wave of Russian Emigration, it perfectly describes the foundations of the structure and activities of Russians abroad based on language, culture and shared values (Anderson, 1998). Russian emigrants were scattered around the world, but together, they created an imaginary

community through which they could communicate and broadcast their values. However, later, a problem arose that many intellectuals, especially writers, ultimately could not reach their readers due to censorship imposed by the Soviet government.

Considering the First wave in terms of the types of migration - circular, return, or permanent, the literature shows that it was a complex phenomenon. Thus, a distinctive feature of the emigrants was that many of them considered their stay in the country of residence as temporary (*émigrés*); that is, it was a prototype of some kind of planned circular migration, and many of those who left, planned and hoped to return to pre-Soviet Russia, which did not happen. On the other hand, it could also be considered in terms of return migration. While their exit was usually involuntary (some people were sent away or pushed out from the country), they hoped to return to the country voluntarily. Furthermore, among the emigrants of the First wave, one can observe both repatriates and volunteers upon their return to Soviet Russia.

Raeff (1990) stated that because many emigrants were *émigrés* planning to return to their homeland, they did not consider and did not need to integrate and/or adopt in the host country due to their planned temporary stay. However, in the long run, under changed circumstances, the refugees could integrate, and as a result, the second generation (children of immigrants) became bicultural. There is another view that Russian refugees were able to integrate into British society, according to Kushner (Harold, 2015). Hence, the literature shows that the majority of the emigrants gradually settled down and adopted in the receiving countries (although for many of them, the entry country was not the final destination and can be mentioned in the context of re-emigration outside the borders of Russia) and continued their activities in the Russian community, at some point merging into one with the Second wave of Russian emigration, the events of which in many ways became a serious test for the Russian diaspora abroad. So, the analysis indicates a transition from planned circular/return migration to permanent one.

The First wave could also be considered in terms of “gain” and “loss.” For example, it consisted mainly of intellectuals, aristocrats and nobles, government officials and their families, religiously persecuted Jews, church leaders, military and civilians subjected to political persecution due to emerging Soviet power, which marked the last ones as enemies of the regime. So, these social and ethnic groups were part of the human capital that Russia lost at that moment while host countries gained.

The emigrants have made quite an essential contribution to both the host countries and international culture in general. Among the Russian emigrants of the First wave, there were many recognised talented people and experts in their field. For example, there were three Nobel laureates, namely Bunin in the field of literature, Leontiev in economics, Prigogine in chemistry; Vladimir Nabokov who left a bright mark in Russian and English literature of the 20th century as well as Chaliapin, Rachmaninov, Kandinsky, Chagall and their outstanding contribution to the world of arts. Russian church emigration greatly influenced the spread of Orthodoxy in general and the formation and strengthening of Russian identity abroad. Later on, it was also used by the ideological concept of Russki Mir.

4.4.3: The Second Wave of Russian Emigration

The Second wave of Russian emigration is notable for its tragedy, endured due to the tightening political regime in the Soviet Union, the dictatorship of Soviet power, and the consequences of the Great Patriotic War and the Second World War. Additionally, the Second wave of Russian emigration coincided with the global emigration following the post-war processes. Many Europeans (especially Eastern Europeans) sought emigration opportunities. Thus, migration was mainly directed towards the Americas as well as just established Israel, which was a destination point for many Jews.

The embeddedness of the Second wave in the global trends is germane for discussion, especially from two points of view. Firstly, the final emergence of the term and phenomenon of “Displaced persons” (DP)⁴ happened during this period, defining the difference between refugees, stateless persons and displaced persons in terminology and practice. The difference is that refugees could leave their country voluntarily, while DPs were forced to leave due to described circumstances (Ginsburgs, 1957). Thus, many Russians happened to find themselves in DP camps in Germany, Austria and Italy along with other DPs and refugees from Eastern Europe, waiting for the interviews, “screening”, and approval for further emigration. Some of them were so morally exhausted that they were ready to repatriate to their homeland despite the possible political

⁴ “The term “displaced person” applies to a person who, as a result of the actions of the authorities of the régimes [...] has been deported from, or has been obliged to leave, his country of nationality or of former habitual residence, such as persons who were compelled to undertake forced labour or who were deported for racial, religious or political reasons” (UNHCR, 1946)

persecution. Secondly, two organisations that dealt with issues of exacerbated emigration appeared in the 1940s. Namely, they were the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration and the International Refugee Organisation. Furthermore, various civil foundations, including the one founded by Alexandra Tolstaya, helped with the increasing migration movements.

The time frame of the second wave of emigration is also debatable, and some researchers note the period of emigration in the 1950s (Iontsev et al., 2001) as a consequence of the war and Stalinist repressions, including the forced repatriation of Russian emigrants. Nevertheless, in this work, the second wave is considered from the moment of its growth and its climax, which covers the events of WWII and the Great Patriotic War as a driving force and the beginning of the Cold War. The choice of this time period is justified by a shift in the formation of the identity of Russian emigrants and a change in the Russian community under the influence of these events.

Given the circumstances of the Second wave – war, displacing people, moving borders – it is challenging to estimate the volume of the Second wave of Russian emigration. Still, Pushkarev estimates that “by the summer of 1944, 5 million Soviet citizens had found themselves outside the USSR in Western Europe as Eastern workers, prisoners of war and refugees fleeing from the Red Army. After repatriation they were “returning to their homeland”, no more than 2-3% of them remained in the West” (Pushkarev, 2008, p.326).

The outbreak of the Second World War in 1939 and the Great Patriotic War in 1941 actually split the Russian immigrant community in two, without mentioning that the last hopes of many emigres of the First wave to return to “Pre-Soviet Russia” were dashed. In the émigré environment, two points of view were formed about the war between Germany and Russia: “defensive” and “defeatist” (Iontsev et al., 2001). The Russian émigrés faced the problem of cooperating with the occupiers or advocating for the protection of the countries in which they lived. The dilemma became more acute, and one had to choose if one should support the Nazis against the Bolsheviks or the Bolsheviks against the Nazis. So, the Russian community abroad was split into right and left wings supporting either Hitler or Stalin, both of which were dangerous ideologies. Political indifference was another choice. It is interesting to note that those who called themselves “patriots” (right-wing or monarchists), for the most part, went to cooperate with the Nazis against Stalin (Iontsev et al., 2001). The literature concludes that at

the time, Russian emigrants faced the dilemma of integrating into the host country and taking its side or patriotically fighting for the rights of the USSR.

To understand the core of the issue better, it is also necessary to recall the main centres of the Russian emigration of the First wave, which were in occupied Europe – Paris, Berlin, Prague, Belgrade, and Sofia. Besides the Nazi occupation during the war, the majority of these cities were under occupation after WWII. Berlin partially came under the control of the Soviet government after WWII, as did the Russian emigrants and refugees themselves. In addition, the countries of Eastern Europe, including Hungary, were under the Soviet occupation and influence. Some other countries were occupied by allied countries, which means that Russian emigrants of both waves were trapped in a way.

In light of this, the main centres of Russian Second wave emigration shifted to New York, San Francisco, Buenos Aires, São Paulo, Caracas, Toronto and others. After a series of Stalinist repatriations, Russian emigrants tried to flee as far as possible from Europe. The USA, Australia and Canada enjoyed the greatest demand and popularity among Russian Orthodox refugees. This was primarily because these countries already had such Russian social infrastructures as Orthodox churches and parishes, Russian schools, Russian printing houses, etc.

The Second wave of emigration began during the war and consisted mainly of Soviet citizens who, for various reasons, ended up in the Third Reich as Ostarbeiters⁵ and prisoners of war. Later in the 1950s, the citizens of the Baltic republics, Ukraine and Western Belarus were added to this list who did not want to recognize the Soviet power.

The defining moment in the history of the Russian emigrants of the Second wave was the Yalta Conference of the Allied Powers, at which a decision and agreement of the parties were adopted on the repatriation of the Russian military and civilians. In fact, it was an agreement according to which the United States of America, Great Britain and other countries forcibly transferred Soviet citizens and Russian emigrants (non-Soviet passport holders) to the Soviet side (MSU, 2021). Obviously, it was not the passport that mattered to Stalin, but the fact of birth on Soviet territory (Ginsburgs, 1957). People were seen as an attachment to the land, not vice versa. There was not even such a human right as to define one's identity since it was determined by

⁵ “Soviet forced labourers in the Third Reich” (Grinchenko and Olynyk, 2012, p.401).

belonging and destiny. It is also worth noting that Russian emigrants were intimidated that they might be extradited to the authorities of the USSR.

In this context, to understand the scale of the problem, it is necessary to mention the tragicomic joke retold by one of the Second wave emigrants, a participant in camps for displaced persons, Valentina Sinkevich: “At the ‘screening’⁶, a bewildered official asked Ivan how he, who was born and raised in Hungary, speaks only Russian and Ukrainian? To which the terrified Ivan replied that he lived in the forest. Later, when the settlement of the displaced persons began all over the world, they sang in the camps, “Along the blue waves of the ocean, Ivan is being taken to Argentina...”” (2012, para. 33).

Notably, some of the emigrants did not associate themselves with Russian ethnicity or consider themselves to be Russians by identity but still were called Russian emigrants, although linguistically, there is a difference between “Russkij”, which refers to ethnicity and “Rossijskij” that associates with nationality (Pronin, 2014) (for a more detailed discussion on the conceptual difference, see Chapter 5). This identity issue differentiates the emigrants of the Second wave from those of the First wave.

A separate phenomenon is maintaining Russian culture and identity in constant fear of repatriation. The publishing activities of the displaced did not stop but were in limited quantities. *Posev* was one of the publishing socio-political journals during the Second wave, based in West Germany. Simultaneously, the Russian language and culture helped maintain a strong spirit of Russian DPs during the trials of the DP camps. Later, the collector Philip S. Penka was able to preserve the remains of the works produced and capture them in the book collection: “Temporary Spiritual Sustenance”: The Print Culture of Russian Displaced Persons in Post-War Germany (1945-1951).

The onset of the Cold War also played an important role in accepting Russian emigrants and, consequently, their identity. Russian DPs and refugees understood the unpleasant consequences of the Cold War, so many of them tried to emigrate as soon as possible while there was an

⁶ “Screening was the suitability testing of displaced persons for care from international organisations and military authorities. In other words, the fate of the displaced persons rested on the outcome of the screening – whether it was appropriate to continue living in the camp or if they would be forced to leave, and sometimes, but not often, forced to return to their homeland” (Camps in Germany for Refugees from Baltic, n.d., para. 1).

opportunity, or this opportunity had to be created by forging documents due to the bias of the host countries. These actions illustrate that the immigrants sought opportunities to change, at least formally, their identity. This trend was also partially reinforced by the context of the Cold War, when the criteria for accepting Russian displaced persons were changed, taking primarily those who served on the side of the Nazis against the USSR (Ginsburgs, 1957).

This section shows that the Russian emigration of the Second wave was a very complex phenomenon, but it could still be considered through the lens of the type of migration. Given the prevalence of DPs, at least partially, this wave could be considered involuntary migration since the emigrants were not given almost any choice in being displaced. Furthermore, the characterisation of this wave as involuntary migration can be corroborated by the occupation of some European countries by the Soviet regime, so that the Russian emigrants were involuntarily returned to their home country. As to those who managed to move to countries outside of Soviet control, these emigrants could be considered within the framework of permanent migration, especially considering that they sought to forge their documents and cut almost every tie with their homeland due to the repressions they had experienced or had been in danger of. Therefore, permanent Russian migrants did not believe that their return to Russia could be possible and aimed more at integrating into their host societies.

From the point of view of gains and loss, unlike the First wave of Russian emigration, the second was more monotonous and mainly consisted of completely ordinary people. So, the Second wave of emigration passed unnoticed, leaving no well-known names except a few, such as historian Avtorkhanov, poetess Anstey, artist Gollerbakh, etc. (Pronin, 2014). Even though the emigration consisted of completely ordinary people, they continued to bring Russian culture to the masses and nurture the Russian community abroad, but on a smaller scale. This could be attributed to the fact that the bulk of the emigrants of the Second wave, in contrast to the First, were less educated and, having formed under the Soviet regime, less rooted in Russian national culture, which largely determined its role in the Cold War against the USSR. The fates of these emigrants were very different. Still, each eventually found one's place in a new country and could integrate into the conditions dictated by the migration policy.

Although the Russian emigrants of the Second wave were not well-educated, still in the post-WWI world, blue-collar workers were the backbone of the economic revival in many countries across the globe. Therefore, it could be suggested that the hosting countries mainly won from the arrival of such a workforce that had the potential to contribute to the production revival. At

the same time, the Soviet Union primarily lost human capital, which could have been helpful in the economic and social restoration of the country after the detrimental losses of the Stalinist repressions and the Great Patriotic War.

To sum up, the Second wave of emigration was a difficult phenomenon for the Russian people for many reasons. First, there was a communal split and an ideological trap. Secondly, there was the forced displacement of people and the political persecution of emigrants. Thirdly, these were actually disastrous conditions in which the Russian refugees found themselves. Fourth, WWII was followed by the beginning of the Cold War and, as a result, the deterioration of the attitude towards Russian emigrants and their rejection. Many Russian refugees were forced to forge documents and identities to be accepted by the destination country. Fifth, these are the coinciding flows of migration and an excess of migrants in general, which served to revise and strengthen the migration policy of those countries that were politically and economically favourable and in demand among potential emigrants.

It is also essential to understand that the Second wave of emigration largely changed the face of Russian emigration. In general, the Russian refugees had a political stigma of shame due to the decisions taken by the split Russian community and the foreign and domestic policy of the Soviet Union. Among the consequences of the stigma was a change in the identity of Russian emigrants, who were humiliated and insulted in so many ways. Furthermore, they were not yet desired and not accepted or accepted with difficulty in their destination countries.

Last but not least thing that needs to be mentioned is the pathos and hopes with which the First wave passed and the despair and hope for a new, more favourable life in the Second wave. These were no longer emigres but real refugees and DPs who fled from extremely tyrannical conditions with no hope of returning but still with great love for their own homeland.

4.4.4: The Third Wave of Russian Emigration

The emigration of the Third wave took place between 1950 and 1986 and was directly related to the Cold War and the change in the leaders of the USSR. In 1953, Stalin died, and he was replaced by Malenkov, later Khrushchev, Brezhnev, and Andropov. Although Stalin's death provoked not a considerable change but a shift in politics, it was a period of the so-called Khrushchev Thaw or the period of de-Stalinization. So, the Soviet government gave permission for Soviet Jews, Germans, Pontic Greeks and Armenians to leave for the purposes of family

reunification or ethnic repatriation. During the Third wave, the level of emigration was entirely dependent on the current state of relations between the USSR and the West. As soon as they got complicated due to the events of the Cold War, the countries of potential emigration refused to enter those who wished to emigrate, often without explanation.

In general, the emigrants of the Third wave can be conditionally divided into two parts: dissidents and forcibly expelled and ethnic (not national) emigrants such as Jews, Germans, Armenians, and Greeks. Basically, there was no other opportunity for emigration. The former group voluntarily or involuntarily left their homeland, while the latter travelled to their historical homeland, mainly to Israel, Germany, and Greece.

It would be deceiving to assume that the trajectory of the second group was predetermined. Not all ethnic emigrants flew directly to the countries mentioned; thus, many Jewish emigrants travelled through Poland, others made stops in Vienna, Rome, Bucharest, Budapest and other cities and, as a result of the changed plans, many stayed there, or flew to the final destination of Israel (Sotnikov, 2010) or re-emigrated to the USA (Freedman, 1984).

The difference between the Third wave and all the previous ones is that ethnic emigration was legal. That is, it was allowed and indicated by the authorities, but not for everyone. Emigration had a slightly economic connotation since many ethnic emigrants used the ethnos as a motive, but in fact, they were in search of a better political and economic life outside the USSR.

In terms of the volume, it is estimated that around 300 thousand Jews left the Soviet Union during the Third wave⁷, almost 83 thousand Germans⁸, and 40 thousand Armenians⁹. Allowing to conclude preliminarily that, in total, there were around 500 - 600 thousand ethnic emigrants who left the USSR at the time. Things were different with the group of dissidents. Firstly, there

⁷ TOLZ, Mark: *Massovaya emigraciya evreev iz SSSR v 1970-e i ee tormozhenie v 1980-e* [Mass emigration of Jews from the USSR in the 1970s and its inhibition in the 1980s]. - <https://www.demoscope.ru/weekly/2007/0303/tema01.php> [Last accessed October 23, 2024].

⁸ PALYAN, Pavel: Emigraciya: kto i kogda v XX veke pokidal Rossiyu [Emigration: Who and when left Russia in the 20th century]. - <https://www.demoscope.ru/weekly/2006/0251/analit01.php> [Last accessed October 23, 2024].

⁹ PALYAN, Pavel: Emigraciya: kto i kogda v XX veke pokidal Rossiyu [Emigration: Who and when left Russia in the 20th century]. - <https://www.demoscope.ru/weekly/2006/0251/analit01.php> [Last accessed October 23, 2024].

were quite a lot of creative and intelligent people, both forced and voluntarily deported from the Soviet Union. Secondly, their ethnic composition was heterogeneous since, under the Soviet Union, ethnic identity may have differed from the formal nationality and, furthermore, it was officially accounted for in registries and one's official documents. Thirdly, their final destination countries were not predetermined but predictable, as many aspired either to the United States or to the more economically wealthy and politically stable countries of Western Europe.

The difference between these two groups of the Third wave of emigrants also lies in the different approaches to the national movement abroad. Those who emigrated for ethnic reasons deliberately tried to assimilate and integrate into the final countries as quickly as possible and forget about their Russian/Soviet identity and everything connected with it, or they generally struggled to find their self-identity over a collective one. The second group proudly carried its identity, joining the pre-existing Russian diaspora and continuing not only to fight the Russian government from abroad but also to stimulate change within the country. It is possible that the two groups could also overlap, but this is rather a minority compared to the majority.

Despite the differences, the two groups of Russian emigrants of the Third wave have one significant similarity – the type of migration movement. Due to the strict control over the border and the immense effort needed to justify immigration, this wave can be considered permanent because those leaving or being deported from the country did not hope to return there in any foreseeable future. It is essential also to mention that those dissidents who were involuntarily expelled from the country can be considered through the prism of involuntary migration, which then transited into the permanent one for the reasons mentioned previously. Therefore, both groups of emigrants were trying to adapt to their host countries, not believing – or in some cases even not wanting to return – that their return to their home country would be possible.

When analysing the Third wave from the perspective of gain and loss, it was in connection with the dissident group that the Third wave of Russian emigration began to resemble the First in terms of its strength of intelligence and the output of labour of emigrating talents. The emigrants of the Third wave brought new breath and hope to the diaspora, which had already been formed from the First and Second waves. Among the prominent emigrants of the Third wave, it is possible to emphasize such personalities as writers Bukovsky, Zinoviev, Maksimov, Solzhenitsyn, poet Brodsky, ballet artists Nuriev and Baryshnikov, and others who continued to nurture the Russian community abroad and carried on their mission, but also contributed to

the development of the world culture in general. Therefore, again, it is possible to suggest that the Soviet Union lost a valuable part of human capital, capable of creative outcomes, while the host societies managed to attract and accumulate the talent.

It is important to note the role of two published periodicals during the Third wave of emigration, namely the magazines *Continent* (editor Sinyavsky) and *Syntax* (editor Maksimov) (McMillin, 1989). *Continent* was created to unite all the emigrants of the Third wave and as an instrument of opposition to Soviet power on behalf of the countries of Eastern Europe (Giglio, n.d.). *Syntax* was the ideological and aesthetic confrontation of *Continent*, which set itself approximately the same tasks but in a different format.

The real thaw in politics began much later, during Gorbachev's Perestroika. Emigration as a phenomenon and process began to be simplified, and cultural and scientific exchanges and private travel became possible; nevertheless, the authorities still controlled the movement and had to be justified.

To sum up, the Third wave was the longest one, compared to the previous waves, and was tightly regulated by the authorities and was of an ethnical and dissident character. The emigrants of the Third wave faced an identity crisis. As a result, many were searching for their self-identity, which often conflicted with a collective identity; in most cases, this refers to ethnic emigrants. The other part of the emigrants, mainly dissidents or ethnic dissidents (the intersection of two groups), were firmly convinced of their identity and made it their mission to carry their Russian identity to the masses, thereby nourishing the Russian diaspora and changing the Soviet ideological space with their creativity, that is, through soft power.

4.4.5 The Fourth Wave of Russian Emigration

The Third wave flowed smoothly into the Fourth. Classically, the Fourth wave is counted from the 1986 or 1990s to the 2000s; an important place is given to the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991 and the Federal Law in the procedure of exit from the Russian Federation and entry into the Russian Federation by Russian Federation's Constitution of 1993 with Amendments in 2008 (Article 27). The law officially determined the beginning of a new reality for Russian citizens and potential emigrants in general since everyone was given the right to travel freely and choose a place to stay or reside (Constitute Project, 2021). This societal shift makes the Fourth wave completely different from the previous due to social, cultural, and

political opportunities. Thus, people could leave the Russian Federation's borders and choose the life they wanted, both by right and by law, not due to forced circumstances.

According to various sources, during that time from 1 to 3 million people left Russia. Considering Denisenko's research results, more than 90% of all emigrants went to three countries, namely Germany, Israel and the USA (Denisenko, 2012; Rybakovsky, 2021). In Israel, repatriates mainly were accepted. Germany accepted everyone with the status of "expelled" (Vertrieben), resettlers (Aussiedler) and late repatriates or resettlers (Spätaussiedler). The United States was ready to host ethnic and/or highly skilled immigrants.

Among the peculiar features of this wave is that perhaps one of the sufficient reasons for the previous emigration was the tense political environment in the country, which is especially proven by the First wave of emigrants who wanted to return to their homeland but could not. In general, it can be assumed from the opposite that the well-being, efficiency, and democracy of the governing apparatus of the state can hardly become the reason for emigration from the country of birth, where the ethnic and national identity and affiliation of a person are formed unless there is some psychological issuer and migratory sentiments driven by curiosity, globalisation or better opportunities awaiting in the host country.

Some may disagree and debate that if all potential emigrants were waited for by better conditions in the host country, it could be argued that emigration was rampant. There are many reasons to support this point of view. However, this thesis would still adhere to the one that the Third wave emigration would remain flexible due to several factors, ranging from the shift of collective identity to the individual and its complexity to the national aspect and its attachment, ending with economic and administrative factors of self-restraining emigration. The social networks and contacts of the emigrant, the ownership of property and the availability of work are not even mentioned here since, even in times of nascent globalisation, these were not holding-back criteria. As for social networks and contacts, they could be recreated since there had been an active Russian diaspora abroad; meanwhile, ties with friends, family and professional community could possibly be maintained at a distance; real estate could always be sold or rented out; work could be found abroad due to high skills or high demand for labour, which an emigrant could perform.

Building upon the discussion regarding the recreation of social networks, it is essential to highlight the significance of the Russian-speaking diaspora. The term "Russian-speaking diaspora" encompasses a broader demographic than "Russian diaspora," as it is based on

linguistic affiliation rather than solely on national origin. As highlighted by Dubinina and Kisselev (2025), the Russian language served not only as the principal means of communication throughout the Soviet Union but also as a pivotal component of Soviet identity. Evidence from the last Soviet National Census conducted in 1989 underscores this linguistic predominance: 100% of individuals identifying as Russian reported proficiency in the Russian language, along with 62% of those identifying as non-Russian. Consequently, in the wake of the Soviet Union's dissolution, emigration impacted not only Russia but also other former Soviet republics. This linguistic commonality has the potential to act as a unifying force within new geographic contexts, thereby facilitating the formation of a cohesive Russian-speaking diaspora.

This potential is evidenced by various studies. For instance, Khanin (2010) indicates that approximately 15% of Israel's population speaks Russian. Furthermore, another study highlights that not all Russian speakers in Israel originate from Russia; about one-third come from Russia, another one-third from Ukraine, and the remaining individuals from other post-Soviet republics (Niznik, 2024). While the dynamics within the Russian-speaking diaspora warrant further investigation, it is possible to draw a hypothesis that in the Fourth Wave of Russian migration, linguistic affiliation rather than strict nationality may have played a pivotal role in establishing social networks within host societies.

A distinctive feature of this wave is that globalisation and openness of choice spawned a round of circular emigration, which had never been observed previously in the history of Russian emigration. Many Russians who left Russia during the Fourth wave continued to live in two countries, holding dual citizenship or planning to return. Thus, the Fourth wave can be called economic, cultural and global emigration, as opposed to mainly forced one that had happened previously. Due to this character, the Fourth wave of emigration is often called cosmopolitan because many Russian emigrants hold dual citizenship, so they still have been attached to their homeland and adapted to a new country of residence (Litovskaya and Litovskaya, 2018). Accordingly, they were also accepted not as *émigrés*, exiles, displaced persons or refugees but as emigrants and cosmopolitans. From the point of view of migration typology, this wave can be considered predominantly circular due to open borders, not being pressured to renounce Russian identity, etc.

Simultaneously, it is germane to note that some immigrants could still be considered permanent. Thus, the ethnic emigration of Jews, Germans, Armenians (Heitman, 1991; Denisenko, 2012), and Greeks in the minority, which was the trend of the Third wave, also continued. The ethnic

character of their migration suggests that they intended to move permanently and build a new identity based on the one of the host societies.

Another feature of the Fourth wave is the mass emigration of women as a trend. The phenomenon is usually known as the “export of Russian brides” abroad, which involves going abroad for marriage or family reunion, which can generally be studied as a separate branch of the feminisation of migration. This part of the Fourth wave of migration can be characterised as either circular or permanent. The former refers to those women who retained some social or economic ties to their home country and did not wish to cut them. In contrast, the latter refers to those women who decided to move away for good and cut their social and economic ties, connecting them with Russia. Considering emigration as a two-way process, it is important to mention that not all countries were open to accepting emigrants: many Russian emigrants faced bureaucratic difficulties in the form of visas and other administrative obstacles. Perhaps this, along with economic reasons, can be counted as one of the main restraining factors; otherwise, there would be more massive emigration in terms of numbers.

So, provided that the main reasons for migration were finding work, getting an education, or doing business and that the major part of the migration was circular, this thesis would argue that the Fourth wave could be framed as a win-win wave for both sending and hosting countries. Hence, while hosting countries benefited from a relatively educated and cheap workforce, Russia gained more educated and experienced circular migrants who wished to hold their economic and creative activities in Russia. The only severe loss that Russia may have endured at the time was the loss of women of fertile age who decided to find partners abroad.

To conclude the discussion of the Fourth wave, its dark side is also worth mentioning. Due to the moderate openness of the migration policies of both sides, many criminals and semi-criminals used the opportunity to move from Russia abroad. It is also noteworthy that illegal emigration is observed when there is a massive departure to work on a tourist visa, which does not give the right to work (Tyuryukanova and Malysheva, 2001). Furthermore, the Fourth wave is characterised by the mass emigration of women, which, however, was not always legal. More specifically, it was illegal emigration for work in the field of entertainment and intimate services; in some studies, it is also considered a separate form of actual human trafficking (Palnikov, 2007).

4.4.6: The Fifth Wave of Russian Emigration

As mentioned earlier, the Fifth wave of Russian emigration is closely related to the Fourth wave and is most often viewed as its continuation. If at the beginning of the Fourth wave, one can only mention the beginning of globalisation and the existing restrictions on the possibilities for relocation, then in the Fifth wave, one can speak of an increase in opportunities for emigration, but still, the same obstacle or its selectivity in accepting Russian emigrants exist. Among these obstacles, they are treating Russian citizens as third-country nationals in the European Union, and relevant migration policies as filtering tools can be mentioned. As a result of such a policy of containment, one of the trends of the Fifth wave is latent or illegal emigration, when a potential emigrant leaves for the country of destination on a tourist or visitor visa and remains there permanently until legalisation or the fact of capture by migration services. This fact recalls the forced measures of the Second wave and falsification of documents to reach the country of destination, which exposes, on the one hand, the actual political and economic situation in the country of birth and original residence, and on the other hand, the conditions of restrained globalisation and its capabilities, limiting the migratory activity of those lacking high qualifications. Obviously, this limited mobility does not affect refugees, whose rights and lives may be in potential danger in their home country.

Relying on the dynamics of research on emigration from Russia, one can note a twofold decrease in emigration, comparing two decades from 1993 to 2000 and from 2000 to 2010 (Iontsev et al., 2016). A more detailed analysis of statistics should be done starting in 2010, considering a number of economic and political events that happened in Russia and could possibly trigger the development of further emigration and its new forms. Among the significant political events under the Putin regime, several can be listed, including the Protests in Bolotnaya Square in 2011 and the further persecution of the Bolotnaya Square case in 2012, which is part of the 2011-2013 protest movements are known as Snow Revolution, the assassination of Boris Nemtsov, the assassination attempts and rallies in support of Alexei Navalny; Russian Financial Crisis of 2014-2016. These events are also associated with political persecution of business people, journalists, and academicians; violation of human rights; destruction of civil society, including the announcement of some media and NGOs as foreign agents; and dishonest or fraudulent elections. Within the framework of the Fifth wave of emigration, there are possible factors to make assumptions about a new wave of political emigration that probably happened in the 2010s (Krechetnikov, 2012). However, due to the

relative novelty of the phenomenon, further research investigating this political underlying reason for the Fifth wave of Russian emigration should be undertaken.

Despite the decreasing trend, the problem of the Fifth wave is that the true scope of emigration is many times greater than the official statistics given by Russia's Federal State Statistics Service. The reason might be the problem that the Russian side counts emigrants from the moment a citizen of Russia moves to another country permanently, adopts the citizenship of that country, and renounces the national passport given by birth. Since the Fourth wave of emigration, many Russian citizens have held two passports as this does not contradict Russian legislation and the country that offers citizenship, or if dual citizenship is prohibited in the country, potentially rewarding the migrant with a national passport, the Russian migrant may decide in favour of the Russian passport and permanent documents for residence in the country of residence, depending on his/her identity, integration and own beliefs.

Considering the aforementioned problem of accounting for emigrating Russians, Federal Law of May 31, 2002, N 62-FZ (as amended on July 13, 2020) "On Citizenship of the Russian Federation", where Article 6 on dual citizenship, paragraph 3 states that a citizen of the Russian Federation who has second citizenship or a residence permit in another country is obliged to submit a written notification of the presence of foreign documents to the Ministry of Internal Affairs of the Russian Federation at the place of residence or place of actual stay in the Russian Federation (Konsul'tant Plyus. Nadezhnaya pravovaya podderzhka, 2020). On the one hand, this law will help eliminate the problem of inaccurate calculations of emigrating Russians, illegal emigration and immigration at the international level of cooperation, and on the other hand, it reminds of the vulnerability of those emigrating, considering the experience and political persecution of the First and Second waves of the Russian emigration.

Particular interest and attention, as a separate phenomenon, should be given to the stage-by-stage form of legal emigration, when a highly qualified Russian emigrant leaves for the country of destination for temporary work or training and, after a while, obtains a residence permit there, and then citizenship. Another offshoot of this form of migration is educational emigration, which has a slightly different motivation when the host countries are interested in inviting and educating young personnel in those spheres of work that are either little in demand among the national population or are predicted to be in short supply in the future. If we consider the immigrant as human capital within the framework of neoclassical economic theory, which puts the behaviour of the individual (migrant) at the forefront, several things can be found at

once. Firstly, this is the benefit of the migrant himself/herself because the migrant always gains from migration. Secondly, this is the maximum gain for the host country since during the training of a potential immigrant, he or she can adapt to the country of immigration and its cultural values; a host country replenishes its national interest from a demographic and economic point of view. Thirdly, whether the sending country gains or losses in terms of financial and human capital depends on the type of migration. If it is a return or circular migration, the sending country gains as a migrant brings back not only new knowledge but also fresh perspectives they managed to internalise while adapting to another society. On the contrary, it is permanent migration, and the sending country loses potential human capital and talent.

An excellent example of such a strategy is educational programs, grants and scholarships of the Balassi Institute (Balassi Intézet), the Tempus Public Foundation (Tempus Közalapítvány) in Hungarian case and Erasmus programs in the European Union framework, which annually accept students from Russia to study at Hungarian universities and institutes as part of an educational exchange. Many graduates from these institutions stay in Hungary to continue their studies and achieve a higher academic degree, find work in a Hungarian or international company or start a business, which is stimulated and encouraged by the Hungarian migration policy.

However, this form of migration also has disadvantages for the host country. For example, trained migrants are circulated to other countries of the European Union, where higher wages are offered to already highly qualified migrants or non-returnable re-emigration to Russia. In both cases, this can be considered a brain drain for the hosting country, even if the migrant initially was not a national human capital.

In addition to the continuing trends of the Fourth wave, such as ethnic emigration, one can also note intellectual emigration (Zharenova et al., 2002), which is more reminiscent of refugees of political persecution or political emigrants. The most famous figures of the Fifth wave are a Russian business oligarch, government official, engineer and mathematician Boris Berezovsky (died under mysterious circumstances in 2011), a former Deputy Prime Minister and Prime Minister of the unrecognised Chechen Republic of Ichkeria Akhmed Zakayev, a Russian entrepreneur, writer, scientist, Doctor of Technical Sciences Yuliy Dubov, a media tycoon Vladimir Gusinsky, a Russian-Israeli businessman, investor, and philanthropist Leonid Nevzlin, creator and former owner of one of the largest retailers in Russia Evgeny Chichvarkin,

former Moscow Mayor Yuri Luzhkov, a Russian financial expert, economist, businessman, former President of Bank of Moscow Andrey Borodin, etc. (BBC News, 2012). In this respect, it is again possible to note that Russia loses its human capital and experiences a brain drain by pushing out people with high economic, business, political, and other expertise. This is also confirmed by some studies that demonstrate that “for the period from 2002 to 2010, the number of [Russian] emigrants with higher education who left [Russia] for permanent residence has almost halved, and, conversely, the number of those who left for temporary employment has doubled” (Ryazantsev and Pismennaya, 2013, p.26).

The role of the Russian-speaking diaspora, particularly in the context of its forming during the Fourth Wave of emigration, merits further critical examination. As articulated by Dubinina and Kisselev (2025), the identification of immigrants from ex-Soviet republics with Russia may be a deliberate choice in contemporary settings, particularly when there exists a limited understanding of their countries of origin among host nations. This phenomenon is exemplified by a case study involving a Belarusian immigrant in the United States, who, when asked about her ethnic background, identifies primarily as Russian. This identification appears to be rooted in her linguistic proficiency rather than an exhaustive expression of her multifaceted ethno-cultural and linguistic identity. Dubinina and Kisselev postulate that this phenomenon reflects a hypothesis that a Russian linguistic identity tends to overshadow national, ethnic, and cultural identities, thereby neglecting the hierarchy of identity perception as articulated by the speakers themselves. Supporting this assertion, Yakimova (2020) presents evidence indicating that Jewish emigrants from the Soviet Union and other ex-Soviet republics are often categorized simply as “Russians” in contexts such as Israel and Germany. This oversimplification not only complicates their ethnic and national identification but also raises questions about the broader implications of identity construction within diasporic communities.

The phenomenon of imposing a Russian identity on immigrants from the former Soviet Union and successor states is a widespread global occurrence. As Perotto (2014) shows in her analysis of Russian-speaking immigrants in Italy, a significant majority, approximately 90%, of this demographic originates from Ukraine and Moldova, underscoring the complexities of identity among ex-Soviet expatriates. Complementarily, a study focusing on the Brighton Beach neighbourhood in New York, a well-known hub for Russian speakers, illustrates that the Russian language serves as a catalyst for fostering solidarity among individuals from diverse national backgrounds (Laleko and Miroshychenko, 2022). On the one hand, these studies reveal

a pronounced disjunction between the labels ascribed to individuals within the host society, that is often categorizing them as “Russian”, and their actual countries of origin. On the other hand, they highlight the significant potential for leveraging a Russian-speaking diaspora to aid newly arrived Russian immigrants. Access to a robust network of Russian speakers not only facilitates the development of social connections but may also enhance living and working conditions, thereby improving overall integration experiences in host countries.

The Fifth wave, considering the motives and identification of emigrants, can be compared with the identification of the emigres of the First wave, given the fact that it also contains elements of circular migration or hopes for remigration. In general, the face of the Russian emigrant of the modern wave can be described as humiliated but unbroken. If we discard the features of a literary character, we can note the motivation of the Russian emigrant and his\her high potential as human capital for a possible host country in the case of permanent migration. Turning also to the elements of the First wave of emigration, it can be assumed that the Russian emigrant of the first generation may not be integrated into the community of the host country or partially integrated, like a cosmopolitan, globalised citizen; however, if this is an emigrant of the Fourth wave and is marked by settled in the host country, the second generation of the same a Russian emigrant can be fully integrated into society and describe himself\herself identically from the ethnically-national point of view of both countries.

Simultaneously, formally or “de jure”, more and more Russians regard emigration as temporary rather than permanent. Many people retain their housing, social network and contact, registration and other documents confirming the status of a migrant in their homeland in Russia (Ryazantsev and Pismennaya, 2013). “Post factum”, it can turn out that temporary or circular migration and residence in the destination country becomes the final decision of emigration. However, there are also informal cases, or “de facto”, when an emigrant maintains social contacts and network in one’s homeland, but at the same time does not plan to return (Ryazantsev and Pismennaya, 2013).

So, if the Fifth wave of emigration is seen as one of globalisation’s advantages and it does contradict politically motivated migration (the first case discussed in the introduction to this chapter), namely that the nature of Russian emigration is not related to ‘Putin’s dictatorship’ and political prosecution, then it’s possible to regard it as a circular or repeated migration.

Considering the variety of the given terms and the absence of a single, generally accepted definition of circular migration, one can refer only to the characteristic features of both the theoretical concept and the tendencies of the Fifth wave of Russian emigration, such as:

1. temporality and repetition of movements across the border for employment and/or education;
2. anti-cyclical and the possibility of the spontaneity of such migration movements;
3. a tool for migration, development and cooperation, which is a win-win situation for both countries and migrants;
4. the legality of migration, which is determined and regulated by laws, policies and international agreements between the sending and receiving countries (Bara et al., 2012).

However, if the decision to emigrate is initially and fundamentally based on political motivation (mentioned in the Introduction to this chapter as the first case) or a mix of political motivation and the search for better life prospects (third case), then most likely the Russian emigrant can take advantage of the opportunities of globalisation to emigrate from the country of birth eventually (Russian Federation) to the destination-country (Hungary, Germany or elsewhere). This is especially relevant given the political instability and the infringements of human rights in the 2010s in Russia.

In this case, it is important to note that the Russian emigrant will have to face the integration and naturalisation process in Hungary and Germany, given the fact that both countries demand local language proficiency, knowledge of history and laws for the adoption or integration of citizenship as the endpoint of emigration. However, if this is a permanent residence permit, then the conditions for integration are more simplified, which will be discussed in subsequent chapters.

4.4.7: The Fifth Wave of Russian Emigration 2.0

In this thesis, the emigration wave after the beginning of the full-scale Russian-Ukrainian war on February 24, 2022, is considered part of the Fifth wave due to the mainly political and economic reasons for exiting the country. However, it should be considered separately since new concepts have entered the public and scientific discourse on Russian outward migration. Furthermore, the process of leaving the country (and sometimes returning back, as it will be

shown later in this section) is still ongoing and requires careful consideration as it has been a background for the current study. Given the novelty of the Fifth wave 2.0, the analysis mainly relies on available statistical and survey data, along with some rare qualitative studies trying to comprehend the phenomenon.

4.4.7.1: “Relocants”: Conceptual Clarification

At the beginning of the discussion of the Fifth wave 2.0, there should be conceptual clarification because a new term of “relocant” entered the public and scientific discussion on Russians leaving the country since February 2024. The term initially appeared in public discussion and was used to self-identify those who left the country at the beginning of the full-scale war (Gudkov et al., 2024). Chernykh and her colleagues (2024) underline that the term “relocant”, although initially referring only to employees of companies that move their offices to other countries, nowadays comprises various employment and social groups when used in the Russian context: labour migrants, IT migrants, “digital nomads”, refugees, political emigrants, and even tourists. Therefore, as the researchers point out, relocants’ self-identification is based not on their employment situation but on a shared event that triggered their departure, the practices of mutual assistance and adaptation, and the idea that their exit has a temporary status (Chernykh et al., 2024; Gudkov et al., 2024).

The last issue is crucial since this perceived temporal character of emigration might mean that relocants do not aim to be included in their host societies but instead retain their Russian identity. This hypothesis finds confirmation in survey data: for example, a survey conducted in 2023 among those who have left the country since February 2022 shows that the vast majority of respondents were still immersed in the Russian political agenda, closely following news in the Russian language. Furthermore, they sought to maintain regular contact with their relatives and friends back in Russia and other Russian emigrants, with 58% saying that they spent most or all of their time with other emigrants from Russia in the last three months (Kamalov et al., 2023). Meanwhile, the shares of those who never socialised with locals and those who spent most of their time with locals were almost identical - around a third of the respondents.

According to some researchers, the geography of a hosting country might be among the indicators that allow differentiation between emigrants and relocants (Gudkov et al., 2024). While the former has had an opportunity and resources to plan their exit strategy (therefore, settling in the countries requiring a visa like the EU countries and the UK), the latter has left the country without any clear plan for future actions, including those who left in the state of

panic in the first days of the full-scale war and subsequent military drafting in September 2022 (therefore, settling in the visa-free countries for Russian nationals).

Although this standpoint offers some insight into the difference between emigrants and relocants, the author of this thesis would argue that it might lead to oversimplification. Thus, this thesis also suggests considering various programs in the EU and other countries that may be attractive for relocants, especially so-called “digital nomads” and entrepreneurs. Currently, more than 40 countries across the globe have activated digital nomad visa programs. Since 2022, it has been possible to apply for the White Card, a residency permit for digital nomads in Hungary. Under the permit, foreign nationals can live in Hungary while working for a company outside the country. The permit is one year and can be extended for another year. However, the Hungarian digital nomad visa is more suitable for single digital nomads because their family members cannot relocate under family reunification but should find other ways to stay legally in the country.

Hungary has a programme offering residence permits for entrepreneurs to open a business there. It is necessary to register an LLC, JSC, partnership, or sole proprietorship from scratch or buy a ready-made business. The most popular company forms among immigrant entrepreneurs are LLCs and sole proprietorships. Furthermore, since 2016, various tax benefits have been available, especially for start-up companies. For example, the IP Box program provides multiple tax benefits, including 50% on revenues qualifying as royalties or tax deductions for R&D costs.

Additionally, other countries, including France, the UK, and the USA, offer special “talent” visas, thus attracting highly qualified and talented workers from Russia. Outside Western countries, for example, the UAE has been seeking to attract Russian entrepreneurs, including highly technological ones, by offering a “zero tax policy,” which, however, ended up being regular taxation.

So, considering these programs across the globe may allow to analyse the difference between emigrants and relocants in a more complex way rather than by dividing the destination countries into visa-free and visa-requiring countries. Thus, considering various visa and relocation programs may provide more insight into emigrants and relocants’ socio-economic backgrounds, as obtaining a visa requires time and economic resources, their perception of the invasion as an urgent or not urgent trigger to leave Russia, etc.

4.4.7.2: Estimation of the Volume of the Fifth Wave 2.0

In terms of numbers, it could be challenging to estimate precisely the number of people who have exited Russia since February 2024 as the official statistics might be unreliable and with limited access to it (an issue especially acute during an armed conflict), not to mention that the definitions of emigration might differ from one country to another, which leads to the discrepancy in the numbers. For example, some researchers suggest counting in the following way: take data on entries and exits of Russian nationals to other countries and subtract one number from another. However, many factors influence these data: for example, in most countries, authorities count border crossings rather than individuals (each of whom may have many such crossings); the fact that Russia's neighbouring countries, where Russians do not need visas, become a "buffer zone"; or a person crosses the border of one country to travel to another, so they are reflected in the border statistics of two countries at once. An additional problem is that countries publish the data on border crossings in and for different periods, so comparing the data might be challenging.

An additional methodological problem that makes the estimation more difficult is closely related to relaxed migration legislation characterising Russian migration waves since the Fourth one. Mainly, it refers to a legal opportunity for Russian nationals to have multiple citizenship; thus, according to some expert estimations, around 1.5 million Russians hold multiple citizenship (Nezavisimaya Gazeta, 2023). So, once they leave Russia as Russian nationals, people with, for example, double citizenship can use their second passport to enter any other country. Therefore, this makes the data on the number of border crossings even less reliable for estimations of the volume of the Fifth wave 2.0.

Nevertheless, some pieces of data allow us to draw at least preliminary estimations of the number of emigrants and relocants as well as the geography of the destination countries. For the research, it is more beneficial to start the discussion with the geography of the destination countries as it will allow us to narrow down the list of countries in which further statistics should be looked for. So, due to bureaucratic and institutional difficulties in travelling to the EU and other Western countries, the majority of Russian migrants settled down in the countries of Central Asia and the South Caucasus – Armenia, Georgia, and Kazakhstan (Gulina, 2023). This suggestion is also confirmed by the research of the first sub-wave of leaving the country (end of February – March 2022) that showed that for more than half of the respondents (58%), the choice of the destination country was not made based on previous preparation, but at the

moment and mainly based on such factors as no need of a travel passport, visa or affordable tickets (Kamalov et al. 2022).

Additionally, Gulina (2023) suggests the following (although inexhaustive) typology of emigration and relocation scenarios that allows for limiting the geography of the hosting societies:

- “Ethnic repatriation” available only to a limited number of Russian nationals and mainly concerned Israel, Germany, and South Caucasian countries (for more information on these groups, see Chapter 5);
- “Transit migration” has covered several countries that have become temporary reception centres for Russians. This type of emigration mainly concerned Georgia, Turkey, and Kazakhstan.
- “Asylum” in countries such as Germany, France and the Czech Republic, which have separate elements of institutional support for Russians from at-risk groups;
- “Relocation of business” affected representative offices of international and Russian firms leaving the country. Turkey, Armenia, and Central Asian countries have become places of relocation for most small and medium-sized businesses from Russia.

During the first almost 10 months of the war – the period from the end of February 2022 till the end of December 2022, there were two main waves for exiting the country – the beginning of the war, which brought high uncertainty and fostered many rumours such as about a possible border closure, and the military drafting announced in September that fostered leaving the country. Researchers and experts give various estimates of the number of those who left the country in 2022, ranging from 700 000 to 1.2 million people (Gulina, 2023). Although the author of this thesis does not aim to identify the most accurate number of emigrants and relocants, based on the statistical data and reports, she suggests that the more conservative estimation seems more realistic. Thus, at the time, Georgia was one of the main destinations or transit countries for Russian nationals. According to the Ministry of Internal Affairs report, around 112 000 Russians entered and remained in the country in 2022. Almost the same number (around 100 000) of Russian nationals also entered and settled in Kazakhstan. Another 200 000 Russians settled in such visa-free countries as Turkey, Serbia, Armenia, and Kyrgyzia (78 000, 50 000, 40 000, and 34 000, accordingly). In contrast, the EU and the USA were the destination points for around 60 000 Russians during this first period of the war. Therefore, it could be preliminarily estimated, based on this circumstantial evidence, that around half a million

Russians left the country during the first 10 months of the war. However, it should be borne in mind that the author considered only the main destination countries of Central Asia and South Caucasus and the main Western countries, while the countries of South-Eastern Asia and South America were not analysed due to the language barrier and could have accommodated another 200 000 Russian nationals.

The journalistic project The Bell offers additional evidence in favour of the more conservative estimation of the number of people who have exited the country since the beginning of the full-scale war. Their report shows that during the first two and a half years from the start of the war, around 700 000 Russian nationals settled all over the world. This report can also be used to analyse the trajectories of Russian emigrants and relocants. Thus, by the end of 2023, Armenia remained among the main countries where Russian nationals entered and stayed, with approximately 110 000 people. In the meantime, it seems that Russians started gradually to leave such countries as Georgia, Kazakhstan and Turkey (as of the end of December 2023, around 74 000, 80 000 and 28 000 Russians settled in the countries, accordingly), making them transit countries rather than destination. Besides these countries being a transition point, this might be because Georgia became somewhat insecure for Russians as there were cases when people were not allowed to re-enter the country after a visa run. At the same time, there were cases when people were extradited to Russia from Kazakhstan. As to Turkey, the country started to refuse to prolong or even annulled the residence permits for Russian nationals, which led to many leaving the country.

Additionally, the report prepared by The Bell shows that some Russian nationals took their time to move to countries more demanding in terms of bureaucracy and documents, either not rushing to exit Russia in the first months of the full-scale war or preparing the documents in transit countries. For example, Israel is among the top countries for Russian emigrants mainly due to its repatriation program, accommodating around 80 000 Russians from the end of February 2022 – July 2024. It seems that in the long run, more Russians managed to settle legally in the EU and the USA than during the first year of the war. As the official statistics in the EU countries indicate, by the end of December 2023, almost 86 000 Russian nationals settled in the countries of the Union, while in the States the number was nearly 48 000.

Some authors estimate that among these 700 000 Russian nationals who have settled in various countries across the globe since February 2022, around 4 000 - 5 000 people could be considered as “fighters against the regime” (Gudkov et al., 2024) – those who had actively

opposed the current political leaders of Russia before the beginning of the full-scale war and continue doing so after exiting the country. At the same time, it should be pointed out that it has been difficult for Russians, who left the country out of the threat of persecution, to obtain asylum in the European Union. According to the Asylum Report 2024, Russian nationals seeking asylum in the European Union got a 30% and 33% recognition rate in 2022 and 2023, respectively, signifying that only around a third of Russian asylum applications got a positive outcome.

4.4.7.3: Social Portrait of the Fifth Wave 2.0

Emerging survey data allows to draw a preliminary social portrait of those who decided to exit Russia at the beginning of the full-scale Russia-Ukraine war. Generally, various surveys demonstrate a difference in terms of socio-demographics between those who chose to leave the country and an average Russian national. For example, the survey data from Gudkov et al. (2024) indicates that there are more men than women (63% vs 37%, which differs significantly from the internal Russian population, where 53% are women and 47% are men). The survey undertaken by the Exodus 22 (2022) project may shed more light on this sex difference as they conducted surveys in spring 2022 (studying those who decided to leave the country due to the beginning of the full-scale war) and in autumn 2022 (studying those who left due to the partial military drafting). Their data clearly indicate the difference in sex composition of those who left Russia in spring and autumn 2022: while in spring, women and men were approximately equal, with a slight predominance of women (women – 51%; men – 49%), in autumn there were approximately twice as many men (women – 36%, men – 64%). This clearly indicates that the threat of military drafting prompted men to leave Russia.

In terms of age, there is a prevalence of young adults between 18 and 44 (83%, while this age group in Russia comprises 30% of the population) (Gudkov et al., 2024). The same skewness towards younger age groups was shown in the survey done by the research project OutRush in 2022. Exodus 22 (2022) also confirms the hypothesis of a younger average age of those leaving the country, as in their data, the average age is 32.

The OutRush (2022) data reveal that 70% originate from large cities with a population of at least one million, while 26% of the total Russian population lives in such urban areas. Exodus 22 (2022) project shows that 75% of their respondents came from Moscow and Saint Petersburg. Additionally, at least half of the emigrants and relocants had previously moved from one place to another within Russia, most often from smaller cities to larger ones (OutRush

2022). This evidence shows that younger people and inhabitants of larger cities, who also more frequently share liberal and pro-Western views, are more prone to emigration.

The OutRush data also shows that those who have left the country since February 2022 are highly educated citizens, with 80% having a higher education diploma, which contrasts with 23% of Russians. Mainly, the respondents were employed in intellectual labour and entrepreneurship spheres such as IT, data analysis, business, science, culture and art, and “white collar”. According to Exodus 22 (2022) data, 45% of respondents were IT specialists and other high-level specialists. New immigrants and relocants are much better off materially than the Russian average. Suffice it to say that 42% of them could afford to buy a car or not deny themselves anything at all (compared to 5% of Russians in the same financial situation) (OutRush, 2022). The Exodus 22 (2022) insights also confirm the relatively high economic well-being of those who left Russia: 32% of “spring” and 42% of “autumn” emigrants and relocants could live from 6 to 12 months on their savings. Taken together, these features indicate a high degree of social and spatial mobility and adaptability.

A similar conclusion can be drawn based on the data from Gudkov and his colleagues (2024), who claim that new emigrants and relocants are more economically active and flexible when compared with traditional emigrants. The authors suggest that although relocants have been motivated to leave the country because of the discrepancy between their political views and the current political course in Russia (first case from Introduction to this chapter), the main reason for emigration has been a search for better professional and, hence, economic opportunities, a comfortable place to live in and raise children (second case). The same reasoning could be found in a survey conducted by Gulina (2023) in Germany. According to it, three dominant reasons prompted respondents to exit the country: full-scale war in Ukraine (87%), toughening of criminal legislation and/or the threat of persecution of the respondent and/or a member of their family (59%), lowering living standards and/or lack of prospects (56%). Among other reasons for leaving the country (ranged according to their popularity), respondents mentioned the impossibility of living and working in Russia due to the sanctions, announcement of partial military drafting, receiving job offers outside Russia, high level of anxiety, unwillingness to pay taxes to the Russian state and be complicity in the war (Gulina, 2023). The data from Exodus 22 surveys also confirms that the majority of respondents had not perceived any immediate danger or threat in their home country: in spring 2022, 22% of the respondents indicated that their departure was forced, while in autumn – 47% of respondents, which might

indicate that military drafting and changes in legislation were perceived as endangering the security of those leaving the country. Therefore, given the reasons for leaving and their socio-demographic profile, it is possible to draw some assumptions that the vast share of people has left Russia without facing immediate threats to their safety or liberal rights, but rather because their professional activities – be they business, scientific or artistic – have been put in danger or somehow affected by the country's actions.

Nevertheless, the various surveys show some connection between the geography of destination countries and the economic well-being and strategies of relocants and emigrants. For instance, the study by Gudkov and his colleagues (2024), conducted in Germany, France, Poland, and Cyprus, demonstrates that the majority of their respondents have high incomes (€3000), corresponding to the European higher middle class. On the other hand, Kamalov and his colleagues (2024), who conducted their panel survey globally, show that the financial situation of the emigrants and relocants is not improving. Thus, in 2022, they observed a substantial fall in the incomes of their respondents, and by summer 2023, the overall level of incomes did not recover but remained at the same level, although there was a noticeable increase in the share of middle-income categories. This was due to a recovery in the incomes of the poorest of Russian emigrants and relocants (probably a sign of adaptation to the economies of the host societies) and a continued increase in the share of the wealthiest emigrants.

The empirical research undertaken by Volkova and her colleagues (2023) in Armenia, Israel, Kazakhstan, Serbia and Turkey shows that there is a connection between the destination country and an emigrant's economic and employment strategy. For example, in Israel, migrants prefer to work for the local market or international companies. In Armenia, Kazakhstan, Turkey, and Serbia, migrants are more likely to work in local labour markets, mainly in companies opened by other migrant Russians. As the study shows, the entrepreneurial initiatives of Russians are often orientated towards Russians themselves, which can create closed markets. Also, in these countries, migrants and relocants either continue to work for employers from Russia remotely (most commonly in Kazakhstan), seek employment with an international company, or engage in freelancing oriented towards the global market.

Besides the geographical location of and political situation in a destination country, the level of preparedness to leave the country can explain the difference in economic and labour adaptability. According to Gulina (2023), 54% of respondents who moved to Germany had planned emigration in the distant future. Almost half of this group stated that the emigration or

relocation happened unexpectedly despite the planning. In comparison, 46% of respondents said the emigration or relocation was unplanned and spontaneous. The survey data from the Exodus 22 research project also confirms that the majority of respondents had not planned their departure from Russia before the full-scale war; thus, almost 80% of those who left in spring 2022 had not planned emigration or relocation, while in autumn 2022 this share decreased slightly by ten percentage points. So, it is possible to hypothesise that general unpreparedness to leave the home country could also contribute to the adherence to work for Russian employers located either in Russia or in other countries or developing businesses aimed at Russian consumers due to a lack of insight into local markets and consumers.

The OutRush (2022) survey also partially confirms the suggestion of the general unpreparedness for leaving the country among the participants of the Fifth wave 2.0. In particular, their data show that for every second respondent, the choice of the country of residence was almost random. Nevertheless, some signs that their respondents are ready to settle down and integrate into host societies could be found: the majority of respondents have permanent partners who have moved with them, half of the respondents plan to move family members from Russia in the near future, the majority of the respondents, around 60%, were willing to learn the local language.

At the same time, as discussed earlier in this chapter, the majority of new emigrants and relocants spent most of their free time with other Russian emigrants and relocants. This might also explain both economic and adaptation strategies. For example, entrepreneurial initiatives in new diasporas are often linked not only to the desire to make a profit but also to finding people with shared values and solidarity (Volkova et al., 2023). Furthermore, as other survey data shows, Russian emigrants and relocants continue to help each other and do charity work and volunteer work (Kamalov et al., 2023). Half of the emigrants continued to support Russian independent NGOs and media financially. Another 40% of respondents had helped other Russian emigrants the previous three months to the survey. So, new emigrants and relocants use their diverse resources to maintain links with other emigrants. Social ties between the new emigrants are strengthened by their similarities: their similar attitudes, their ingenuity and willingness to be productive and relevant in their host countries, and their experience in organising and maintaining communities that they draw on in emigration. As could be noted, the list of similarities does not include common national or ethnic backgrounds, which is also confirmed by the study undertaken by Volkova and her colleagues (2023). The researchers state

that professional identity and the notion of common destiny – that is, finding themselves in difficult circumstances because of the same events and, therefore, needing to come together and help each other to overcome them – seem to unite those who emigrated and relocated since February 2024. Ethnicity and religion become a point of convergence for ethnic and religious groups not related to the titular nation (for example, Bashkirs and Russian Muslims).

Therefore, the currently available research data show that there is a duality in the approach towards integration and preserving one's national identity among new Russian immigrants and relocants. On the one hand, they might seek to integrate by learning the language of a host country, seeking to establish new connections and expanding their networks through locals. On the other hand, they still strive to maintain their Russian identity by supporting other emigrants and relocants, consuming Russian-language media, and keeping ties with their home country. This might at least partially be attributed to the fact that the majority of new emigrants and relocants did not plan their departure from Russia and, therefore, they have vague plans for the future, which might explain this dual desire to be integrated into the host society and preserve their Russian identity.

To add to the complexity of the current situation and identity formation in emigration, the research by Volkova and her colleagues (2023) reveals a peculiar point of convergence in the opposition of oneself to other groups and the distinction between “us” and “others”. Thus, Russians who have left are more likely to consider themselves in contrast to other Russians: those who moved to the host country before the war, those who stayed in Russia or do business there, and those who have different values and political views. Therefore, given the unexpected nature of the need to leave the home country, choosing the host country randomly, and attempts to build local and Russian networks, it is not a surprise that there is complexity in terms of the identity of current emigrants and relocants which might undergo further transformation in the future under the influence of political and other events.

An important aspect concerning the identity of Russian relocants and immigrants belonging to the Fifth Wave 2.0 is their engagement with the Russian language and their relationship with the broader Russian-speaking diaspora. Despite a limited number of studies on this phenomenon, existing research reveals significant ambivalence. Specifically, while the population of Russian speakers outside Russia and Ukraine has increased, leading to a growth in the global Russian-speaking diaspora, the decision to speak Russian in public spaces remains complex and layered.

For instance, Dubinina and Kisselev (2025) observe that Ukrainian immigrants and refugees, both pre- and post-war, tend to gravitate towards the Ukrainian language, even when they possess proficiency in Russian, as well as the language of their host country if it has been previously learned. This language shift is often motivated by expressions of patriotism and acts of symbolic resistance against the Russian aggression. Similarly, Zavadskaya (2023) highlights the complex language choices faced by Russian immigrants, particularly within post-Soviet states. In her study conducted in Georgia, she notes a preference among Russians for English over their native language, as a means of minimizing their perceived affiliation with Russia.

Conversely, Israel presents a notable exception, as illustrated by Khanin (2023), where Russian continues to function as a common linguistic medium among post-Soviet Jews. Khanin attributes the absence of tension within this context to the ethnic homogeneity of the group; all individuals share a Jewish identity, regardless of their country of origin.

The findings of these studies suggest that Russian immigrants from this wave may encounter significant difficulties in integrating into the Russian-speaking diaspora. This challenge arises from two primary factors: the perception of the Russian language among individuals not originating from Russia, and the ambivalence that these immigrants may experience regarding the use of their native language. Consequently, this linguistic barrier could hinder the ability of the Russian-speaking diaspora to harness its full potential, with the notable exception of specific contexts such as that of Israel.

4.4.7.4: Migration Typology of the Fifth Wave 2.0

The cited above studies show the complexity of the Fifth wave 2.0 by highlighting various motivations for leaving the country, a variety of destination points, identity issues, etc. Furthermore, the process is still ongoing in highly unpredictable circumstances. Therefore, the application of theoretical concepts to this phenomenon may be challenging, but this thesis still undertakes this task, acknowledging that future studies may shed more light and bring more insight into this emigration wave.

Regarding the type of migration, it is still too early to draw conclusions about whether one of them has become dominant. However, it is possible to suggest that all three types are met among the Russian emigrants of the Fifth wave 2.0. Circular migration is rather widespread, especially among so-called digital nomads, encompassing various professions from IT developers to social media managers. Here, it might be especially beneficial to rely on definitions by EMN

(2011), IOM (2011), and Schneider and Parusel (2015) that highlight that the nature of circular migration lies in a continuous movement between countries. Thus, digital nomads are sometimes legally forced to move from one country to another due to their visa restrictions, making their migration circular and not settling in one country. For example, in Hungary, time living as a holder of a White Card does not count for a permanent residence permit and citizenship. Furthermore, spouses of digital nomads in Hungary cannot relocate to the country through family reunification, thus restricted to finding other ways to arrive legally. Croatia considers a digital nomad visa as a non-immigrant one, meaning that a digital nomad can stay in the country for one year only, and then they should leave it. On the other hand, Cyprus, although not creating limitations in terms of residence permits, obliges digital nomads and their family members not to work for local companies. These legal and bureaucratic limitations varying from country to country can provide some insights into why at least one part of Russian immigrants moved from one country to another during this period.

Another case in which Russian emigration can be considered circular is when a person transits through various countries to a destination point. As mentioned above, transition mainly happens in visa-free countries, while destination countries are visa-requiring. Still, the transit period can last several years due to various circumstances: waiting for family members to arrive, collecting necessary documents for a visa application, and others. Therefore, these circumstances may force Russian emigrants to settle, even if temporarily, in their transit countries while waiting for an opportunity to move further in their migration routes.

Return migration can also be found among Russian emigrants and relocants in both voluntary and involuntary forms. As mentioned earlier, relocants have strong social and economic ties with Russia, which may at least partially explain why some of them have decided to return voluntarily to the country. From the point of view of the statistics, this information is even more unreliable than that of those who left the country because the latter could be estimated through the number of new residence permits and other sources, while the former is more evasive. Therefore, there are estimates of a share of those returning (excluding those travelling back and forth), which differ from 15% (Kamalov and Sergeeva, 2024) to up to 50%¹⁰.

¹⁰ BLOOMBERG: *Russians who fled abroad return in boost for Putin's war economy.* - <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2024-05-02/russians-who-fled-war-return-in-boost-for-putin-s-war-economy> [Last accessed October 23, 2024].

Among the reasons for returning to Russia, relatives and animals in need of care and obligations left behind in Russia have been the main ones. Additionally, some people returned because of the inability to obtain prescription medications or regular medical diagnostics. Economic reasons also play a crucial role in the decision to return, as some people moved back out of fear of losing their jobs or being unable to provide for their families. As early as March 2022, sociological surveys recorded that half of those who left had enough financial resources to stay outside Russia for 3 months, and the majority of those who left had their only sources of income only in the Russian Federation (OkRussians, 2022).

Besides economic and social ties, some Russian relocants return to the homeland due to bureaucratic and integration problems they face in receiving countries. It mainly concerns those who, facing various restrictive measures abroad because of their Russian citizenship, revised their political views in favour of the current political regime in Russia¹¹. According to Kuleshova (2024), the relocants and emigrants of the Fifth wave 2.0 may feel resentment towards Western countries when facing one or a combination of the following issues: inability to find employment outside Russia, foreign banks refusing to open accounts, lack of residence permits, the need to move from country to country, inability to move family, difficulties with integration and poor housing conditions. So, they start to perceive restrictions as a push-out, perceiving their return not as a voluntary decision but rather involuntary. Furthermore, in some cases, it may lead even to adherence to Russian narratives of the world rallying against Russia and increasing Russophobia abroad. Overall, the proportion of respondents who reported any discrimination in the last three months before the survey increased from September 2022 to summer 2023, from 21% to 24% (Kamalov et al. 2024). So, although the majority of the emigrants and relocants do not consider the sanctions and various measures in the Western countries as discrimination, there are still those who might potentially return back to Russia due to the perceived discrimination.

It is also important to underline that a substantial share of the Russian immigrants and relocants hope to become return migrants in the future. As discussed previously, not all emigrants and

¹¹ DW: “*S obidoj na mir*”? *Kak zhivut relokanty, vernuvshiesya v Rossiyu* [‘*With a grudge against the world*’? *How do relocants who have returned to Russia live?*]. - <https://www.dw.com/ru/s-obidoj-na-mir-kak-zivut-relokanty-vernuvsiesya-v-rossiu/a-69138776> [Last accessed October 23, 2024].

relocants consider their exit from the country as permanent and plan to return to the country as soon as there will be changes towards democratisation.

Although the phenomenon is still developing, and it is too early to make any definite conclusions on the permanent form of migration, it is already possible to draw several hypotheses based on the available empirical research data. Firstly, it is possible to suggest the beginning of the full-scale invasion of Ukraine facilitated the exit of those who planned their emigration from Russia, including permanent emigration. This can refer to, for example, talented people who felt the growing political pressure or people considering repatriation to Israel, Germany or other countries. The second hypothesis suggests that some of those who initially were circular or return emigrants may decide to settle in their host countries due to integration into the society, meeting their partners among the locals, etc. Lastly, the third hypothesis suggests that some circular or return emigrants may turn into permanent ones due to their disillusionment in the hopes of democratisation of Russia and returning there, acceptance of the duration of the armed conflict as not a temporary situation, and, consequently, the decision to integrate into their host society. So, the main difference between the second and the third hypotheses lies in the motivation to stay: in the former case, it is due to personal reasons, while in the latter – it is due to political ones.

4.4.7.5: “Gains” and “Losses” of the Fifth Wave 2.0

As it has been demonstrated in the discussion of the social portrait of the Fifth wave 2.0, the Russian emigrants and relocants are a highly heterogeneous group even though the majority share such characteristics as being younger and better educated than the country average and coming from larger cities. Furthermore, as highlighted several times, the phenomenon is still developing in highly uncertain circumstances. Therefore, this thesis offers a preliminary analysis of the gains and losses of the Fifth wave 2.0 and suggests some hypotheses to be tested in future research.

Generally, it is possible to hypothesise that host countries mainly benefitted from the influx of Russian immigrants who brought not only their education, expertise, and talent but also wealth. Therefore, the host societies, with the right policies and the willingness to accommodate the immigrants, can generate more wealth to be redistributed further. The only case when the host societies lose in these economic terms is when Russian emigrants arrived as refugees, but there have not been that many such cases, so the general load from the Russian emigrants on the welfare system of a host country should not be high.

Countries having digital nomad, business relocation, or talent immigration programs (which might be both visa-free or visa-requiring) have won from coming Russian emigrants and relocants who brought their expertise, talent, and income to these countries. For example, Armenia experienced pronounced economic growth during the first year of the full-scale invasion of Ukraine, partially attributed to the influx of Russian IT workers who settled there, opened start-ups there, etc. So, they brought not only their expertise but also contributed to the economic development of their host country by paying taxes, making mundane purchases, or even creating new job opportunities. Host countries should especially seek to gain from closed Russian markets, described above, rather than marginalise them, as they potentially can have high levels of liquidity. Therefore, countries should seek to develop their digital nomad programs further, making them even more attractive for immigrants so that they can enjoy more gains while minimising the losses from reduced tax and general money inflows. As to digital nomads and talented emigrants and relocants, they have also gained while living abroad by receiving new work and life experiences, contributing to developing their soft and hard skills.

Other countries not offering such programs have still benefited from Russian immigrants and relocants because those leaving the home country due to disagreement with its actions have frequently been motivated to find work, at least partially integrate into and contribute to the social life of their host country. Therefore, such countries have gained from the arrival of a younger and economically active population.

Although it might be too early to discuss the contribution of talented Russian immigrants such as artists, musicians, writers, scientists, etc., it is possible to hypothesise that they will leave their traces in world culture. The majority of them still aim to work in the Russian language, but with time, the tendency may change, and they may be more willing to contribute to the cultural or scientific development of their host societies. Among the current examples, it is possible to mention the name of the theatrical and film director Kirill Serebryannikov, who was prosecuted in Russia before his emigration. Since emigrating from Russia, he has filmed *Limonov: A Ballad in English*, presented it at the Cannes Film Festival, and staged several theatrical productions in France, Germany, and the Netherlands. Based on the analysis of the past waves, it is possible to suggest that more and more artists will turn to the international audience in the future.

Conversely, Russia has experienced a loss in workforce and talent and an economically active population share. So, the workforce market has been experiencing a deficit that the brain drain

can generally characterise. This situation may lead to less wealth being accumulated and then redistributed across the society. However, it is possible to hypothesise that Russia can gain from those return migrants who experienced a push-out in their host societies, especially in political rather than economic terms. Thus, these migrants can return with a changed and more regime-supportive outlook, seeking to contribute to their home country.

4.4.7.6: Preliminary conclusions

The shared idea of a temporary exit from the motherland can give grounds for comparing the Fifth wave 2.0 and the First wave of Russian emigration as the latter also hoped to return to Russia soon believing in the failure of the Bolshevik regime. Thus, new Russian relocants and emigrants seek to maintain the connection with their motherland through the consumption of the news in Russian language, keeping strong social ties with people remaining in Russia (family, friends, colleagues), and something that makes them strikingly different from all other waves of immigration – depending on income or other receipts from Russia (although survey data showing that this link is weakening with time (see Kamalov et al. 2023 and Kamalov et al. 2024)).

Gulina (2023), analysing those who have settled in Germany since February 2022, also suggests that the two waves could be compared, at least in some respects. Thus, just like a century ago, German cities have become a point where emigrants can meet other emigrants, offering public spaces for discussions and debates. “Old” immigrants sought to create various associations and networks of support, which were done by “new” immigrants and relocants. Thus, since February 2022, multiple projects such as Kovcheg (The Arc), Map of Piece, and local associations have emerged seeking to provide material and emotional help to those leaving Russia along with assistance in job seeking, finding accommodation, medical aid and others.

Furthermore, “new” emigrants, just like “old” ones, do not perceive their departure to be final, but rather, they leave the country to “outwait” the turmoil and return once the situation changes for the better (Gulina, 2023). In both cases, it led to the formation of a government in exile or similar bodies: in the First wave, there was a Russian Council; nowadays there are such bodies as the Russian Anti-War Committee (although not a government) – both aiming at developing pathways for the future of the home country.

Still, an excessive focus on only political motivation (the first case from the introduction to this chapter) can be somewhat misleading when considering this wave. It should also be

acknowledged that some people migrated in search of better economic and life prospects (second case) mainly because of the sanctions imposed on the country rather than because of the disagreement with the actions of the country's current government. So, once their economic prospects in their home country became somewhat bleak, they decided to move out, looking for better opportunities. Additionally, the mixture of both political and opportunistic motivations (third case) should not be excluded from the analysis.

4.5: RUSSIAN STATE'S POLICIES TOWARDS ITS DIASPORA

This section provides an analytical exploration of Russian policies toward its diaspora. The historical roots of the state-diaspora relationship can be traced to the conquest of Siberia in the 14th century, which facilitated the migration of populations from the Tsardom of Russia. Rieber (2007) characterizes these early settlers as occupying a state of legal, political, and ideological ambivalence; they were simultaneously perceived as both traitors, fleeing from state oppression, and as vanguards of the state, serving as outposts and defensive perimeters against external threats. Similarly, Suslov (2018) suggests that this inherent complexity continues to characterize the relationship between the Russian state and its diaspora.

While the implications of this historical relationship are profound, this section does not seek to provide a comprehensive overview of its entirety. Instead, it aims to investigate the main developments and policies from the post-Soviet era, given the thesis' focus on the period from 2010 to the 2020s. It is the content of the first part of this section, which is followed by a short literature review on the analysis of the Russian policies towards its diaspora. The section concludes with a discussion of the main Russian institutions present in Hungary and their role in facilitating the formation of the Russian diaspora in the country.

4.5.1: The Development of Russian Policies towards Its Diaspora

The dissolution of the Soviet Union resulted in approximately twenty-five million ethnic Russians residing outside the contemporary borders of the Russian Federation. To address the uncertainty of the status of these individuals in the newly established post-Soviet republics, the government led by Boris Yeltsin sought to articulate and implement policies pertaining to this population. By redefining the nation as the homeland not only for ethnic Russians but also for individuals possessing a "cultural and historical 'link' to Russia" (Pilkington and Flynn, 2006,

pp. 56–57), the state sought to assume a protective role for its “compatriots” living abroad. However, during that time, this rhetoric of compatriot protection did not often materialize into substantive action.

In 1994, President Boris Yeltsin issued “Decree on the Main Directions of the State Policy in Relation to the Compatriots Abroad.” This initiative was intended to supplement the double citizenship policy in accordance with the newly adopted Constitution, specifically Article 61, which asserts that the state “guarantees defence and protection to its citizens abroad.” The program delineated a distinction between emigrants and compatriots, the latter being identified as individuals affected by the geopolitical shifts following the dissolution of the Soviet Union and characterised as “victims of historical perturbations” and political repression. The program adopted a paternalistic approach towards the post-Soviet diaspora residing in the former Soviet republics, while largely neglecting the needs and rights of those who decided to emigrate based on their own initiative, so-called “global Russians.” However, due to significant opposition from both the Ministry of Interior and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the implementation of the double citizenship policy was ultimately abandoned, resulting in the program remaining largely theoretical and failing to produce meaningful change.

In 1995, the State Duma issued the Declaration on the Support of Compatriots Abroad, which was again framed within a protectionist context. This document broadly defined compatriots as individuals who were once citizens of the Soviet Union and who maintain a spiritual connection to Russia, irrespective of their current nationality or legal status in their countries of residence. The use of the term “rossijskaia diaspora” (Russian civic diaspora) rather than “russkaja” (ethnic Russian) underscores a civic identity while downplaying ethno-national side. In accordance with this framework, the Council of Compatriots was established within the State Duma to further these initiatives. Additionally, the Administration of Moscow supported the establishment of the Foundation “The Russians” (Rossijane) and the Institute for Diaspora and Integration, thereby reinforcing the government’s commitment to facilitating the integration and support of the Russian diaspora globally.

The shift in perspective regarding the status of compatriots occurred against a backdrop of intense debate surrounding the federal law concerning compatriots. Initially conceived within the State Duma Commission on Compatriots in 1997, this legislation exhibited ideological characteristics aligned with the opposition, comprising an alliance of radical nationalist and communist revanchist factions. As a result of these ideological affiliations, the law was initially

rejected by the Federation Council and subsequently vetoed by the President after a second approval from the Duma. In 1999, the legislation successfully overcame the presidential veto, leading to the enactment of the law titled “On the State Policy in Relation to Compatriots Abroad” (Federal Law № 99-FZ). The preamble of the law defines Russia a successor of both the Russian Soviet Federal Socialist Republic and the USSR. Therefore, it gives grounds to suggest that the law adhered to a post-Soviet imperial framework. It delineated three distinct categories of compatriots:

1. Citizens of the Russian Federation who reside permanently outside its borders.
2. Citizens of the former Soviet Union living in states that were once part of the Soviet Union, excluding Russia.
3. Emigrants from the Russian Empire, the Soviet Union, and the Russian Federation, along with their descendants, who no longer possess Russian citizenship.

The categorisation of the first and third groups was relatively straightforward from a policy perspective; however, the second group represented a more inclusive approach. It encompassed all former citizens of the Soviet Union and underscored Russia’s responsibility for its Soviet legacy, thereby promoting a paternalistic stance towards compatriots abroad. In particular, the law defines them as individuals “who were born in one state, are residing or have resided in it [...], share a common language, history, cultural heritage, traditions and customs.” The law also considers the direct descendants of these people to be compatriots. It should also be mentioned, that the law explicitly excludes “descendants of persons who belong to the titular nations of foreign states.”

The vagueness inherent in this definition raises critical questions regarding the inclusivity and exclusivity of the Russian diaspora. The law does not delineate specific criteria for what constitutes a “common” language, history, and culture, leaving significant ambiguity regarding the population it aims to protect and serve. This lack of precision effectively allows for a broad categorisation of “compatriots,” encompassing a diverse range of individuals from ethnic Russians to all former citizens of the Soviet Union (Shevel, 2011, p. 193).

Upon ascending to power following Yeltsin’s resignation on New Year’s Eve in 1999, Vladimir Putin presided over a significant transformation in the political landscape of Russia. During his first term, the intense political competition that sought to define the nature of the nation and establish parameters for inclusion began to diminish, as discussed in detail in Chapter 5, and a more unified approach emerged. In the aftermath of the elections, the Governmental

Commission on Compatriots was revived to serve as a counterbalance to the Committee of the State Duma, seeking to marginalize its influence in the preparations for the First International Congress of Compatriots. In August 2001, the President endorsed the “Conception of Support for Compatriots,” which laid the groundwork for subsequent initiatives. The Congress convened in October 2001, marking a significant milestone in the government’s engagement with its compatriot communities abroad. In his remarks, Putin articulated a vision for a new era in the relationship between Russia and its diaspora, emphasizing a framework grounded in principles of mutually beneficial partnership within both economic and cultural realms. However, he also resorted to traditional rhetoric concerning the protection of the rights of Russians living abroad.

At the beginning of the first term, Putin prioritized the reintegration of post-Soviet regions as a means to assert Russia’s role as a significant global actor in maintaining stability across Eurasia (Bugajski, 2004). The “Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation” (2000) emphasized the role of the Russian diaspora within the framework of Russian foreign policy. It articulated the Kremlin’s discontent with the territorial boundaries established following the collapse of the Soviet Union, advocating for the protection of the rights of Russian citizens and compatriots residing abroad. The term “compatriot,” as defined in the State Policy of the Russian Federation, encompasses not only citizens of the Russian Federation living outside the country but also former citizens of the USSR, Russian émigrés from both the Soviet era and the contemporary Russian state, their descendants, and foreign nationals who express admiration for Russian culture and language.

One of the initiatives that emerged from the policy aimed at fostering connections with compatriots was the Voluntary Resettlement Campaign. The primary objective of the program was to facilitate the relocation of Russian compatriots to sparsely populated regions in Russia. Despite being backed by a state budget that could cover nearly all associated resettlement expenses, the program saw only seventeen thousand individuals benefit from its provisions between 2007 and 2011. However, in the period between 2012 and 2017, there were over a half a million people who benefitted from the program, which can be attributed the economic growth in Russia and, hence, more attractive economic and work prospects in the country.

A significant shift in Russia’s foreign policy landscape emerged following Vladimir Putin's re-election to the presidency in 2004, at which point diaspora politics became one of the central focuses. Just to illustrate this point, in 2007, the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the

Ministry of Education and Science established the Russian [Russkij] World Foundation. This initiative was aimed at re-establishing connections between the Russian diaspora and their homeland by fostering new and enhanced ties through various cultural and social programs. In 2008, further efforts to strengthen these connections led to the formation of the World Coordination Council of Russian Compatriots, which seeks to facilitate communication between the Russian authorities and the diaspora community. Additionally, in the same year, the Russian government established the Federal Agency for the Commonwealth of Independent States, Compatriots Living Abroad, and International Humanitarian Cooperation (Rossotrudnichestvo). This agency is tasked with safeguarding the rights of expatriate Russians and promoting cultural and educational exchanges, thereby reinforcing the bonds between the Russian state and its citizens living abroad.

To further illustrate the growing importance of diaspora in Russian policies, Mukomel (2011) observes that during the first decade of Putin's rule, funding for state policies directed at Russian compatriots residing abroad was allocated through distinct channels within the federal budget. Specifically, this financing involved a range of governmental entities, including (but not limited to) the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, the Federal Agency for the Commonwealth of Independent States, Rossotrudnichestvo, the Government Commission on the Affairs of Compatriots Living Abroad, the Interdepartmental Commission responsible for the execution of the National Program facilitating the voluntary resettlement to Russia of compatriots currently residing abroad, the Russian Centre for International Scientific and Cultural Cooperation, the Federal Agency for Press and Mass Communications and even the governments of Moscow and Saint Petersburg.

In 2010, there were further shifts in terms of Russian approach towards its diaspora and compatriots. Thus, an effort was initiated to engage more with "global Russians." This was reflected in substantial amendments to the federal law concerning compatriots, which were designed to underscore the historical, cultural, ethnic, and spiritual connections that these individuals have with Russia. The revised definition of compatriots retained citizens of the Russian Federation residing abroad, as well as emigrants from the Russian Empire, the Soviet Union, and the Russian Federation, along with their descendants. However, there was an innovation, introducing a new group of "individuals and their descendants who [...] typically belong to the peoples historically residing on the territory of the Russian Federation [...], and who have freely chosen to enter into spiritual, cultural, and legal relationships with the Russian

Federation.” This formulation notably excludes the former Soviet citizens living in Central Asian republics by characterizing Russia in its current form as a host for specific peoples. In doing so, the law seeks to constrict the category of compatriots by moving away from Russia as a Soviet successor framework of citizenship in favour of a more ambiguous ethno-cultural principle emphasizing a “spiritual relationship” with Russia. Nevertheless, this approach does not provide a definitive legal clarification; rather, it presents a vague notion of “spiritual relationship,” which is not clarified further.

Generally, five distinct and potentially competing definitions of the term “compatriots” can be identified in the Russian diaspora politics: 1) citizens of the Russian Federation residing abroad; 2) emigrants from the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union; 3) Russian-speaking individuals who are former citizens of the Soviet Union; 4) individuals who identify as ethnically Russian; and 5) all former citizens of the Soviet Union (Suslov, 2018). This lack of a legally standardized definition of the diaspora creates significant opportunities for the political elite to strategically construct and reconstruct its meaning in response to the prevailing political context. The framing of diaspora can vary significantly based on the ideological frameworks applied, which may emphasize distinct dimensions such as the Soviet legacy, the prevalence of the Russian language, or the concept of Russian ethnicity. When these three parameters converge, they form a cohesive identity for a subset of Russians residing in the former Soviet republics. This identity becomes a focal point for the Kremlin’s strategies concerning the instrumentalization of diaspora, including initiatives related to passportization, repatriation, and irredentism (Suslov, 2018).

The 2013 Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation signals a notable shift towards the adoption of soft power strategies in the international relations. Specifically, the section titled “Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation and the Modern World” asserts that soft power serves as a comprehensive instrument for achieving foreign policy objectives (Article 20). Soft power techniques include the utilization of new technologies, information and communication, humanitarian initiatives, and the mobilization of the diaspora. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs has tasked Rossotrudnichestvo with the development and implementation of policies that align with this strategic goal. When examining the implications of this concept in relation to compatriot policies and their execution, it becomes evident that Russia seeks to exert influence over its diaspora to affect the domestic policies of neighbouring states.

Nowadays, Rossotrudnichestvo operates across 71 countries, maintaining 87 foreign missions. Since 2021, its international branches have been informally designated as “Russian Houses,” a branding initiative aimed at enhancing their cultural and diplomatic outreach. Additionally, the Russian World Foundation extends its influence to 39 countries, with over 80 centres established globally. This extensive network of institutions has been strategically designed to leverage the political potential of the Russian diaspora, employing a multifaceted approach that encompasses hard, soft, and sharp power methodologies.

The “Comprehensive plan of key measures for implementing the Russian Federation’s state policy towards compatriots living abroad for 2021-2023” continues the implementation of the protectionist and soft power approaches towards the diaspora developed during the 2010s. Thus, ensuring the protection of the rights of compatriots and supporting socially vulnerable groups are among the main aims of the documents, thus showing the continuation of the state protectionism in relation to the nationals residing abroad. Simultaneously, the document also discusses the importance of sustaining compatriot organisations, the development of media and Internet resources developed by the diasporas, and other measures that can be considered the further expansion of Russian soft power through diaspora organisations.

Interestingly, the last version of the Decree “On the Concept of the State Migration Policy of the Russian Federation for 2019–2025” pays a lot of attention to the issue of the voluntary repatriation of Russian compatriots living abroad. Thus, the program states that one of the main conditions for this should be a stable economic and socio-political situation to increase the number of repatriates. This shift may be a signal of how the government sought to approach the problem of increasing economic emigration, discussed in the previous section of this chapter.

4.5.2: Research on the Russian Diaspora Policies

The examination of the Russian diaspora within the post-Soviet states emerged as a significant area of scholarly inquiry in the 1990s. Initial research predominantly concentrated on the historical migration patterns of Russian communities into these newly independent states, their contemporary circumstances, and the citizenship, minority rights, and language policies implemented by the respective governments. Additionally, studies addressed the Russian Federation’s policies towards these communities, as well as domestic factors influencing such policies and the potential implications for regional stability (King and Melvin, 1999). It should be noted that by the end of the decade, a growing number of scholars began to critique the

applicability of the term “diaspora” to characterise Russian communities in post-Soviet states. They suggested that, rather than being a product of involuntary dispersion, these communities had become increasingly distanced from their homeland due to the reconfiguration of state boundaries. This led to the emergence of diverse attitudes toward the concept of homeland among these groups (Pilkington and Flynn, 2006).

At the beginning of Putin’s rule, many scholars initially overlooked the ideological dimensions of the diaspora politics. Still, some accounted for how his regime co-opted various strands of Russian political thought in its endeavour to cultivate a sense of national unity (Evans, 2008; Laruelle, 2009). At the same time, Bugajski (2004) explores how Russia seeks to exploit a variety of conflicts, including political, regional, religious, social, and ethnic tensions aiming to manipulate the foreign and security policies of nations he categorizes as being within Russia’s sphere of influence, which encompasses the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) in Europe, particularly Belarus, Ukraine, and Moldova, in addition to the Baltic States, Central Europe, and South-eastern Europe.

With time, scholarship has increasingly examined how Russia has adapted its foreign policy to leverage its compatriots in the post-Soviet states with the aim of reinforcing its dominant role in the region (Grigas, 2016; Laruelle, 2009; Suslov, 2018). Additionally, several studies investigate the interplay of identity politics in shaping the trajectory of Russia’s diaspora policies, highlighting the complex structure of the Russian diaspora. Thus, Zevelev (2014) proposes that Russia’s diaspora-related policies reflect its ongoing struggle to articulate a coherent sense of nationhood. He further examines how Russia’s perception of the West influences its quest for identity through various foreign policy practices. In contrast, Shevel (2011) contends that the ambiguous definition of “compatriots” within Russian legislation aids in addressing the country’s identity issues, although without providing clear boundaries for the group in question. According to her, this ambiguity allows the Kremlin to enact a diverse range of policies on the international stage. Harris (2020) argues that the Kremlin’s self-designation as a kinstate has facilitated the construction of Russian nationhood along ethno-cultural and linguistic lines. She highlights the interconnection between Russia’s interventions in neighbouring states on behalf of expatriates and its unfinished project of nation-building.

Recent scholarship has provided comprehensive geopolitical analyses of Russia’s policies towards its diaspora. For instance, Grigas (2016) argues that the Putin’s regime has strategically utilized its expatriate communities to facilitate a process of re-imperialization across post-

Soviet states. Grigas identifies a range of diaspora policies as key instruments through which the Kremlin seeks to achieve this objective, employing soft power strategies, mechanisms of passportization, and the annexation of territories inhabited by Russian compatriots. Similarly, Pieper (2020) examines the Kremlin's pretextual invocation of humanitarian protection for compatriots, highlighting its role in the revision of territorial boundaries amid deteriorating relations with the West. Pieper focuses on the Russian political discourse surrounding humanitarian responsibility during critical events such as the Georgian war in 2008 and the annexation of Crimea in 2014, underscoring how these narratives have been manipulated to justify territorial expansion. Vasilevich (2020) highlights how the Russian authorities utilise transnationalism, that is, extending its power over the national borders, and the idea of "compatriots" to achieve their geopolitical goals. Additionally, she shows how Russian policies frame compatriots in a broad way, thus allowing to include all the population of the post-Soviet Union countries, along with the role of soft power tools to leverage Russian diaspora in various countries, especially in Belarus, Moldova and Ukraine. Conversely, Mikhail Suslov (2018) explores the evolution of Russian geopolitical thought, specifically analysing the relationship between the concept of the "Russian World" and the notion of a "sphere of influence" over the past two decades.

Değirmen Dysart (2021) contends that the contextualization of the Russian diaspora has been both shaped and constrained by the Russian authorities' interpretation of national identity since Putin's second term. This sanctioned vision of national identity, favoured by Russian authorities over alternative perspectives, has significantly influenced the formation and evolution of the diaspora within post-Soviet states, as diaspora identity is fundamentally constructed in relation to the nation. Furthermore, the findings of her study indicate that Russian policies regarding the diaspora are deeply affected by the country's self-perception in relation to Europe and the West. In essence, Russia's engagements with these external actors have been instrumental in shaping its conception of national identity, which has, in turn, impacted the Kremlin's formulation of its diaspora policies in neighbouring countries. Moreover, beyond these arguments, the foreign policy practices related to the diaspora may serve to bolster public support for the Kremlin's particular vision of identity domestically. Consequently, the Kremlin's strategic utilisation of its diaspora in post-Soviet states fulfils a dual purpose: it strengthens national unity within the country while simultaneously promoting the regime's vision of Russian identity.

4.5.3: Russian Institutions and Diaspora in Hungary

One of the main Russian political institutions is the Russian Embassy in Hungary. Besides providing various consular services to Russian national living in Hungary, the embassy and its staff are also involved in various political, social, and cultural activities, trying to engage diaspora in them and extend its soft power in Hungary. For example, the embassy was very active in promoting the 80th anniversary of the Victory Day in the Great Patriotic War, organising an official reception in the embassy and various commemorative activities across Hungary, inviting both Russian diaspora members and Hungarian elites.

Still, there remains a challenge to mobilise the Russian diaspora in Hungary, especially when it concerns the active participation in the civic life of Russia. For instance, data from the Hungarian Central Statistical Office indicates that as of 2024, there were approximately 8,000 Russian passport holders residing in Hungary. However, only 1,800 Russian, representing about 22% of their total amount, participated in voting at the Russian Embassy during the presidential elections in 2024. The scenario is even more pronounced in the context of elections for the State Duma and regional assemblies. Each country with a Russian embassy is allocated specific electoral districts within Russia, and in the case of Hungary, Russian voters in 2021 were assigned to the Almet'yev District in the Republic of Tatarstan. This geographical designation posed significant challenges, as many voters were unaware of the district's location or the candidates contesting there. Such barriers highlight the complexities of governance and representation faced by the Russian government in mobilizing its expatriate citizens.

In this relation, it may be important to mention that the proposition of establishing a separate voting district for "compatriots" was initially raised in 1994 by the committee of the State Duma; however, progress on this issue has since stalled. This stagnation is primarily attributable to concerns among political leaders about granting emigrants a voice in domestic affairs (Suslov, 2018). This situation highlights a significant paradox regarding the political subjectivity of the Russian diaspora: to attain meaningful political mobilization, the diaspora requires a coherent political project. However, Russian elites, understandably apprehensive about relinquishing control over such a project to individuals perceived as disloyal to the government, have refrained from facilitating its development. Furthermore, efforts to leverage the diaspora in the "far abroad" have resulted in a division among Russians living outside of Russia. Some individuals have adopted the role of "professional compatriots," actively

engaging with initiatives from the Russian state, while others have distanced themselves from Russia, displaying skepticism toward initiatives emanating from the government.

Besides the Russian Embassy, divisions of both Rossotrudnichestvo and the Russian World Foundation are present in Hungary. Rossotrudnichestvo is represented by the Russian House in Budapest. It organises various cultural and patriotic activities for Russian nationals, such as exhibitions, theatrical plays, information on local Russian communities, and others. Furthermore, it provides the consultations for Russian state programs for supporting compatriots, including voluntary repatriation. So, given that it targets mainly Russian nationals residing in Hungary, the Russian House can be considered through the framework of long-distance nationalism and transnationalism as it aims at reviving and maintaining the link with the home country.

The Russian World Foundation has three branches in Budapest, Pécs and Debrecen. In contrast with the Russian House, their main activities can be considered through the lens of soft power as they seek to popularise the study of the Russian language among Hungarians through courses and libraries. Additionally, they host a wide variety of educational, scientific, cultural and social events: meetings for admirers of the Russian language, Slavic Culture Days, drawing competitions, celebrations of traditional holidays such as Christmas, Old New Year, Easter and Maslenitsa, and charity evenings. Therefore, the Russian World Foundation aims at promoting a positive image of the country, which can contribute, on the one hand, to the acceptance of the Russian immigrants and, on the other hand, more support for Russian foreign policies among Hungarians.

Aside from these institutions, there are a variety of civil society organisations in Hungary, including Russian-Hungarian Friendship Society, Russian-Hungarian Cultural Association, Russian-Hungarian Church Association, Russian-Hungarian School “Hope”, Russian-Hungarian Music Club “Harmony”, and others. It is important to note that all these organisations unite both Russians and Hungarians not only in their names, but also in their members. However, the majority of these organisations are found by Russian nationals or people from Russian descend, who seek to promote and contribute to the integration of Russians in Hungary. These organisations are spread across the country, showing that the issue of the Russian integration into Hungarian society appears not only in large cities like Budapest, but also in smaller cities, too. Additionally, these organisations can also be considered as means for Russia to leverage its soft power through these communities, as they organise a wide range of

charity, cultural and patriotic events in Hungary, including commemorations of Victory Day and celebrations of Russian festivities, including the Day of Russia and Maslenitsa.

4.6 Conclusion

This chapter provides a general overview of Russian emigration, divided into five waves, the main motives for emigration, and the image of the Russian immigrant at each stage. In addition to historical context, the problems of Russian emigration, in general, were also raised, among which it is possible to designate the debate around the waves or stages of Russian emigration, the challenge to apply concepts of migration and its typology to the Russian case, the appearance of new concepts associated with Russian migration (refugees, emigres, displaced people, relocants), the lack of accurate data in figures and, as a result, the possibility of inaccurate future forecasts regarding migration.

Although this dissertation is mainly done within the field of migration and nationalism studies, this chapter shows the advantages of applying an interdisciplinary approach by combining such disciplines as history, migration studies, nationalism studies, and economics. Each discipline proves useful for the analysis of such complex phenomena as the Russian emigration movement. Thus, history allowed us to draw a connection between migration waves and their historical contexts, while migration and nationalism studies shed light on the typology of migration in each wave as well as the matters of identity. Lastly, economic theories have also been applied to show the possible gains and losses from Russian migrants, analysing the benefits and drawbacks for them, as well as the host and the sending societies. The result of such interdisciplinary analysis can be a well-formed migration policy. This can be especially relevant to potential Russian emigrants, given the forecasts of increased emigration from Russia.

Summing up the main findings of this chapter, it is possible to conclude that among the main motivations for leaving Russia throughout the history of the emigration movement have been political ones (first case, introduced at the beginning of this chapter). Only since the Third wave has it been possible to trace the search for better opportunities (second case) or a combination of political motivation and the search for improved living conditions (third case) among the motivations for leaving the country when ethnic minorities started to leave the Soviet Union voluntarily. Making hypotheses about the future of Russian emigration, it is possible to single

out precisely the political motive for the future emigration associated with Putin's anti-democratic regime, censorship and secret repressions.

Furthermore, this chapter shows that Russian emigration has always been a complex phenomenon because there has been a complex interplay of circular, return, and permanent migration, sometimes even one type switching to the other. In particular, this chapter clearly shows that there has been a constant aspiration towards circular migration since most migrants, even if forced, wish to return to their homeland or, at least, to know that they have such an opportunity. However, it was not always possible due to legal or political reasons.

Lastly, applying the economic approach to the case of Russian migration makes it possible to highlight that hosting societies have frequently won from Russian immigrants by gaining more human capital in the form of the immigrants' education, work and life experiences. As to Russian migrants, escaping political prosecutions and improved living conditions are undoubtedly among the benefits; still, as this chapter shows, not all immigrants have managed to adapt quickly and successfully to new societies; they have frequently experienced identity crises and other problems. Lastly, as the sending country, Russia has frequently lost due to brain drain and loss of valuable human capital.

So, aiming to understand migration comprehensively as a complex process, this dissertation offers an interdisciplinary approach. This will prove that migration as a whole can be controlled, and it can have a positive effect when more complex aspects are taken into account when creating a migration policy as a deterrent tool.

This part of the dissertation study has some limitations, including a lack of connection between Russian emigration and the nominated countries of Hungary and Germany. To overcome it, the author plans to continue her work and publish an article or a book chapter on the topic. Furthermore, it is also planned to publish a chapter or an article on the formation of the identity of the Russian emigrant with an analysis of the concepts of *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft*, collective and individual identity with a wide range of theories on nationalism. The final chapters will be direct studies of the migration policies of Hungary and Germany concerning potential Russian emigrants and a potential simulation model. A core part of this dissertation will be conducting a questionnaire interview with Russian immigrants in Hungary and Germany to confirm hypotheses about their motives, identification, and integration in the nominated countries.

Lastly, this chapter highlights a significant research gap that warrants further exploration in future studies. Currently, there is a scarcity of comprehensive research focused on the complex relationships within the Russian-speaking diaspora, predominantly conducted in North America. Consequently, there exists a compelling need for further inquiry into this phenomenon, with an emphasis on the processes of formation and the evolving dynamics within the diaspora, especially in the light of recent political events. Moreover, it is essential that future studies encompass a diverse array of contexts, including European and post-Soviet environments, where the geographical proximity to Russia may significantly influence the development and characteristics of the diaspora.

CHAPTER 5: IDENTITY FORMATION – CASE STUDY OF RUSSIANS

5.1: Introduction

As Hopf argues, identity plays a central role in shaping both individual and collective behaviour in international relations. It not only defines how actors perceive themselves but also determines how they interpret the actions and intentions of others. Without identity as an organising principle, the social and political world would be marked by disorientation and instability (Hopf, 1998). The formation of identity is not a static or innate process; instead, it emerges through continuous interaction with cultural symbols, societal norms, institutional settings, and shared experiences.

In the Russian context, identity has been a historically fluid and politically charged issue. Russians have often aligned themselves with dominant civilizational frameworks, whether rooted in Orthodox Christianity, Tsarist imperial traditions, or the ideological constructs of the Soviet era (Ponarin, 1999). At the same time, this fluidity and identification with state-centric ideologies and imperial narratives has left little space for a clearly defined and continuous Russian identity. In contrast, many of Russia's neighbours, particularly those that were once part of the Russian Empire or the USSR, have managed to foster distinct and enduring national identities. While the Soviet Union attempted to serve as a powerful homogenising force, constructing a new Soviet identity, its dissolution in 1991 initiated a major shift. The collapse not only dismantled a vast political structure but also triggered a deep crisis of belonging in Russia, as questions surrounding the foundations of Russian identity in both civic and ethnic senses came to the forefront once again (Ponarin, 1999).

In her critical reflections on Russia's post-Soviet trajectory, Shevtsova (2014) notes that the issue of national identity has remained unresolved, often resurfacing during periods of internal crisis. She argues that, especially during the presidency of Vladimir Putin, the state has frequently turned to existential questions, such as "Who are we as a people?", as a means of redirecting attention from more immediate socio-economic and political concerns. In such moments, identity becomes not only a subject of intellectual inquiry but also a political tool used to assert cohesion amid fragmentation.

As will be discussed in more detail in this chapter, the contemporary debate on Russian identity continues to revolve around two enduring themes: the role of religion, particularly Orthodoxy,

and Russia's evolving relationship with the West. These questions are rooted in the history of the debate around Russian national identity. They echo the ideological divisions that shaped the 19th-century debates between Slavophiles and Westernizers, and they remain deeply embedded in the cultural and political fabric of 21st-century Russia. A useful lens through which to understand these divisions is the distinction between the concepts *russkij* and *rossijskij* that exists in the Russian language. The former typically refers to ethnic Russians, tied to language, culture, and Orthodox faith, while the latter denotes civic belonging to the Russian state, inclusive of non-Russian ethnic and religious minorities. While these terms were once nearly synonymous under the Tsarist Empire, where Russianness was strongly associated with Orthodoxy and Slavic heritage, they began to diverge during the Soviet period. Although the USSR promoted a supra-ethnic Soviet identity, it also privileged the Russian language and culture, often at the expense of minority identities through practices such as Russification and political suppression.

Only in the post-Soviet period did the tension between *russkij* and *rossijskij* gain formal recognition in official discourse. The vacuum left by the Soviet collapse made space for re-evaluating both civic and ethnic dimensions of identity. However, as Vera Tolz (1998) points out, the process of nation-building in Russia has historically struggled to reconcile these two concepts. The imperial legacy of multinational governance stifled the formation of a coherent ethnic Russian identity, while the authoritarian nature of the Soviet regime hindered the emergence of a truly inclusive civic identity. As a result, at the time of the USSR's disintegration, many in the Russian Federation did not view the former Soviet republics as foreign nations or see Russia as a clearly defined homeland in the traditional national sense.

The first part of this chapter starts with a brief overview of the historical debate surrounding identity in Russia, dating back to the 19th century and ending with modern times. It proceeds with a discussion of the issue of identity among ethnic minorities in Russia throughout history. Therefore, the first part will provide context for understanding the intricacies of Russian identity, particularly regarding Russian immigrants, which is the focus of the second part of the chapter.

5.2: The Historical Overview of the Debate on Russian Identity

5.2.1: Westernisers and Slavophiles in the 19th Century

Russia's search for a national identity has long been shaped by its geographical position between Europe and Asia, which also has had some symbolic reflections. For example, the enduring image of the Russian double-headed eagle, gazing simultaneously westward and eastward, captures the essential tension at the heart of Russian self-identification: is the country part of the West, the East, or is it a distinct civilisation? With the growth of national self-awareness in the 19th century against the background of rapid modernisation, Russian intellectuals undertook one of the first attempts to answer this question.

At the heart of this identity debate was a profound ideological rift between two emerging intellectual currents: the Westernisers and the Slavophiles. Their origins are often traced to the intellectual centres of Moscow and St. Petersburg and, more specifically, to the conservative historian Nikolai Karamzin, the founder of Slavophile thought, and the liberal statesman Mikhail Speransky, the founder of Westerniser thought. Karamzin warned that borrowing too freely from the European Enlightenment endangered Russia's traditional social and political fabric, while Speransky envisioned European-style reforms as the only viable means to modernise the Russian state. This early 19th-century divergence, as noted by Neumann (1996), laid the groundwork for the further development of thought on Russian national identity.

Westernisers viewed Europe as the beacon of civilisation and progress. They were convinced that Russia could only become a strong, modern state by embracing Western principles of legal equality, civil liberties, and rational administration. However, this group had some internal divisions. Some Westernisers focused primarily on emulating Western technology and industrial advancement, seeing these tools as a means to strengthen Russia's geopolitical position. Their view was often pragmatic and selective, treating Western ideas as instruments rather than ideals. Others, particularly the more liberal wing, admired the West's political and moral frameworks, such as individual rights, democratic governance, and secularism, and sought to introduce them in Russia as well. In this view, modernisation meant more than railroads and factories; it meant the cultivation of civic responsibility and the limitation of autocratic power (Tsygankov, 2010).

The Westernisers' optimism about European models was, however, sharply contested by the Slavophiles, who rejected the notion that Russia should copy the West. For thinkers like Aleksey Khomyakov, Ivan Kireevsky, and Konstantin Aksakov, Russia's cultural and spiritual identity had been uniquely shaped by its Orthodox Christian tradition, its historical resistance to feudal fragmentation, and the communal life of its peasantry. They saw in Russia a spiritual unity, called *sobornost* by Khomyakov, that they believed the secular and individualistic West had long lost. According to Khomyakov, this spiritual essence had coexisted peacefully with European influences until the Council of Florence in 1439, after which Russia and Western Christendom diverged irreconcilably. He asserted that Orthodoxy alone preserved the true spirit of Christianity, while Western Europe had succumbed to a superficial religiosity devoid of moral depth (Neumann, 1996).

Rather than viewing Russia's vast Eurasian territory as a hindrance to its development, the Slavophiles interpreted it as a source of strength. They believed Russia's geographic, cultural, and historical interactions with both East and West conferred upon it a unique civilizational mission. This mission was not to imitate either West or East, but to forge a society rooted in its own traditions, one that upheld moral collectivism over Western-style individualism, and spiritual obedience over secular reason. Riasanovsky (2005) notes that for the Slavophiles, adopting European models threatened to erode the very foundations of Russian national character, its religiosity, moral unity, and communal ethos.

The 19th century witnessed oscillations in the dominance of these intellectual camps, often in response to external pressures. After Russia's humiliating defeat in the Crimean War (1853–1856), there was a palpable sense that the country lagged behind Europe not only technologically but institutionally. This defeat galvanised support for Westernising reforms, and under Tsar Alexander II, many of the Westernisers' goals were at least partially realised. The emancipation of the serfs in 1861, the establishment of local self-governments, judicial reform, and military modernisation reflected the belief that Russia had to learn from Europe in order to survive and compete on the world stage.

However, these periods of reform were often followed by reactionary turns. The very success of modernisation sparked a resurgence of nationalist anxiety. If reform meant adopting European ideologies as well, then the question arose of how Russian uniqueness could be preserved. This concern was fueled by the growth of revolutionary movements that drew inspiration from the West, leading conservatives and nationalists to reassert the value of

Russian distinctiveness. As Riasanovsky (2005) notes, Russia's intellectual pendulum repeatedly swung between fascination with the West and fear of its corrupting influence. The West became, in Neumann's (1996) words, Russia's "constitutive Other": an aspirational model and a looming threat, always present in Russian self-conception.

Over time, the Slavophile worldview evolved into new intellectual and political currents. One of the most significant was Eurasianism, a theory that gained prominence in the early 20th century and particularly among émigré thinkers after the Bolshevik Revolution. Eurasianists rejected the binary of Europe and Asia and instead argued that Russia was a unique civilisation, defined by its transcontinental geography and Orthodox heritage. Marlène Laruelle (2008) has shown how Eurasianism positioned itself as an ideological alternative to both Western liberalism and Eastern despotism, casting Russia as a mediating force between civilisations. The Slavophile emphasis on spiritual unity and cultural uniqueness remained foundational to this vision.

One of the prominent thinkers of Eurasianism was Ivan Ilyin (1883–1954), whose works were deeply influenced by the Slavophile tradition. A nationalist and legal philosopher, Ilyin emphasised the primacy of spiritual renewal over political or economic reform. For Ilyin, the soul of Russia was rooted in Orthodox Christianity and a metaphysical love for the homeland. He argued that true Russians were bound by a duty to God, the state, and the common good, and he opposed the assimilation of ethnic minorities into a homogenised civic identity. His thought, especially regarding the moral foundation of national unity and the dangers of liberal cosmopolitanism, has experienced a revival in contemporary Russian political discourse, notably in the speeches of Vladimir Putin.

This long arc of debate between Slavophiles and Westernisers reveals the enduring struggle over Russia's identity. The 19th-century confrontation between Westernisers and Slavophiles was not merely academic; it shaped imperial policy, cultural production, and the intellectual habits of generations. It exposed deep ambivalence about the West: admiration for its achievements, but resistance to its values; desire for its strength, but fear of its secularism and individualism. So, the Slavophile-Westerniser debate was not a question of choosing one side definitively over the other, but of negotiating a precarious balance. Russia repeatedly sought to modernise without Westernising, to industrialise while preserving spiritual and communal values, and to engage with the world without losing itself.

The legacy of this debate has left its mark across Russian history since the 19th century. Whether positioning itself as a unique Eurasian civilisation or seeking closer ties with the West, Russia continues to draw from both Slavophile and Westernising traditions. As Winchester (2008) argues, the country's identity is not fixed but negotiated, historically contingent and ideologically fraught. What began as a debate among a narrow circle of intellectuals has become a defining feature of Russian political and cultural life throughout its history.

Given the influential role that this debate has played in the formation of Russian national identity since the 19th century, it warrants a thorough examination through a theoretical lens. A key aspect that unifies both sides of this debate is the realisation that Russian identity has been primarily constructed through a comparative framework with a reference group, namely, the West. While the Slavophile thought, showing some signs of ethnocentrism, used the West to highlight distinct traits of Russians (*russkij*), advocating for a positive in-group bias by idealizing Russians as a more spiritually oriented nation, the Westernisers countered this by fostering a positive out-group bias that highlighted the intellectual, cultural, political, and economic advantages of the West in relation to Russia.

This dynamic fostered a fluctuating interplay between the two ideological positions, preventing either in-group or out-group biases from fully developing into a cohesive national ideology capable of consistently influencing internal, foreign, cultural, and other policy domains. Nevertheless, it is crucial to note the persistence of an ethnocentric bias favouring those identified as *russkij*, which refers to ethnic Russians. This bias has historically engendered internal discrimination against various ethnic minorities and has undermined their opportunities, a phenomenon that will be further explored later in this chapter.

Perennialism provides a valuable lens through which the last point could be analysed, as this line of thought states that there should be no difference between the concepts of nation and ethnicity. So, both Slavophiles and Westernisers did not differentiate between the terms *russkij* (ethnic Russian) and *rossijanin* (Russian national), largely framing their arguments around the predominant Orthodox Christian majority. Moreover, perennialist theorists (Greenfield, 1992; Grosby, 1991; Hastings, 1997) have contended that the evolution of nations and national identities is deeply rooted in historical contexts that shape the very essence of a nation. In this regard, Slavophiles assert that Russia's uniqueness stems not only from its geographical position but also from a historical trajectory that has enabled it to assimilate the beneficial

attributes of both Western and Asian influences, while concurrently fostering and preserving the distinctive character of the country and its population.

Lastly, the theory of uneven development offers valuable insights into the intellectual framework of the Westernisers. This theoretical lens underscores the perception of Europe as the centre of civilisation, with Russia positioned as its periphery. While the Westernisers did not explicitly argue that Western nations exploited Russian labour and resources, they nonetheless regarded the West as a model of progress, modernity, and civilisation, thus attributing the role of a metropolis to it. Consequently, this perspective implied that Russia must endeavour to emulate Western advancements. It was only through this process of catching up that Russia could aspire to be recognised as an equal participant among European nations.

5.2.2: Identity in the Soviet Era

The dissolution of the Russian Empire following the revolution of 1917 marked not only the end of dynastic autocracy with its social hierarchies but also triggered a fundamental rupture in the continuity of Russian identity. Centuries of imperial rule had forged a cultural and political sense of “Russianness” that blended Orthodoxy, tsarist authority, and a self-conception as the spiritual and civilizational core of Eurasia, according to the Slavophile thought. The sudden collapse of that order created both an institutional and ideological vacuum regarding how the Russian people were to understand their place in a radically new society. The Bolsheviks, in their revolutionary ambition to forge a classless, post-national future, were confronted with the deeply rooted and varied identities of the empire’s many ethnic groups, including that of the ethnic Russians. This new political reality set the stage for a long and contested evolution of Russian identity under the Soviet regime.

In the early Soviet state, drawing on Marxist-Leninist ideology, the Bolsheviks envisioned a union of self-determined socialist republics, each with cultural autonomy, united under a shared commitment to proletarian internationalism. In practice, however, this commitment was limited. While Lenin endorsed policies of *korenizatsiia*, that is, the promotion of non-Russian languages and local elites within minority republics, no real political sovereignty was given to these groups. Ethnic Russians (*russkie*), while publicly discouraged from expressing nationalist sentiment, continued to dominate the central institutions of the Communist Party, military, and state apparatus. As Slezkine (1994) has observed, the Russians occupied a privileged cultural and political position within this multinational federation, often serving as the default or “elder

brother” in the Soviet “family” of nations. The Soviet Union thus emerged as a peculiar hybrid: formally a civic, multinational state grounded in Marxist universalism, but substantively an empire where the Russian language, culture, and worldview exerted hegemonic influence (Kolstø, 2000).

This tension between ideology and practice persisted and deepened under Stalin, who drastically reoriented national policy. Though initially a participant in *korenizatsiia*, Stalin soon began to dismantle minority institutions, crack down on ethnic elites, and centralise cultural life under Russian norms. The Soviet state increasingly relied on the Russian language, history, and symbolism to foster cohesion, particularly during the Great Patriotic War (1941–1945). Faced with the existential threat of Nazi invasion, Stalin reframed the Soviet war effort in explicitly patriotic terms, glorifying the Russian people as the main defenders of the motherland and invoking symbols of Tsarist and Orthodox heritage that had previously been derided. The image of ancient Rus’ national heroes like Alexander Nevsky, and even the Orthodox Church, previously fiercely persecuted, was rehabilitated to mobilise the population.

These mobilisations were not merely rhetorical. Stalin’s strategic leveraging of nationalism and religion demonstrated the emotional and symbolic power of Russian identity during times of crisis. As Riasanovsky (2005) notes, while such invocations lacked true ideological sincerity, they served as powerful instruments of political manipulation. Russian folklore, historical continuity, and collective sacrifice were recast not as relics of a feudal past but as assets for a unified socialist future. Yet, these gestures to Russian nationalism did not result in a formal elevation of Russian identity as a distinct category within the Soviet state. The RSFSR, Russian Soviet Republic, remained the only republic without its own party or capital, and Russians were expected to subsume their ethnic identity into the broader Soviet ideal.

With the death of Stalin and the rise of Khrushchev, a more ambivalent approach to Russian identity emerged. Khrushchev’s leadership (1955–1964) is often associated with a partial thaw of Stalinist repression and the reassertion of Leninist principles. He repudiated Stalin’s cult of personality and sought to reduce overt expressions of Russian chauvinism, yet the structures of ethnic dominance remained. Russian continued to be the language of government, higher education, and interethnic communication across the union. The Khrushchev era also witnessed a renewed campaign against religion, including the Orthodox Church, resulting in what Riasanovsky (2005) describes as one of the institution’s most repressive periods. With the religious void deepening, the regime intensified its promotion of the secular “New Soviet Man”:

a model citizen characterised by scientific rationality, physical fitness, moral purity, and unwavering commitment to socialism.

However, this vision failed to resonate equally across the USSR. For ethnic minorities, the imposition of Russified Soviet culture was often experienced as a form of cultural assimilation. While the language of “friendship of peoples” remained a hallmark of official propaganda, beneath the surface, the Soviet identity project struggled to reconcile its universalist ideals with the reality of Russian ethnocultural predominance, as discussed later in this chapter.

The Brezhnev period (1964–1982) brought a pronounced return to conservatism and institutional inertia, but it also further consolidated the association between Soviet identity and Russian cultural norms. Under the banner of “developed socialism,” Brezhnev promoted the idea of the unified Soviet people as a “new historical community.” Yet this seemingly civic identity was increasingly Russocentric. Russian language education became nearly universal, and the elevation of Russian historical figures, war heroes, and literature was ubiquitous. Ethnic minorities were permitted limited cultural expression, but only insofar as it conformed to the general Soviet narrative.

This duality of multinationalism in form and Russification in substance was reflected in the fact that Soviet passports continued to record citizens’ ethnic identity. One could not be simply “Soviet”; one was officially categorised as Russian, Ukrainian, Tatar, Uzbek, and so on. In reality, as some scholars have pointed out, “Soviet” functioned as a kind of political nationality that masked, rather than eliminated, ethnic hierarchy (Martin 2001; Wojnowski 2015). For many ethnic Russians, the Soviet Union itself became a continuation of Russian imperial identity under another name. The RSFSR’s lack of its own institutional structures, such as a republican Communist Party, reinforced the idea that Russians were the state, and the state was Russian.

It was at the end of the Soviet regime, during Mikhail Gorbachev’s leadership (1985–1991), that the contradictions inherent in this identity structure came to the surface. Gorbachev’s reforms, especially perestroika (restructuring) and glasnost (openness), inadvertently eroded the ideological foundations of Soviet identity. Seeking to modernise the economy and state institutions, Gorbachev initiated a process of political liberalisation that included greater openness to Western models and ideas. Unlike his predecessors, Gorbachev viewed engagement with the West not as a betrayal of socialism, but as essential to its revitalisation.

As Tsygankov (2010) explains, this “New Thinking” amounted to a fundamental re-evaluation of Soviet ideological assumptions, including the nature of identity and sovereignty.

This shift profoundly unsettled both elites and ordinary citizens. As the economic and ideological crises deepened, the shared myths that had sustained Soviet identity for decades, particularly those surrounding collective sacrifice, anti-fascist victory, and socialist utopia, began to unravel. Ethnic minorities reasserted their national distinctiveness, often framing it in opposition to perceived Russian domination. Simultaneously, ethnic Russians, long unaccustomed to thinking of themselves as a distinct group with its own interests, began to develop a sense of Russian national consciousness that was separate from the Soviet one.

For reformist thinkers like Gorbachev, the path forward was in liberalisation, individualism, and market reform, all filtered through a new civic ethos, reviving the ideas of the Westernisers. However, conservative voices rejected this direction, warning that the West lacked moral depth and that Russia’s salvation lay in rediscovering its own historical and spiritual traditions, echoing themes of the 19th-century Slavophile movement. This ideological rift not only destabilised the Soviet Union politically but also fractured the fragile foundation of its collective identity. The result was a profound identity vacuum: the Soviet ideal had been delegitimised, but a coherent Russian national narrative had not emerged yet.

In sum, the Soviet experiment with identity was marked by paradox. The state sought to transcend ethnicity while simultaneously relying on Russian culture to bind its disparate parts. It constructed a supranational Soviet identity yet never fully relinquished ethnic classifications. The Russians were at the core of Soviet power, yet denied their own national institutions. And while the Soviet Union claimed to offer a future beyond nationalism, it ultimately succumbed to the very national forces it tried to suppress. This legacy continues to shape post-Soviet debates about what it means to be Russian today.

The overview provided highlights the complex dynamics of Russian identity formation during the Soviet period. Various theoretical frameworks can be employed to gain a deeper understanding of the social and cultural processes that transpired during this era. Notably, constructivist theory offers valuable insights, particularly in the context of the Soviet Union’s emergence, when state authorities actively sought to dismantle existing identity constructs and establish a novel, cohesive Soviet identity replete with new rituals and traditions.

One of the most notable examples of this identity transformation is the adoption of New Year celebrations in place of Christmas, which was prohibited since 1929. This shift was officially recognised by the resumption of New Year festivities in 1936. Moreover, significant dates such as October Revolution Day, established in 1927, and International Day, commemorated since 1918, served as focal points for the promotion of this newly constructed Soviet identity. Collectively, these commemorative practices, evident in their nomenclature and observance, aimed not only to cultivate a distinct Soviet identity but also to cut ties with the previous imperial and Christian traditions that had previously defined Russian culture.

The events of the Great Patriotic War and the subsequent formation of national identity can be analysed through the lens of perennialism. This theoretical framework emphasises the significance of historical continuity and the resilience of the nation and its identity. In an effort to harness patriotic sentiments and enhance public engagement during the war, the Soviet leadership under Stalin invoked various enduring elements of Russian national identity, including folkloric and religious traditions. By appealing to historical roots and the population's deep-seated connection to the homeland, the authorities reactivated aspects of identity that they had previously sought to suppress. This strategic reorientation highlights the complex relationship between national identity and wartime propaganda, illustrating how historical narratives can shape contemporary societal cohesion and patriotism.

The constructivist approach to national identity offers insights into the formation of the “ideal” Soviet individual during the Khrushchev era. Similar to the early years of the Soviet state, authorities sought to transcend the narrative of continuity associated with the Great Patriotic War, instead aiming to re-establish a Soviet identity that aligned more closely with their political objectives during this period. This shift reflects a broader strategy to actively construct and promote a cohesive national identity that served the prevailing ideological and political goals of the regime.

Brubaker's institutionalist analysis of Soviet nationality policies shows how the USSR both suppressed and structured Russian identity. He observes that the Soviet regime “institutionalised nationhood and nationality” by erecting titular republics and official ethnic categories (Brubaker, 1994). In practice, this meant that many Russians developed a dual sense of self: citizens of a multiethnic Soviet state but also members of an “external” Russian nation. Brubaker notes that Soviet Russians and other national minorities often maintained an ethnocultural understanding of nationhood, even under communist internationalism.

Simultaneously, the Soviet regime acted in some ways like a nationalising state: for instance, promoting the Russian language and culture and treating the RSFSR as the Russian homeland. Brubaker's framework encourages viewing Soviet identity as a field of contested categories rather than a single fixed essence. Thus, Soviet Russian identity was not monolithic; it was actively shaped by state policies and socialist ideology (a form of civic identity) intersecting with inherited ethnonational attachments.

The uneven development theory may be useful to explain the following two aspects. Firstly, it highlights that in the USSR, despite officially not being discriminated against, ethnic minorities were at the periphery of social and political structures and should have internalised Russified Soviet identities. In the meantime, the RSFSR played the role of the centre. Secondly, in the final years of the Soviet Union, the phenomenon of looking toward the West can again be considered through the lens of this theory. Faced with a struggling economy and a rapidly deteriorating political system, the Soviet leadership once again perceived itself at the periphery of global development, viewing the capitalist West as a model to aspire to. Similar to the dynamics during the era of the Russian Empire, the West did not exert direct political or economic control over the Soviet Union; rather, it functioned as an aspirational benchmark toward which the USSR should move.

5.2.3: Modern Russia: Debates over Identity

The disintegration of the Soviet Union in 1991 marked not only the collapse of a country but also a profound rupture in the political, cultural, and social fabric of Russian society. Deprived of its ideology and imperial structure, the new Russian Federation faced the challenge of reimagining itself in the absence of the Soviet mythos. As some studies have emphasised, this moment was not just about inheriting the institutional remains of the USSR; it also required an entirely new "political software" (Godzimirski, 2008, p. 15), a recalibration of values and identity capable of anchoring the post-Soviet transition (Tsygankov, 2010).

In the early 1990s, under the leadership of Boris Yeltsin, the new Russian state embarked on an ambitious project of national self-definition. With the collapse of Marxist-Leninist ideology and the socialist utopia, Yeltsin's government oriented itself toward Western liberalism, embracing market reforms, democratic pluralism, and civic nationalism. The prevailing assumption among reformist elites was that Russia, long distorted by Soviet communism, was inherently a part of the Western cultural and political tradition. Many policymakers and

intellectuals drew inspiration from the nineteenth-century Westernisers, viewing the post-Soviet transition as a return to Russia's "natural" European trajectory (Tsygankov, 2010).

However, the problem for post-Soviet Russia was that the newly proposed liberal, pluralistic, and Western identity lacked organic roots in the lived past of the country for almost 80 years. Most Russians had never known life outside the Soviet system, and the abrupt end of the Soviet system along with the embrace of capitalism and Western norms produced ontological insecurity and confusion. Yeltsin's attempts to forge a non-ethnic civic identity, referring to all nationals of the Russian Federation regardless of ethnicity, met with significant resistance, particularly from nationalist movements and parties on both the left and right. These critics associated civic identity with Western liberalism and accused Yeltsin's government of eroding Russian cultural and spiritual foundations.

The cultural sphere reflected these tensions. In 1996, the Yeltsin administration launched a state-sponsored contest to define a new national idea, calling intellectuals, artists, and ordinary citizens to articulate a vision for post-Soviet Russia. Yet despite receiving thousands of entries, the contest was ultimately abandoned, and no winner could be declared. This failure symbolised the broader identity crisis: there was no shared narrative capable of uniting the population in the wake of Soviet collapse (Laruelle, 2011).

The late 1990s only deepened the social and economic anxieties. The financial collapse of 1998, combined with the war in Chechnya and growing public disillusionment with the promises of liberal reform, intensified a collective sense of national humiliation. As Bobo (2008) suggests, four main factors contributed to the inability to formulate a clear national idea at the period: the vacuum of identity, the dysfunctionality of post-Soviet institutions, endemic corruption, and policy failures. Amid this climate, identity became not a unifying principle, but a field of ideological conflict, with competing narratives of Russia's past, present, and future competing for dominance.

It was in this context of uncertainty that Vladimir Putin rose to power in 1999. From the start of his presidency, Putin recognized the problem of a lack of the national identity and sought to construct one based on the idea of Russian distinctiveness, showing preference to the Slavophiles. Early in his first term, he emphasized the need for shared cultural values and a unified historical memory. In his 2000 address to the Federal Assembly, he called for "a consensus on goals" rooted in the country's unique civilizational experience. Unlike the West,

Putin argued, Russia's development followed a "special path," shaped by Orthodox Christianity, imperial tradition, and collective endurance.

This narrative was not only political. Under Putin, national identity became a strategic resource, embedded in state ideology and foreign policy. His administration sought to reconcile elements of Soviet nostalgia with pre-revolutionary imperial symbolism, producing what some scholars have called a "neo-traditionalist" identity model (Laruelle, 2015). This was evident in the state's embrace of figures like Peter the Great, Catherine the Great, and Joseph Stalin, reinterpreted as strong leaders who embodied Russia's greatness. The canonization of national suffering and sacrifice, especially through the glorification of the Great Patriotic War, became central to this identity. Museums, school curricula, and patriotic holidays were reoriented to emphasize continuity, sacrifice, and heroism.

Religion, particularly Orthodox Christianity, also re-emerged as a vital element of national self-understanding. Although the Russian Orthodox Church had been marginalized during the Soviet era, it now became a privileged partner of the state. Putin presented Orthodoxy not merely as a personal faith, but as the spiritual backbone of the Russian nation. Starting in the mid-2000s, he increasingly framed Russian identity in terms of moral and religious exceptionalism, positioning Russia as a bastion of traditional values in contrast to the moral relativism of the secular West (Mitrokhin, 2009).

Amid this surge of traditionalist rhetoric, Dmitry Medvedev's presidency (2008–2012) appears as another shift towards the West. Though closely aligned with Putin, Medvedev attempted to modernize Russia's image and institutions. He promoted a vision of Russia as a high-tech, innovation-driven state, and called for greater engagement with global markets and political norms. His slogan of "modernizatsiya i innovatsiya" (modernization and innovation) aimed to distance Russia from Soviet legacies and foster a more cosmopolitan civic identity. Medvedev's Russia was open to Western investment, digital technologies, and political cooperation, exemplified by his support for U.S.-Russia relations during the "reset" period. However, his vision failed to generate broad social acceptance, and many Russians perceived his initiatives as elitist or disconnected from everyday life.

In the years following Putin's terms, the government deepened the ideological consolidation of Russian identity along traditionalist lines. Putin's references to Ivan Ilyin, the émigré philosopher and developer of Eurasianism, reflected a growing emphasis on spiritual and moral sovereignty. Ilyin's ideas that true Russianness entails obedience to divine authority, reverence

for the state, and resistance to Western corruption became main points of Putin's late-career discourse. As Laruelle (2019) notes, this identity project is not static but reactive: it intensifies in moments of perceived external pressure and internal unrest.

This emphasis on the uniqueness of Russia, based on the Slavophiles' ideas, was also echoed in society. For example, in 2014, 80% of the population did not identify with Western values, and 42% actively disapproved of the Western lifestyle¹². Regarding religious beliefs, approximately 50% of the population considered themselves to be somewhat or very religious in 2021¹³. Furthermore, 46% of the Russian population supported the idea that the Orthodox Church should serve as a moral compass, while 39% advocated for the Church to uphold and promote traditional values.

In this ideological environment, ethnic Russians (*russkie*) have once again been elevated as the symbolic core of national identity, sometimes at the expense of the civic inclusivity once promoted by Yeltsin. While formal policy continues to speak of *rossijskij* identity, the reality is a growing emphasis on ethnocultural homogeneity, with non-Russian minorities often marginalised or assimilated.

Thus, over the past three decades, Russia's identity has undergone a dramatic transformation: from Western-oriented liberalism to ethnonational conservatism and civilizational exceptionalism. Where Yeltsin sought to integrate Russia into a global liberal order, Putin has sought to restore a unique Russian path rooted in Orthodox faith, historical continuity, and geopolitical independence. This identity has become both a domestic tool for social cohesion and a foreign policy instrument, reinforcing Russia's position as an alternative to the West.

The identity crisis experienced by Russia in the 1990s provides a crucial context for understanding the evolution of the Russian national idea under Vladimir Putin. These processes can be analysed through the lens of constructivism, particularly by employing the concept of "invented traditions" developed by Hobsbawm and Ranger (1983). In the latter part of his presidency, Putin appears to have sought to partially dismantle the Soviet-era identity, turning

¹² Levada Center: *Zapadnye obestsennosti* [Western devalues]. - <https://www.levada.ru/2014/10/28/zapadnye-obestsennosti/> [last accessed June 5, 2024].

¹³ Levada Center: *Tserkov i gosudarstvo* [Church and state]. - <https://www.levada.ru/2022/01/19/tserkov-i-gosudarstvo-3/> [last accessed June 5, 2024].

instead to the works of thinkers such as Ivan Ilyin. This shift has involved a revival of various traditions from the Russian Empire, exemplified by the establishment of the Day of Family, Love, and Fidelity in 2022, commemorating two Orthodox saints known as patrons of family life. Concurrently, the regime has reinforced existing traditions, such as the annual celebration of Victory Day, which honours the Soviet Union's triumph in the Great Patriotic War. Additionally, under Putin's administration, there has been a concerted effort to construct and promote the notion of "Russian traditional values," further shaping the national narrative.

Interestingly, this idea of "Russian traditional values," particularly as articulated within the context of Russian nationalism, reflects characteristics of an essentialist theoretical approach. Notably, there are elements of cultural primordialism, as articulated by Geertz (1963), embedded in Putin's construction of national identity. Specifically, Putin asserts that Russians possess distinct cultural attributes that both unify them and delineate them from other nations, particularly those in the Western sphere. Such attributes as Orthodoxy, a sense of duty, honour, and selflessness may have been strategically selected to serve specific political objectives; however, they are publicly portrayed as fundamental elements of Russian history and, by extension, contemporary Russian culture and society.

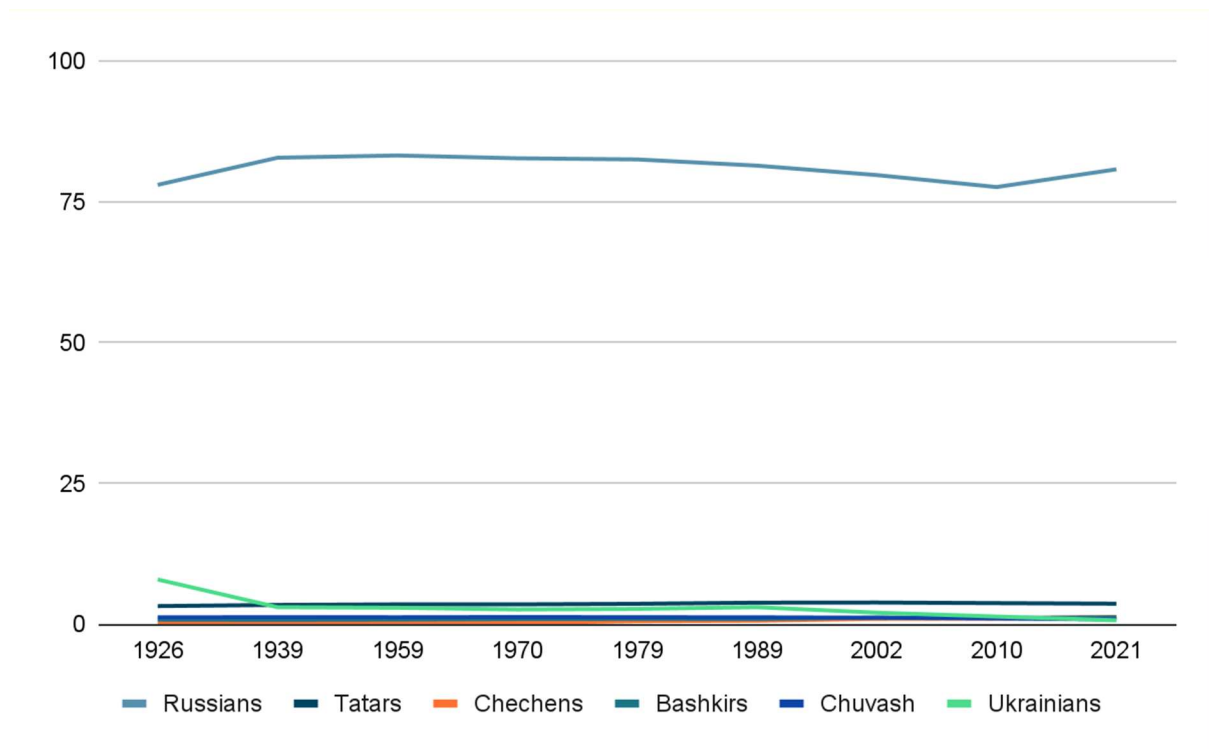
Moreover, the emphasis on the continuity of these cultural traits suggests a dimension of ethnosymbolism, a theoretical perspective that underscores the resilience of symbolic national features such as myths, cultures, and languages (Armstrong, 1982; Smith, 1998). Consequently, Russian national identity is often depicted as having withstood significant political transformations, evident during the Soviet era and the subsequent upheavals of the 1990s. This portrayal reinforces the notion of a stable and enduring national character despite the historical transformations.

It is essential to note that the construction of contemporary Russian national identity perpetuates a tradition rooted in the 19th century, characterised by the construction of identity through the acknowledgement of "others," particularly the West. This dynamic fosters an in-group bias, wherein Russians are often portrayed as embodying traditional values and possessing a greater sense of spirituality compared to populations in Western countries. Grounded in social identity theory, it can be suggested that political mechanisms are at play to disseminate this ethnocentrism throughout the broader population, potentially elevating it to a system-building ideology. In light of recent political developments and armed conflicts involving Russia, there has been a notable emphasis on the defence of Russian traditional values, the protection of

Russian populations abroad, and the promotion of the Russian language. These factors underscore the increasing significance of ethnocentric ideas in shaping not only domestic but also foreign policies.

5.2.4: Ethnic Minorities in the Territory of Modern Russia throughout History

Based on data from Rosstat, the Federal State Statistics Office in Russia, it is documented that there are over 190 distinct ethnic groups residing in present-day Russia. The population censuses in Russia facilitate individuals to express their ethnic identity by considering their lineage and self-identification. As per the most recent census conducted in 2021, the primary ethnic groups in Russia include Russians, Tatars, Chechens, Bashkirs, Chuvash, Avars, Armenians, Ukrainians, Dargins, and Kazakhs. Graph 1 presents the fluctuation in the sizes of these ethnic groups as per the census findings.



Graph 1. Ethnic groups in Russia, percentage, 1926 - 2021 (census data). [1. ábra. Oroszország etnikai csoportjai, százalékban, 1926–2021 (népszámlálási adatok)].

Note: The data is reported in percentages, given that the country’s size changed several times throughout 1926 - 2021. Only the ethnic groups from the 2021 census top ten that comprised 1% or more of the population at least once throughout the period are reported.

The graph reflects trends discussed earlier in this chapter. At the onset of the Soviet Union, Russian ethnicity and culture held dominance, as evidenced by the graph's depiction of an increase in the percentage of individuals identifying as ethnically Russian. Simultaneously, there was a decline in other ethnic identities, particularly noticeable in the case of Ukrainians. Following the end of Stalin's rule and adopting more lenient attitudes toward other ethnicities, there was a gradual decrease in the identification with the dominant Russian ethnicity, reaching its lowest point in 2010. This trend mirrors the circumstances of the 1990s, during which individuals experienced a sense of loss regarding their prior identity, and the state struggled to provide clear answers to the question "Who are we?" However, the graph also demonstrates a gradual increase in the percentage of people identifying as Russians since 2010, potentially indicating a general perception and growing acceptance of identity politics under Putin.

The diverse composition of modern Russia, encompassing over 190 ethnic groups, is symbolic of the nation's historical trajectory, encompassing its treatment of various ethnic groups amid periods of territorial expansion and subsequent strategies for governing diversity. This ethnocultural mosaic dates back as early as the 12th century, when Russia's expansion into the territories of the indigenous peoples of northern and eastern regions necessitated interaction with and incorporation of various ethnic minority groups. Non-Orthodox ethnic practices faced persistent persecution by the governing authorities, compelling their retreat into the fringes of society (Geraci, 2009). Moreover, Russia's northern and far eastern territories were construed as frontier areas during the eras of the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union, prompting state-initiated migration initiatives to bolster the presence of ethnic Russians in these regions.

Graph ## demonstrates that Tatars currently constitute the second-largest ethnic group in Russia. In the 16th century, Ivan the Fourth triumphed over the Muslim Tatar Khanates of Kazan and Astrakhan, thereby consolidating the domain of the Tsardom of Russia. The Tatar ruling class maintained their language and faith on the condition that they served the Tsar (Lazzerini, 1994). Moreover, the conquest of the Tatar Khanates facilitated the expansion into Siberia and, subsequently, in the 19th century, the annexation of the Caucasus region. The nineteenth century's conquest of the Caucasus region, coupled with the integration of diverse Central Asian populations, further altered the ethnic makeup of the empire (Nation, 2015).

The incorporation of conquered peoples into Russia signified the end of their independence, yet initially, little effort was made to diminish their distinct identity. In fact, as long as these groups were willing to acknowledge the authority of the Tsar, individuals from minority communities

could rise to prominent positions within the imperial hierarchy (Geraci, 2009). However, starting in the mid-nineteenth century, the processes of urbanisation, industrialisation, and the influx of Russians in the ethnic sense into the new “Russian lands” accelerated. For the first time, local identities and traditional ways of life were confronted with a substantial challenge. The process of Russification and conversion to Orthodoxy gained momentum in the 1830s, mainly targeting Muslim Tatars and Caucasian ethnic groups. This initiative sparked civil unrest, leading to a moderation of the policy. However, Russification was reinvigorated towards the late nineteenth century, shifting towards balancing the idea of establishing an ethnically Russian order to construct a powerful Empire (Geraci, 2009).

During the 18th century, subsequent to the annexation of Polish and Lithuanian territories into the Russian Empire, a significant influx of Jews migrated to Russia. Throughout the 19th century, Jews encountered severe repression and were prohibited from assimilating into Russian society. The implementation of the Pale of Settlement confined Jews to the western regions of the empire, and in the latter part of the 19th century, there were officially sanctioned pogroms against Jews (Safran, 2002).

The collapse of the tsarist regime in 1917 precipitated a surge in national consciousness among minority groups within the Russian Empire. During the subsequent civil war, the Bolsheviks forged alliances with prominent ethnic groups, offering them territorial concessions in exchange for their support. This practice was institutionalised as a fundamental tenet of the Soviet state. The Russian Soviet Federated Socialist Republic (RSFSR) was established in 1918, and diverse groups were granted varying degrees of territorial autonomy, representing a significant departure from the previous imperial administrative framework. The administrative system underwent a restructuring that centred on ethnic-based asymmetry, elevating ethnicity to a core organising principle of the Russian administrative order. By the 1980s, the RSFSR comprised 88 administrative units consisting of ethno-territorial entities and territorial formations. Despite its designation as a federation in the Soviet Constitution, regional and minority concerns were largely subordinated to the priorities of the central government, and measures were implemented to discourage the ethno-territorial units from evolving into hubs of nationalism (Beissenger, 2002).

The Stalin rule targeted a wide range of minority populations for deportations, particularly the people of the North Caucasus, Volga Germans, and Jews, and subjected them to forced assimilation into the dominant Soviet culture, based primarily on Russian ethnic culture. The

Jews were never formally recognised as an ethnic minority due to their lack of compact settlement. In 1928, the Soviet authorities allocated a territory in the Russian Far East for Jews, which later became the Jewish autonomous oblast in Khabarovsk Krai in 1934, facilitating the deportation of Jews to the Far East from the European part of Russia (Gitelman, 2001). However, only a small percentage of Jews settled in the region, with the 1989 population of the oblast consisting of roughly 9,000 Jews out of a bit higher than 200,000 total population of the oblast.

During the reign of Catherine the Great in 1763, the Volga Germans were granted land in Russia along the Volga River. In the Soviet Union, they were granted some autonomy. Thus, in 1924, the Soviet regime established the Volga German Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic with German as its official language (Koch, 2010). However, the republic was dissolved during the Great Patriotic War, and its German population, numbering almost 900,000 people, was forcibly deported to Siberia and Central Asia. Despite their rehabilitation in 1965, the German population was not permitted to resettle in the Volga region; instead, they relocated to Siberia, the Ural Mountains, and the republics of Central Asia, particularly Kazakhstan (Koch, 2010).

The policies of Russification were also facilitated by Soviet governance through the resettlement of ethnic Russians into regions previously not Russified (usually along the southern border of the RSFSR and the Soviet Union in general). Furthermore, starting in the 1930s, teaching Russian became mandatory, leading to the disappearance of many native languages from educational institutions. Despite these efforts, from the 1960s, a growing ethnic and national consciousness began to characterise numerous minority groups in the RSFSR. During Leonid Brezhnev's time, the rise of indigenous political and cultural leadership within many minority territories hastened these developments (Tuminez, 2003).

In the 1980s, a combination of increasing nationalist sentiments, the reformist government, and the ethno-territorial structure of the Russian Federation created the conditions for minority issues to take on significant importance within the RSFSR. In particular, ethnic republics like Tatarstan, Bashkortostan, and the Republic of Sakha (Yakutia) sought increased autonomy. This was evident in their declarations of sovereignty in 1990, with varying levels of powers claimed. For example, Karelia acknowledged the delegation of some powers to the centre, while Tatarstan's declaration did not mention the RSFSR at all (Tuminez, 2003).

The dissolution of the Soviet Union and subsequent reforms in Russia in the late 1980s and onwards exacerbated inter-ethnic tensions, highlighting the intricate ethno-political legacy and

the challenges associated with establishing a new multi-ethnic, multicultural Russia (Tuminez, 2003). These tensions often resulted in outbreaks of violence. Chechnya-Ingushetia and Tatarstan emerged as the first republics to challenge Moscow. In November 1991, the leadership of Chechnya-Ingushetia declared independence from Russia and promptly sought international support. The pursuit of sovereignty in the early 1990s facilitated the provision of legal status and advocacy for indigenous cultures and languages for minority groups (Beissenger, 2002). However, ethnic autonomy remained largely notional in regions where ethnic Russians predominated, leading to assimilation pressures.

During the power struggle between the ethnic republics and Moscow, there was a significant resurgence of linguistic, cultural, and ethnic practices among minority populations in the Russian Federation. This revival also extended to the emergence of religious organisations within the main minority groups (Beissenger, 2002). Notably, a phenomenon of “confessional coexistence” developed between the Russian Orthodox Church and various other faiths. It is worth noting, however, that certain factions within the Orthodox movement advocated for the prohibition of “non-traditional religions,” such as Mormons, Hare Krishna, and Protestant groups, and actively promoted anti-Semitism during this period (Beissenger, 2002).

Following President Putin’s ascension in 2000, the Russian Federal Government has shifted its focus to promoting equality over supporting ethnic minorities. Even though ethnic minorities continue to hold certain positions of authority in local governments, Putin has been resistant to implementing special measures for ethnic minorities and ethnic regions (Prina, 2015). These actions are part of a broader strategy to consolidate power within a centralised federal structure, with federal districts overseen by presidential representatives.

The relationship between Russia and its ethnic minorities can be analysed through the lens of uneven development theory. This overview highlights the fluctuating dynamics of power relations between the ethnic majority and minority groups throughout different historical periods. During the era of the Russian Empire, for instance, Russia sought territorial expansion, leveraging the resources of newly acquired lands while enlisting ethnic minorities to defend its expanding borders. In contrast, during the early Soviet period, the central government attempted to negotiate a degree of autonomy and promised certain freedoms to ethnic minority groups inhabiting specific territories, contingent upon their loyalty to the state.

However, this relative autonomy was curtailed under Stalin’s regime, which imposed a more hierarchical and centralised approach to the governance of ethnic minorities. During this period,

the Soviet government exercised significant control over the lives of ethnic minorities, dictating their settlement patterns and cultural expressions. Furthermore, it can be argued that there were systematic efforts to suppress the development of distinct ethnic identities through a series of cultural, linguistic, and educational policies designed to promote Russification and diminish local traditions.

Following the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the dynamics of ethnic mobilisation, as articulated in Nairn's (1997) theory, became increasingly evident. Ethnic minorities and their political elites re-engaged in efforts to attain greater autonomy, and in some instances, outright independence from the central authority, as it was attempted by Ichkeriya (Chechnya). A notable example of this phenomenon is observed in the Republic of Tatarstan, where the political leadership successfully negotiated for expanded freedoms. These developments contributed to the formation of distinct identities among the ethnic minorities residing within the borders of Russia.

Conversely, during the terms of Vladimir Putin, there has been a pronounced centralisation of power that seeks to delineate Russian identity through both civic and ethnic frameworks. While it is not accurate to assert that ethnic identities have been explicitly suppressed, there exists a discernible emphasis on the predominance of the ethnic majority and the proliferation of its cultural norms (for example, the reinforced role of the Russian Orthodox Church). This shift indicates a tension between the assertion of minorities' identities and the overarching narrative of a unified national identity.

5.3: Russian Diaspora Identity

Russia holds a distinct position within Europe due to its historical context of internal colonisation and control over regions, such as the Northern Caucasus and Central Asia. Compared to its European counterparts, Russia had limited exposure to international migration until the mid-19th century, focusing mainly on internal migration to facilitate the Russification process. The uniqueness of Russian emigration lies in the fact that it started relatively late, in 1910 – 1920s (or in 1881 as suggested by Williams (see Fialkoff, 1973)), after the main emigration waves in Western European countries ended. As discussed in *Chapter 4. The Problems of Russian Emigration Stages Identification and Study*, this thesis suggests identifying five main waves of Russian emigration: between 1918 and 1923, in the second half

of the 1940s, between the late 1960s and early 1980s, between the late 1980s and 2000, and the ongoing one starting in the early 2000s. The reasons for these waves varied, from political upheaval and instability to economic reasons.

In this work, diaspora is defined as “a people with a common origin, who reside, more or less on a permanent basis, outside the borders of their ethnic or religious homeland – real or symbolic” (Shain and Barth, 2003). This definition is helpful as it encompasses the ideational, cultural, and symbolic components of the Russian diaspora identity that are important for the discussion in this thesis.

The first major and documented wave of Russian immigration occurred during the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917 and the Russian Civil War from 1918 to 1920, significantly impacting emigration in the early 20th century. While Europe was the primary destination for most emigrants, approximately 30 000 Russians relocated to the United States (Maydell and Wilson, 2009). The majority of these immigrants, who the Bolshevik Revolution displaced, belonged to the Russian aristocracy. Fleeing their homeland to evade prosecution by the newly established Soviet regime, they were forced to take low-paying jobs to survive in their new country (Isurin, 2011). Despite their aristocratic background, these immigrants faced economic and cultural barriers in their new home, which impacted their identity. So, failing to integrate into the new society, they preferred to form and live in a diaspora, preserving their Russian identity and hoping to return back one day.

Following this, emigration from the Soviet Union declined in the late 1920s. For almost four decades, from the 1930s to the 1970s, a totalitarian political regime prevented Soviet citizens from leaving the country, requiring special permission from the state to travel overseas as tourists (Isurin, 2011).

The 1970s and 1980s marked a gradual change in the mobility regulations for Soviet citizens, leading to a new generation of Russian immigrants seeking a better life abroad. This group primarily consisted of Russian Jews who were accepted as refugees. While the communist revolution brought some improvements to the lives of the Russian Jewish community, including access to education and the opportunity to settle in major cities, they continued to face discrimination in the Soviet republics (Isurin, 2011); therefore, they used this opportunity to leave the country when possible.

The collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 intensified emigration from the former Soviet republics (Ryazantsev and Pismennaya, 2016). During that time, the Russian Federation experienced a significant brain drain, losing some of its most qualified professionals (Ryazantsev and Pismennaya, 2016). Post-Soviet Russian immigrants entered various countries in different statuses, including asylum-seekers, international students, professional immigrants, and spouses of host countries' citizens. These immigrants were generally well-educated and worked in diverse fields such as science, politics, medicine, finance, education, technology, social work, and development.

In the early 1990s, the Russian diaspora outside the CIS countries and the Baltic States was estimated to be around 2 million people. The majority of this diaspora was located in the USA, comprising approximately half of the total diaspora population, with significant communities also found in Israel and Germany, various Latin American countries, and Canada. The formation of this diaspora can be traced back to a series of migrations that occurred before and after the 1917 revolution and during the Soviet period. The dissolution of the Soviet Union and the subsequent era of economic and political uncertainty, combined with the relaxation of border controls, precipitated large-scale emigrations from Russia and other former Soviet states (Siegel and Bovenkerk, 2000). It is estimated that approximately ten million Russian-speaking immigrants established themselves in various countries globally during the first fifteen years following the disintegration of the Soviet Union (Elias and Shorer-Zeltzer, 2006). Additionally, since the emergence of the new Russian state in late 1991, there has been a notable focus on the "new Russian diaspora" in research (Shlapentokh et al., 1994). This refers to the 25 million ethnic Russians who became "beached" (Laitin, 1998, p. 29) following the abrupt reconfiguration of the Soviet borders. Subsequently, these individuals became residents in 14 newly formed national states outside Russia.

The literature indicates that immigrants from specific regions of the former Soviet Union, who emigrated during differing historical and political periods, may possess diverse resources for their identity construction. These resources are contingent upon the political, economic, and social circumstances in both their countries of origin and their new places of residence (Kopnina, 2005; Siegel and Bovenkerk, 2000). Thus, those who migrated during the Revolution could not fully adapt to the receiving countries because, despite having cultural and social capital, they frequently experienced economic hardship and, consequently, a lack of validation of their status and identity. In the meantime, Soviet Jews often sought to leave behind their past

experiences and were willing to internalise new cultures and identities, mainly when they referred to their ethnic background. The issue of identity is more complex for immigrants from the late Soviet Union and after its dissolution due to the complexity of identity policies throughout almost 80 years of the Union's existence.

So, when considering the two concepts of Russianness - national and ethnic - it is crucial to recognise the profound influence of the Soviet Union's legacy on the self-identification of migrants. The Soviet Union's policies actively promoted the forced assimilation of ethnic minorities and emphasised the dominance of the Russian language and culture among its population (Kononenko and Holowinsky, 2001). Consequently, individuals who migrated from and were born in the Soviet Union may still identify themselves as Russian through their native language (Russian-speaking) rather than by their ethnicity. The immigrants from the former Soviet Union collectively experienced and internalised comparable political and cultural frameworks for over three generations, utilising similar cultural resources in the construction of their identities (Melvin, 1995). Despite its obsolescence in political and economic terms, the socialist ideology continues to serve as a foundational element for identity formation among immigrants who were born and raised in the USSR, often operating as an implicit and unacknowledged frame of reference (Melvin, 1995). At the same time, some studies show that for some groups of immigrants (for example, Russian Jews, Russian Germans, and others), their ethnic self-awareness plays a crucial role in their identity, especially given that their host society labels them as "Russian" (Poppe and Hagendoorn, 2001).

David Laitin's (1998) study of the Russian diaspora in the near abroad has significantly influenced scholarly inquiry into the Russian-speaking populations, which emerged as a result of the dissolution of the Soviet Union. Laitin's conceptualisation of a new conglomerate identity of "Russian-speaking populations" as a "diaspora without a homeland, non-titular, Russian-speaking, and Soviet peoples" (Laitin, 1995, p. 284) is frequently used for the analysis of Russian migrants. While these populations did not possess a claim to nationality in the 1990s, their existence has undergone ideological transformation over the years, particularly by the Russian state, to facilitate the formation of nationalist claims. The Kremlin has strategically constructed and leveraged the notion of Russian "compatriots" to advance Russian interests abroad. In 1993, the Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation was adopted, thus officially recognising the Russian populations abroad. Subsequently, this "ethnic" diaspora has encompassed more cultural elements, leading to the formation of the concept of "Russian

compatriots.” As of 2010, being a “Russian compatriot” merely requires ethnic ancestry to one of the 185 nationalities present in the former Russian Empire, along with a “spiritual connection” to the Russian homeland, according to Rossotrudnichestvo.

The concept of compatriots pertains to individuals who serve as “transmitters of Russian culture, values, language, and intermediaries of relations between Russia and foreign countries”, as stated by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation. Since 2012, with the official return of Putin to the presidency, diaspora policies have encompassed the ideas of the Russian World. This Russian World is underpinned by three key elements: the Russian language, shared historical Soviet memory, and the Russian Orthodox Church (Kallas, 2016).

These ongoing developments need to be comprehended within the framework of Russia’s bordering practices. The Russian state has unilaterally endeavoured to redefine the physical and symbolic boundaries of Russianness and the Russian nation. These bordering practices aim to reconcile cultural, ethnic, territorial, and social diversity by integrating the civic (*rossijskij*) and ethnic (*ruskij*) conceptions of Russianness. These conceptions are delineated by politico-territorial and ethno-cultural borders, respectively (Kosmarskaya, 2005, p. 268).

In the post-Soviet space, Brubaker’s concepts of “accidental diaspora” and homeland nationalism are particularly apt for explaining Russian identity politics. He describes the millions of Soviet-era Russians stranded outside the Russian Federation as an “accidental diaspora”: communities formed not by voluntary migration but by the sudden movement of borders (Brubaker, 2000). As Brubaker notes, these diasporas “crystallised...through the sudden, traumatic movement of borders across people as multinational empires shattered” (Brubaker, 2000: p. 3). Russia thus became an external national homeland for these minorities. Brubaker observes that Russian state elites increasingly frame overseas Russians as part of the Russian nation – for example, seeing ethnic Russians in Ukraine or the Baltic states as belonging to the new Russian state (Brubaker, 1994). At the same time, Russia itself behaves as a nationalising state, promoting Russification and “compatriots” policies both at home and abroad. This dual role – homeland and nationaliser – explains contemporary dynamics: for instance, programs appealing to Russian speakers abroad or interventions in neighbouring states can be seen as homeland-nationalism in action rather than innate ethnic enmity.

The previous research on Russian immigrants shows several issues in relation to identity and adaptation in a host country. One of the profound challenges faced by individuals is the loss of identity, particularly prevalent among refugees and asylum seekers who may find themselves

stripped of their social identity, reduced to a mere embodiment of their physical selves (Colic-Peisker and Walker, 2003, p. 341). While this phenomenon is commonly associated with the nature of refugee status, it is essential to note that such traumatic experiences are not exclusive to this group. Even voluntary immigrants may encounter a similar loss of identity if the new socio-cultural environment fails to validate the aspects of their identity built upon their previous professional, cultural, and social experiences. The study conducted by Gang and Stuart (2000) on the economic implications of immigration from the former Soviet Union to the USA clearly demonstrated that a majority of professionals perceived a significant loss of human capital following their immigration. This was primarily due to a mismatch between their expectations of how their identity would be recognised in the new country and the actual response they received. As a consequence, they experience a severe crisis of identity, feeling they do not belong to their country of origin or the host country.

Another challenge for immigrants in general and Russian ones in particular is being labelled as inferior. The use of labels to categorise people can lead to social marginalisation and discrimination (Matheson, 2005). Immigrants, in particular, often face negative labelling by the host population, which contributes to the construction of an inferior identity. This labelling can be based on factors such as language fluency, accent, and cultural differences, leading to the perception of intellectual inadequacy and social exclusion. Host societies may use the abnormal or deviant construction of cultural identity to assert power and discriminate against immigrant groups (Cottle, 2000; Yurdakul and Bodemann, 2006). Language fluency, in particular, is a salient issue for immigrants, as it can impact their employment and professional identity. The presence of a strong “alien” accent and linguistic mistakes can lead to the perception of intellectual inadequacy and social disadvantage, leading to marginalisation and identification as outsiders (Rapoport et al., 2002). This issue was identified by Maydell and Wilson (2009) in a study of Russian immigrants to New Zealand.

To cope with the experience of identity loss and the associated negative societal perceptions, certain immigrants may choose to normalise their adverse encounters. Rapoport et al. (2002) proposed that engaging in the normalisation process involves the negotiation of unfavourable identity attributions by internalising the responsibility for such perceptions. This approach may be adopted by immigrants as a means of reclaiming their sense of identity, rejecting the imposition of societal norms for identity construction. Immigrants may reframe inferior identity

attributions as “normal,” drawing upon the perceived inherent disparities between immigrants and the population of a host country.

Alternatively, some Russian immigrants might choose to refuse the negative constructions imposed by the host society by being creative about their identity and communicating it to others. As shown by Maydell and Wilson (2009), some Russian immigrants, when answering the question “Where are you from?” – the question already implying some exclusion from the host society – opted for such answers as naming their current city of residence, their city of birth, or other local identities rather than national ones.

Russian immigrants can also aim to obtain the identity of the host society. This is possible through social integration, learning new cultural norms, and gaining some insider information about the cultural environment. This feature of blending in and becoming “invisible” among Russian immigrants was highlighted by Helen Kopnina in *East to West Migration* (2005). She studied Russian immigrants in two European cities, Amsterdam and London, who moved there in the 1990s and early 2000s. In particular, her research shows that Russian immigrants did not seek to form any form of community or diaspora but rather aimed at blending with the host populations.

Alternatively, it is possible for immigrants to learn about and internalise new norms while maintaining the norms of their culture of origin (Madison, 2006). For example, research has shown that some of the Russian-speaking population in Finland resist the pressure to align with nationalist sentiments, opting instead to leverage their flexibility in renegotiating their identities and affiliations across various domains. In an examination of adolescent Russian-speaking immigrants, Jasinskaja-Lahti (2000, p. 47) documented a diverse range of ethnic and linguistic self-identifications, identifying two distinct dimensions: one characterising their Russian identity and the other their Finnish identity.

This last point of getting a new identity while maintaining the original one could also be considered from the point of view of transnational identity formation, as this perspective allows for accounting for an immigrant’s desire to live in and identify with more than one culture simultaneously (Vertovec, 2001). However, it should be noted that this transnational identity is mainly spotted among recent immigrants from Russia – children and adolescents leaving the country after the collapse of the Soviet Union and later generations.

Furthermore, some studies show that those migrating after the year 2000 seek to maintain their original norms and identity by forming communities, engaging in diaspora activities, using modes of self-organisation, and so on (Byford, 2014). This could be attributed to the recent compatriot politics developed by the Russian state, which seeks to promote Russian cultures and values among immigrants and diasporic groups.

CHAPTER 6: NATIONAL IDENTITY AND MIGRATION PERCEPTION IN HUNGARY

6.1: Introduction

Migration is a significant phenomenon that has occurred globally throughout human history. Currently, intense social and political discourse surrounds the advantages and disadvantages of migration against the backdrop of long-lasting and emerging local and global conflicts. In receiving societies, there are concerns among specific segments of the population regarding the capacity and willingness of immigrants and their descendants to assimilate into the prevailing cultural milieu. Conversely, many immigrants are focused on preserving their cultural identity and resisting the pressures of assimilation for themselves and future generations. Similar fears are evident in various nations, particularly in Europe, where there are apprehensions about the integration of newly arrived immigrants into local cultures. This dynamic is also applicable to Hungarian immigrants and other new arrivals, whose ability to assimilate and integrate into their host societies has been and is scrutinised since their arrival in their new homelands. The situation is similar for immigrants to Hungary, including those from Russia, who need to balance integrating into Hungarian society and preserving their original identity. The interplay between integration and cultural retention poses significant questions for scholars and policymakers alike, requiring a nuanced understanding of both individual and societal factors influencing these processes.

From the empirical perspective, the chapter summarises the main empirical studies of the national identity of Hungarians living in and outside the country. Given the country's complex history, changing borders, participation in military conflicts, and other factors, the formation of the Hungarian national identity has not been a straightforward process. Furthermore, as the theoretical overview demonstrates, national identity formation is always ongoing, subject to social, political, and economic needs. So, applied to the Hungarian case, as this part of the thesis demonstrates, there have been changes in the constructs associated with being a Hungarian that are based on both in- and out-group comparisons, even in a relatively short period since the dissolution of the Soviet Union.

The connection between identity and context is even more pronounced when considering that Hungarians live outside their homeland. For example, as previous empirical studies show,

Hungarians from different migration waves and, hence, moving outside the country under various circumstances have different opinions on whether to retain their original identity. Additionally, the thesis pays attention to the issue of identity in the second and third generations of Hungarian immigrants who have been studied, especially in the USA.

Lastly, the chapter provides an overview of the perception of Russian immigrants in Hungary. Despite a limited number of empirical studies on the issue, it is possible to draw a preliminary conclusion that the general attitude is relatively neutral, meaning that Russian immigrants do not evoke any strong emotions in the host society. It seems that even the Russian full-scale invasion of Ukraine has not produced any long-term negative impact on Hungarian public opinion, as by 2023, Hungarians started to demonstrate quite a positive view of Russia and Russians. Despite this, Russians may still struggle to assimilate into society, which can be attributed to cultural and linguistic differences, among other factors. The chapter concludes with a discussion of current policies aimed at immigrants in Hungary, including those coming from Russia, and suggests some policy recommendations.

6.2: Hungarian National Identity: Inside the Country

The historical progression of national concepts in Hungary illustrates both the ethno-cultural and political dimensions of national identity (Gyurgyák, 2007). During the medieval era, the term *natio Hungarica* primarily described the Hungarian nobility, encompassing not only ethnic Hungarians but also various other nationalities. This framework underscored the primacy of political allegiance over ethnic affiliation, reflecting a broader understanding of community (Egedy, 2016; Halász, 2009). This political conception remained salient during Hungary's integration into the Habsburg Monarchy, a period characterised by Vienna's dominance in terms of maintaining law and order. Later, when the Hungarian establishment increasingly sought autonomy from Habsburg hegemony, they adopted liberalism as their guiding philosophical framework. The ethno-cultural notion of the nation gained prominence following the 1920 Trianon Peace Treaty, which resulted in significant territorial losses and left a considerable portion of the Hungarian population as minorities beyond national borders (Halász, 2009). In the wake of these geopolitical changes, Hungary pivoted towards an ethno-cultural understanding of nationhood, wherein shared cultural heritage and common identity became the primary determinants of national membership. The dynamics of national identity

were further complicated in the context of the Second World War, during which certain territories previously part of Hungary within the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy were temporarily reinstated. This brief restoration highlighted the tensions between historical claims, national identity, and territorial integrity, thus enriching the debate on the evolving nature of Hungarian nationality in both historical and contemporary contexts.

Following the conclusion of the Second World War, Hungary found itself behind the Iron Curtain, ultimately falling under the dominance of the Soviet Union. A significant aspect of Hungary's resistance to Soviet influence was the preservation of a distinct Hungarian identity. This theme was particularly evident during the Hungarian Revolution of 1956, a popular uprising against the communist government. John Matthews, a correspondent for Radio Free Europe who was in Budapest during the tumultuous period of the revolution, noted that the uprising was fuelled mainly by an energetic cohort of youth who had grown up under a repressive regime. Within the educational system, these young people were exposed predominantly to narratives that emphasised the superiority of the Soviet Union while receiving scant information about their national history. Matthews observed that these revolutionary participants took immense pride in their identity as "Hungarians," actively encouraging their peers to join the movement by suggesting that the ruling communist authorities were not "true Hungarians." Furthermore, the symbolism of the revolution was underlined by the fighters' use of flags that bore deliberate alterations, specifically featuring holes cut from the area where the crest of Saint Stephen – an emblem of considerable cultural significance that had previously adorned Hungary's national flag – once resided. While multiple factors influenced the revolution, the sentiment of national identity and the conviction that this identity was worthy of defence played a pivotal role in mobilising the population during this period of profound socio-political upheaval.

This 1956 movement can be analysed through the lens of the theory of uneven development, especially as formulated by Nairn. So, once Hungary became part of the Soviet Bloc, it took a somewhat peripheral role, as the centre was in the Russian Soviet Republic. Furthermore, the Soviet Union sought to enforce its dominant culture and identity on the countries of the Soviet Bloc. This led to a situation in which local elites and intellectuals started to leverage local cultural identity to mobilise the population to revolt against the centre. Even though the revolt was put down, it left its mark on the formation of the Hungarian national identity during the period when the country was under the Soviet Union's influence.

So, the contemporary Hungarian controversy surrounding the definition of the nation has deep historical roots. This ongoing debate remains pivotal in shaping the conflicts among various Hungarian political camps. The attitudes of Hungarian intellectuals towards their ethnic compatriots were significantly influenced by the Communist period, particularly under the Kádár regime (1956–1988), which promulgated an “anti-national” or “anti-ethnicist” stance. This regime condemned symbolic politics and nationalistic rhetoric. In the late 1980s, coinciding with the parliamentary elections of 1990, the question of national belonging resurfaced. By the early 1990s, diverse interpretations regarding the concept of the nation began to emerge, leading to a contest over its legitimate definition. The conservatives adopted a “national” perspective, considering ethnicity as the most essential part of the nation. Thus, according to them, ethnic kin residing beyond Hungary’s borders are integral to the national identity. These conservatives articulated a pressing need for the kin-state to actively support its ethnic kin against the assimilative pressures imposed by hosting cultures. Their advocacy included the promotion of collective rights for minorities, which entailed a form of autonomy, and a push for the unification of Hungarians through integration within the European Union (Bárdi, 2013).

In the post-Communist era, within the Hungarian left-liberal political camp, individual rights and the right to association are believed to be sufficient for minorities to speak out about their interests effectively. Therefore, within this group, the “anti-national” approach persists. The dichotomy between national and anti-national approaches proves to be mutually exclusive, resulting in a significant communication barrier between the two political camps. This dynamic engenders a substantial “deficit in political identity,” particularly when considered in the context of the Kádár regime’s policies and the subsequent developments (Bárdi, 2013). The juxtaposition of these contrasting “anti-national” and “national” attitudes has not only prevailed but has also actively influenced the kin-state policies of left- and right-wing Hungarian governments since the collapse of the Soviet Bloc. The parallel existence of these frameworks fosters a sense of unity in their corresponding political groups, thereby shaping the broader political landscape in Hungary (Bárdi, 2013).

This political debate reflects the scientific one around the issues of nationalism and national identity, as discussed in Chapter 3. Hence, the “anti-national” stance can be considered through the approach of Giddens that underlines the state’s role as administration and the nation is mainly defined as a collection of people living on the same territory. Simultaneously,

primordialism can be applied to analyse “national” ideas that highlight the importance of ethnic kin and ties.

In his analysis of the subject, historian Gábor Egry articulates the central controversy regarding membership in the Hungarian community with the critical questions: “Who, how, and why are individuals members of this community?” Egry argues that the citizens residing in Hungary constitute a “republic,” which he suggests has evolved historically. Shared concerns and collective decision-making processes predominantly delineate the “borders” of this republic. Thus, theoretically, this “republic” differentiates between individuals who inhabit the state’s territory and possess the rights to participate in the governance of communal affairs and those who reside outside its borders and are excluded from such rights (Egry, 2010).

After undergoing numerous geographical and political transformations throughout the 20th century, Hungary has emerged as one of the most ethnically homogeneous nations in Europe, with over 95% of its population identifying as ethnic Hungarians. Some scholars consider this demographic composition to contribute to the prevalent attitudes among Hungarian adults toward minority groups and “outgroups” within the country, such as immigrants, Jews, and the Roma population (Vukovich et al., 2012). So, as social identity argues, positive in-group evaluations in combination with negative out-group perceptions can lead to the development of nationalism. Thus, large-scale survey data indicate that levels of prejudice in Hungary rank among the highest in Europe, particularly within older demographic segments, of lower socioeconomic status, and possessing less formal education (Zick, Küpper, & Hövermann, 2011). Earlier research conducted by Csepeli and the co-authors (2004) suggests that national identity and a sense of pride among Hungarian adults surpass those observed in Western European countries, a phenomenon closely tied to prevalent ethnocentrism and xenophobia within the nation. Furthermore, sociological investigations indicate that nationalism constitutes a significant psychological and political force within Hungarian society (Örkény, 2006).

Several empirical studies have sought to understand the evolution of national identity in Hungary following its exit from the Soviet Bloc. For example, Örkény’s (2006) study starts from a hypothesis that one of the most significant indicators of national identity is the degree of attraction individuals demonstrate towards their immediate micro- and macro-environments. His analysis draws upon survey data collected in 1995 and 2003. The survey depicts potential physical environments within the sociocultural landscape as concentric circles in the questionnaire. The innermost circle represents the respondent’s place of residence, followed by

the subregion (county), the nation-state encompassing all Hungarian citizens, and finally, the continent, serving as a broader political, cultural, and historical reference point. Theoretically, it can be suggested that local and macro-level identities manifest in distinct ways within everyday sentiments. The micro-environment – which encompasses one’s residence and its immediate surroundings, whether a city or a village – fosters personal identification. In contrast, the macro-environment, which includes the nation and the larger region, plays a crucial role in either facilitating or impeding the development of a collective identity. Furthermore, from the study, it can be inferred that broader mechanisms of identification or detachment significantly influence the cognitive and emotional relationships individuals maintain with their sociocultural spaces.

The research findings indicate that a substantial majority of Hungarian respondents expressed a sense of national closeness in both 1995 and 2003, with only a marginal 4% exhibiting any negative emotions toward their country. The degree of national identification is particularly pronounced: nearly 80% of respondents in 1995 and 75% in 2003 reported feeling close to their homeland. Notably, this strong national identification suggests an accompanying connection to both local and global contexts; individuals who express a strong affinity for their nation tend to be more attracted to Europe and feel a greater sense of belonging within their immediate environments.

Overall, the responses from Hungarian participants reveal a pervasive sentiment of national closeness, with 50% indicating positive identification across various dimensions, a trend that remained relatively stable from 1995 to 2003. Furthermore, almost half of the respondents in the mid-1990s expressed an unwillingness to relocate, whether at the local or macro level, with 85% dismissing the idea of emigrating for better opportunities. This positions Hungary at the forefront globally regarding a reluctance to settle abroad under any circumstances. However, by 2003, a shift occurred in migration potential, as the proportion of immobile individuals decreased to one-third, while those expressing openness to the world rose up to 20%.

Consequently, Örkény’s findings suggest that Hungarian public opinion is deeply infused with a robust sense of spontaneous national identity. This is reflected not only in the pronounced feelings of closeness to the country but also in the low propensity for migration. A significant negative correlation exists between spontaneous national identity and the likelihood of migrating beyond national borders. This indicates that individuals who feel a strong connection to their homeland are also less inclined to consider living elsewhere.

The delineation of national identity extends beyond physical parameters to include the definition of group boundaries based on national identification. This process serves as both a formal (political and legal) mechanism for determining national affiliation and a symbolic affirmation of the nation as a community, functioning as a vital psychological resource for national identity. Örkény (2006) delineates seven criteria for being Hungarian, which encompass both cultural and political dimensions. Culturally, criteria include proficiency in the national language, self-identification as a member of the nation, and adherence to its dominant religion. Politically, the criteria encompass citizenship, birthplace, residency, and respect for national laws. The analysis of survey data reveals that cultural identification – comprising shared language, culture, and history – prevails over political criteria within Hungarian society.

National pride emerges as a significant psychological source of national identification, providing substantive content to the emotional attachment individuals feel towards their country and rationalising this attachment through strong emotional affirmation. Örkény's research indicates a temporal evolution in Hungarian national pride. In 1995, participants considered European values associated with modernisation – such as economic performance, democratisation, establishing an effective welfare system, and enforcing human rights – as having limited relevance to national pride. Conversely, respondents expressed considerable pride in national symbols, particularly Hungarian arts and history. By 2003, a shift occurred as European values gained more popularity among the survey participants, yet there was no corresponding decline in the significance of Hungarian symbols in fostering national pride.

As previously discussed, the concepts of closeness and ethnocentrism are interrelated, potentially acting as a ground for nationalism. A pronounced sense of closeness to one's nation may coexist with a strong national identity – whether grounded in political or symbolic terms – which is often characterised by ethnocentrism and could ultimately culminate in a nationalist form of national consciousness. This attachment may coincide with a high degree of physical rootedness, reflecting a reluctance to migrate, reinforcing ethnocentric sentiments and paving the way towards nationalism.

According to Örkény's research, Hungarian national identity is further characterised by relatively negative attitudes toward out-groups. This phenomenon can be attributed to the prevalent political ideology of nationalism, which often incorporates antipathy towards foreigners and immigrants. So, during the survey, participants were asked about their perceptions of minorities within Hungary, particularly regarding whether they preferred these

groups to assimilate or to preserve their cultural diversity. The results reveal a correlation between attitudes toward immigrants and sentiments regarding internal minorities. While xenophobic views toward immigrants have diminished over time, there has been a notable increase in adverse attitudes toward internal minorities, especially the Roma community. This could be explained by the fact that ethnocentrism plays a significant role in constructing nationalist sentiment. Despite the observed decline in aversion toward external immigrants, ethnocentric tendencies appear to be on the rise, fuelled by a belief in cultural superiority that promotes assimilation efforts concerning internal minorities.

From Örkény's (2006) analysis, it follows that a Hungarian respondent with a rightist political orientation is more likely to embrace nationalist ideologies, which can exacerbate xenophobia and promote ethnocentrism. While it would be inaccurate to suggest that rightist politics are solely responsible for fostering xenophobic sentiment, they do play a role in indirectly reinforcing intolerance towards diversity and external groups through a political and economic nationalism stance. Nonetheless, various indicators suggest that Hungarian society is gradually progressing towards a more tolerant stance than a radical nationalist outlook.

These nationalistic sentiments can be attributed to the political environment of the country during the period. The political climate during the 1998–2002 governmental term illustrates how right-leaning political forces sought to bolster the sense of community and their popularity by invoking nationalist concepts and constructing traditional values. This was evidenced by actions such as the relocation of the Holy Crown of Saint Stephen from the National Museum to the House of Parliament – a decision viewed by many as controversial – and the enactment of the Status Law, which provided special support for ethnic Hungarians living in neighbouring countries. This created diplomatic tensions in the international sphere.

Another attempt to comprehend Hungary's national identity was undertaken in 2004 when the country was included in the GLOBE study, which utilised Hofstede's six dimensions of culture. The findings revealed that Hungary's Power Distance Index falls below the median level, suggesting a cultural inclination towards independence, limited hierarchical structures for convenience, and enhanced accessibility of superiors, accompanied by direct and participative communication styles (Holicza, 2016). Additionally, Hungary demonstrates an individualistic cultural orientation, characterised by loosely-knit social frameworks where individuals primarily focus on their welfare and that of their immediate families. In terms of gender roles, Hungary is classified as a masculine society, wherein work is often prioritised over personal

life. Leadership is expected to be assertive and decisive, emphasising competition, performance, and resolving conflicts through direct confrontation.

According to Holicza's study, Hungary exhibits a pronounced preference for avoiding uncertainty, reflecting a cultural inclination where security serves as a critical element in individual motivation. The nation's high score in uncertainty avoidance indicates a reliance on rigid codes of belief and behaviour. In such cultures, there exists a palpable emotional need for established rules, fostering an intrinsic drive among individuals to be industrious, while precision and punctuality are generally upheld as normative values. Regarding temporal orientation, Hungarian culture demonstrates a pragmatic approach. In societies characterised by this dimension, individuals tend to believe that truth is contingent upon situational context and temporal variables. This perspective allows for a notable adaptability of traditions in response to changing conditions, alongside a pronounced propensity for saving and investing, underpinned by a sense of thriftiness and a commitment to perseverance in achieving tangible results. Furthermore, the GLOBE survey shows that Hungary has a low score of 31 on the indulgence-restraint scale, signifying a tendency towards cynicism and pessimism. In contrast to indulgent societies, restrained cultures like Hungary place limited emphasis on leisure time and exercise control over the gratification of desires. Individuals within this framework often perceive their actions as constrained by social norms, leading to a belief that self-indulgence is somewhat morally objectionable.

Summing up the aforementioned national and international data sources, it is evident that Hungarian culture encompasses slightly collectivist traits, although the younger generation displays a more individualistic orientation. Additionally, it embodies masculine values alongside a robust tendency for uncertainty avoidance. There is a distinct demarcation between "insiders" and "outsiders" within this cultural context.

To understand the current trend in Hungarian national identity construction, it is possible to refer to the political discourses around it, since it has been shown that the political environment affects individual perceptions. Thus, the discourse surrounding immigration in Hungary, particularly since 2015, has underscored the importance of an official national identity as constructed by the political elites. Prime Minister Viktor Orbán has been vocal in opposing the influx of migrants, framing them as one of the main threats to the country's national identity. For instance, on October 2, 2016, in light of the EU's proposal to resettle 160000 asylum seekers across Europe, with 1294 being designated for resettlement in Hungary, the government

conducted a referendum. The referendum posed a straightforward question: “Should the European Parliament be permitted to exercise its authority over the Hungarian government without the consent of the Hungarian government?” Orbán characterised the referendum as a matter of sovereignty; however, the rhetorical and cultural undercurrents that accompanied the vote suggested a more profound significance. Leading up to the referendum, Orbán referred to refugees as “poison” to Hungarian society, a sentiment that has resonated widely within mainstream Hungarian discourse. Many citizens cited preserving their “national character” as their primary motivation for voting “No” in the referendum.

Additionally, Orbán has presented a vision of an “illiberal democracy” for Hungary. In a notable 2014 address, he articulated that Hungary does not put a priority on any of the ideologies, but on the development of and strengthening the community that lies at the centre of the country. Therefore, he claimed, the government prioritises a national approach, at the same time not denying foundational liberal values and freedoms. So, the current political elite seeks to construct a distinct identity for Hungarians that would distinguish them from other ethnic (for example, ethnic minorities in the country) and political (e.g., the EU) groups.

6.3: Hungarian National Identity: Outside the Country

The national identity debate in Hungary is characterised by a complex interaction of migration cycles and territorial changes, particularly following the Treaty of Trianon. This interplay resulted in the fragmentation of the Hungarian nation, leading to distinct majority-minority dynamics within Hungary and the various states where Hungarians reside as a minority. Consequently, the complex nature of Hungarian identity – both within national borders and in diaspora – is linked to historical processes. For instance, during the 19th century, the Hungarian population lived under the domination of a German-speaking elite, which cultivated a leading class of a different ethnicity than that of the majority. The aftermath of the First World War exacerbated this situation, as a substantial portion of Hungarians became national minorities, bearing a state-forming majority national consciousness that remained confined beyond the borders of their homeland, a condition further reinforced by the territorial adjustments following the Second World War. After the Second World War, Hungary became part of the Soviet Bloc, cultivating a specific identity, trying to break with the past. In 1989, Hungary formed as a state in its current borders.

The study of Hungarian migration reveals several distinct periods, as Gázsó (2016) outlined. The initial migration wave occurred before 1849, characterised by individuals departing primarily for adventure and opportunities for wealth accumulation. The second wave, spanning from 1849 to the Compromise of 1867, was marked by political instability, prompting many to flee due to fears of persecution. The third period, which lasted until the end of the First World War, saw migration driven by economic hardship, starting mainly with dispossessed peasants and subsequently including those seeking economic advancement, particularly in North America (Kuncz, 1997; Gázsó, 2016). Post-World War I, the fourth migration period extended until the conclusion of World War II, including continued economic-driven migration and the relocation of individuals from annexed regions seeking new opportunities in the West or Australia. The 1930s political oppression further catalysed migration, with many Hungarians resettling primarily in North America, the United Kingdom, and Australia (Kuncz, 1997; Gázsó, 2016). The fifth period, beginning after World War II and continuing until the 1956 Revolution, was characterised by those fleeing potential wartime retribution, alongside a significant Jewish migration to Israel following its establishment in 1948. This migration was influenced by the shifting political landscape in Hungary post-war, which encouraged further emigration towards Western nations. The sixth migration wave commenced after the 1956 Revolution, marked by political refugees seeking improved living conditions, lasting until 1989. The seventh phase, beginning with the regime change in 1989 and persisting to the present day, exhibits migration trends reminiscent of earlier periods, significantly driven by the pursuit of better economic opportunities (Kuncz, 1997; Gázsó, 2016).

Given the historical context of these migration periods and the shifting geographical borders, it is germane for this thesis to examine the identity of Hungarians living in concentrated communities, sporadically and in diaspora. The experience of cultural existence in a minority context is characterised by duality as individuals navigate the competing influences of two intertwined cultural spheres. The transborder Hungarian culture constitutes an essential component of the broader Hungarian national identity; concurrently, it functions as a coexisting culture that perpetually interacts with local cultures (Pogonyi, 2017). This dual existence often manifests through the phenomena of dual citizenship, diverse cultural interactions, multiple identities, divided loyalties, and community life organised through complex network structures, thereby enhancing the relevance of stable organisations, particularly churches and religious institutions (Keményfi, 2011).

Sociolinguist Annamária Ulla Szabó-Törpényi conducted research examining the identity of French-Hungarian bilinguals residing in Paris. Her findings suggest that her second-generation interview subjects, born in France, experience a singular but complex identity rather than a dual identity (Szabó-Törpényi, 2012). The author finds that the interview subjects underwent their secondary socialisation primarily within the French educational system, while their Hungarian cultural influences largely stemmed from their family environment, characterised by the observance of Hungarian festivities and the use of Hungarian in domestic settings, rather than a direct cultural transmission from Hungary.

Additionally, in her study, Szabó-Törpényi (2012) categorises the names chosen by her interview subjects for their children into three distinct groups:

1. Hungarian names (or names perceived as Hungarian)
2. French names
3. Neutral (international) names

The author illustrates the historical variations contingent upon the birth periods of the subject's children. The second generation is categorised into two subgroups: individuals born between 1970 and 1995 and those born from 1995 to 2010. In the 1970s and 1980s, political migrants prominently favoured traditional French names for their children, such as Cédric and Claire-Anne, reflecting a strong desire to assimilate into French society. Conversely, following the end of communism and particularly after the turn of the millennium, there has been a marked increase in the popularity of neutral names among Hungarians residing in France. These neutral names bear similarities in both French and Hungarian, exemplified by names such as Sara/Sára, Liza, Victor/Viktor, and Daniel/Dániel. This shift in naming conventions signifies parents' intentions to instil a dual cultural identity in their offspring. Other prevalent practices during this period included the adoption of the French variants of international names used outside the home while retaining their Hungarian counterparts within the household, such as Alexandre (Sándor), Christian (Krisztián), and Sophie (Zsófia). Notably, the author also identifies cases where families exhibited anti-assimilationist tendencies by giving children distinctive and often untranslatable Hungarian names, such as Jenő (Eugene) and Attila.

In addition, the author examines the interplay between the observance of Hungarian feast days and national holidays. The study reveals that despite the participants belonging to the second generation receiving their formal education in France without any formal instruction in the Hungarian language, their adherence to Hungarian traditions and use of the language at home

facilitated the integration of both French and Hungarian cultural elements into their identities. The Hungarian celebrations attended by the informants primarily included national holidays such as March 15 and October 23 (observed in France during the academic year) and August 20 (celebrated in Hungary during vacation periods). Moreover, family gatherings referred to as Hungarian feasts included the feast of St. Nicholas (Mikulás) and name days, which are not widespread among the French and yet have been maintained by the interviewed families.

The author also explores how Hungarians residing in Paris and the Île-de-France region commemorate major international holidays, such as Christmas and Easter. Notably, the findings indicate that the majority of respondents celebrated Christmas according to Hungarian traditions, specifically exchanging gifts on Christmas Eve (December 24) instead of the French practice of December 25. Furthermore, many informants prepared traditional Hungarian desserts for Christmas, including beigli, which at times substituted the French *bûche de Noël*. A similar pattern emerged concerning Easter observances. Participants who opted to adopt French traditions and abandon Hungarian customs expressed concerns regarding potential “disadvantages” and discrimination their children might face in educational settings.

Zoltán Fejős’s research on first and second-generation Hungarian immigrants in Chicago deals with the significance of ethnic and cultural symbols. Fejős believes that the process of transforming cultural phenomena into symbols requires time, as evidenced by the case of Chicago Hungarians who have strategically selected symbols to represent their identity (Fejős, 1993). Certain symbols, such as the bridal dress traditionally worn in Kalotaszeg, have been removed from their original contexts, morphing from representations of local identity to becoming national or ethnic symbols for Hungarians in the United States. The study also highlights that the fragmented understanding of Hungarian history and culture among second-generation Hungarian Americans contributed to the consolidation of ethnic symbols. These symbols, often drawn from Hungary’s historical narratives, prominent figures, folklore, or even pseudo-folklore, as well as the contributions of Hungarians to American culture, have been subject to processes of typification and simplification in the American context.

For the second generation of immigrants, the evolution of cultural identity was not grounded in direct empirical life experiences as observed in the first generation. Instead, it involved the formulation of a new, mythical cultural tradition constructed from a specific set of symbols (Fejős, 1993). According to Fejős, the ethnic movement that emerged in the mid-1930s, subsequently interrupted by the onset of World War II, cannot be solely interpreted as an anti-

assimilationist response. Instead, it must be contextualised within the broader assimilation process. As immigrants attained relative financial stability, they began to embrace their ethnic heritage without shame, expressing pride through, for example, participation in multicultural festivals.

Fejős further explores the relationship between cultural pluralism and the sociopolitical and economic conditions of the host society. During the unstable period of World War I, for example, Hungarian immigrants were significantly restricted in their ability to openly express a dual allegiance to both their native and adopted homelands. They were expected mainly to demonstrate loyalty solely to their new country (Fejős, 1993). The latter half of the 1930s, however, marked a period of ethnic renaissance in the United States, characterised by a brief revival that coincided with the economic recovery following the Great Depression in 1934-1935, only to be curtailed by the beginning of the Second World War. Notably, ethnic festivals flourished during this time, with nearly every Hungarian American community hosting its own event (Fejős, 1993).

Anita Máté highlights a significant generational shift among Hungarian-American youth between the 1920s and 1930s regarding their attitudes toward their heritage. By the latter decade, the third generation became sufficiently integrated into American society that feelings of shame regarding their ethnic origins diminished. This change was also reflective of a broader transformation in the sociopolitical climate of the United States, discussed in the previous paragraph. This shift can be attributed, in part, to the increased visibility of ethnic cultures through organised festivals and the popularisation of radio, which facilitated the integration of immigrant cultural elements into the American mainstream (Fejős, 1993; Máté, 2011).

Éva Huseby-Darvas applies Benedict Anderson's concept of long-distance nationalism in her exploration of Hungarian return migrants who repatriated following the collapse of communism. She underscores that many Hungarian émigrés had had intentions to return should a regime change occur. However, when such a change happened in 1989, many of these individuals found that they could not return home and believed their contributions would be more beneficial from abroad (Huseby-Darvas, 2012). A notable challenge for these returnees was the scepticism from native Hungarians regarding the value of the knowledge acquired by those who had lived in the West, which they hoped to share to improve the conditions in their home country. Huseby-Darvas' research reveals that some Hungarians abroad perceived their inability to return permanently as rooted in the unique insights they possess, which are often

absent among those residing in the homeland. This phenomenon can be viewed as a kind of “virtual homecoming,” wherein the act of remaining abroad serves as an ideological platform from which they can engage with and influence contemporary political developments in Hungary (Huseby-Darvas, 2012).

The work of Anna Borbély represents the first longitudinal study of language shift within a bilingual community in Hungary. As a sociolinguist, Borbély conducted multiple return visits to her hometown of Kétegyháza to examine the transition from Romanian to Hungarian. Her field research spanned three decades, with studies conducted in 1990 (T1), 2000/2001 (T2), and 2010/2011 (T3). Employing a panel research methodology, she aimed to re-interview the same cohort of respondents from T1 during each successive fieldwork period. Borbély’s findings indicated that the observed language shift is not linear, but can be more accurately characterised as an “oscillatory movement.” In over 50% of the language use contexts analysed, the use of Romanian increased, contrary to expectations regarding the majority language, due to various sociocultural dynamics within the community (Borbély, 2014). She acknowledged, however, that this trend was context-specific while concurrently recognising a generationally-driven gradual language shift.

Csilla Bartha (2002) critically examined various models of Hungarian language use among immigrants, particularly focusing on the intergenerational communication between first and second-generation Hungarian emigrants in the United States. Her findings discern three predominant models:

1. The Authoritative Model: Families adhere to the exclusive use of Hungarian in all contexts, often reinforcing this expectation through constant reminders to children and other community members. This approach is particularly prevalent among families from deported populations, who apply a purist ideology regarding the use of the Hungarian language. The norms surrounding language within the Hungarian community further support this model, thus affording these families a relatively high social prestige.
2. The Interactional Model: This model is often enacted unconsciously by the speakers, who fluidly alternate between Hungarian and English based on conversational context, the topic at hand, and the interlocutor’s language preference. Parents employing this model typically communicate with their children in both languages, often adapting to the children’s language choices. Bartha notes that this strategy is more frequently observed among families stemming from the 1956 wave of migration, characterised by

parents who possess high proficiency in both Hungarian and English, frequently minimising their accent in English.

3. The Integrative Model: This strategy is rooted in the misconception that bilingualism can hinder a child's integration into society. Parents belonging to this model often believe that proficiency in two languages may adversely affect their child's cognitive development and impede their English language acquisition, thereby restricting their social mobility. This approach is prevalent among parents with a strong Hungarian accent in English and within ethnically mixed families.

Furthermore, Bartha (2002) demonstrates that the concept of Hungarian identity varies significantly across different Hungarian-American communities. For instance, in Detroit, she discovered that proficiency in Hungarian is not deemed a prerequisite for identifying as Hungarian. Conversely, in New Brunswick, a knowledge of the Hungarian language serves as a crucial marker of ethnic identity; members of the second generation actively seek to enhance their vocabulary while avoiding discussions on topics they cannot address without resorting to English. The prevailing purist ideology within New Brunswick's community – illustrated by the stigmatisation of incorrect Hungarian language use – contributes to a notably slower process of language shift compared to other Hungarian-American communities established by the “Old Hungarians,” who emigrated around the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. While the latter communities often experience a shift within three generations, this process in New Brunswick unfolds at a markedly more gradual pace (Bartha, 2002).

Additional studies highlight variations in language preservation strategies among diasporas in different nations. Generally, education serves as one of the ways to construct and sustain national identities, as argued by constructivists and, especially, Hobsbawm. Thus, in Australia, the Hungarian diaspora numbers between 67000 and 68000 individuals, predominantly residing in Sydney, Melbourne, and Adelaide (Gazsó, 2016). The migration influx to Australia began later than that to the USA, peaking in the mid-1950s (Kuncz, 1997). Following World War II, Hungarian refugees established opportunities for educating their children in their mother tongue, exemplified by the founding of the Hungarian Community School in Adelaide in 1958. This institution aimed to maintain Hungarian cultural identity by teaching Hungarian culture, folk dance, and language to the children of 1956 refugee families (Palotai et al., 2019).

In North America, particularly within the Hungarian diaspora in Cleveland, a notable approach to the preservation of Hungarian identity has emerged. The establishment of the first Hungarian

school in Cleveland in 1893, operated by the Szent Erzsébet (Saint Elizabeth) Hungarian Catholic Church, founded in 1892, marked a significant step in this endeavour. Initially, the school consisted of a single class taught by one teacher. However, by 1900, the institution had expanded to educate over 350 students primarily in English, with Hungarian language and Bible classes taught by the parish priest, supported by two nuns from the Orsolya Order (Fejős, 1993). The education efforts among the local Hungarian community continued to grow with the opening of the Szent Imre (Saint Emeric) Catholic Church in 1905 in the western part of the city, which contributed to the instruction of around 150 students in Hungarian language, history, and geography. This instruction was provided by both the parish priest and nuns sent from Hungary (Palotai et al., 2019). Furthermore, the establishment of a Calvinistic church in 1894 on the East side added to the educational landscape. By 1919, educational initiatives for Hungarian language and Bible studies, primarily offered on Saturdays and during summer holidays, attracted the participation of approximately 600 students. Several other congregations, including Greek Catholic, Hungarian Evangelical, and Jewish communities, also contributed to the provision of Hungarian language education (Palotai et al., 2019). Hungarian immigrants expressed the need for schools that equalled state institutions while remaining independent of religious affiliations; so, a pragmatic solution was devised. Diaspora members organised weekend and holiday educational programs with support from various churches (Fejős, 1991; Palotai et al., 2019).

In a different context, the Hungarian Alliance of South Africa, established in 1957, has aimed to preserve and propagate the Hungarian identity by emphasising the learning of the Hungarian language, literature, and culture. The organisation conducts reading events focused on Hungarian folk tales for children and classic and modern literature for older generations, alongside various celebrations of Hungarian holidays and culinary traditions (Palotai et al., 2019).

The discussion of Hungarian identity in regions beyond the homeland is incomplete without addressing the issue of Hungarians residing in neighbouring countries. Many states within Central and Eastern Europe are relatively new nation-states in search of the definition of their national identities and their relationship with ethnic minorities. With the exception of Romania, these states, which host Hungarian minorities, emerged as newly independent nations. The respective majority populations in these states often view themselves as the legitimate bearers of national identity and engage in nationalistic practices aimed at the assimilation of minorities.

For instance, ethnic Hungarians constitute the largest national minority in Slovakia, making up 8.5% of the population as of 2011. The prevailing narrative among majority groups often frames their cultural, economic, and demographic challenges as justifications for resisting minority influence (Brubaker et al., 2011).

The concept of nationhood holds unique significance for ethnic Hungarians residing in neighbouring countries, as they navigate their identity as members of both the ethno-cultural Hungarian nation and the political entities of their home states. The Treaty of Trianon in 1920 resulted in the displacement of over three million ethnic Hungarians, who transitioned from citizens of the Hungarian kingdom to minorities in newly established states. Consequently, these individuals formed “coerced communities,” facing immense pressures to assimilate into dominant cultures that sought to impose their identities upon national minorities. This historical context profoundly influenced the identity formation and national aspirations of these communities. Hungarian minorities often exhibit limited loyalty to the countries they inhabit; their histories are characterised by a persistent struggle to retain their ethnic identities (Bárdi et al., 2011). Despite their separation from the kin-state, ethnic Hungarians have continued to maintain their linguistic and cultural practices, preserving a robust sense of national identity.

The work of Brubaker, Feischmidt, Fox and Grancea critically examines the dynamics between the ethnic majority and minority communities in Cluj-Napoca (Kolozsvár) in Romania. The authors find that, in everyday interactions, Hungarians and Romanians coexist amicably; however, it is the ethnic entrepreneurs within the political elite who exacerbate tensions between these groups. The text delineates the majority nation as the “mainstream,” or unmarked category, which aligns with normative societal expectations, while the minority is framed as the marked category, diverging from this mainstream narrative. As articulated by the authors, “The normative cultural homogeneity that everywhere accompanies the rise of the nation state marks as minorities those that do not share the dominant culture; at the same time, it ‘unmarks’ and de-ethnicises the dominant culture” (Brubaker et al., 2008, p. 19). Within this framework, the majority is deemed “mainstream,” as it is situated within the expected norms, contrasting with the minority, which is identified by its differentiation from these norms.

The study illustrates examples of cooperation across various domains between the two groups. Nonetheless, the competitive pursuit of political power often highlights the ethnic character and the inherent asymmetry of power dynamics between the majority and minority populations. For ethnic Hungarians, who navigate life as a minority, their “marked” cultural identity has been

pivotal in the preservation and continuation of their cultural heritage (Brubaker et al., 2008). The majority ethnicity is frequently portrayed as civic, even while pursuing assimilationist policies towards minorities. In contrast, the minority is pathologised as ethnic and regressive, while the majority is often valorised for adopting an ethnic identity, characterised as a stabilising force rooted in civic virtues (Schöpflin, 2004). Demonstrative actions by minorities, such as protests against limitations on the use of their language, serve to remind the majority that the ostensibly “unmarked” dominant Romanian culture operates in an ethnic manner (Kiss, 2013).

Ethnic Hungarians struggle to fit within the political construct of the nation, which conflates citizenship with national identity as defined by the inhabitants of a specific territorial state. A definition of ethnic Hungarian identity that hinges exclusively on citizenship risks negating their cultural heritage and ancestral ties, rendering them unable to claim their identity based on cultural lineage. The states where significant populations of ethnic Hungarians reside do not typically adhere to principles of “civic nationalism” that advocate for a neutral stance toward minorities. Instead, these states embody ethnic nationalism, engaging in assimilationist practices aimed at cultivating a homogeneous national identity (Kiss, 2015).

In the context of ethnic Hungarians residing within the Carpathian Basin, three primary communities are often referenced: the collective of all ethnic Hungarians, those remaining in the territories of Hungary (following the Treaty of Trianon), and Hungarians living as national minorities in surrounding countries. Within this framework, the Hungarians of Székelyland are recognised as a distinct social group, posited as a “conceivable community” (Anderson, 1991). This enforced community, geographically detached from the motherland, shares a collective experience of minority status and nourishes aspirations toward minority nation-building (Bárdi and Szarka, 2007). The construction of this imagined community is due to the transformation of collective memory into a cohesive historical narrative, underpinned by an institutional framework that legitimises and commemorates this reinterpreted past through holidays, anniversaries, ceremonies, monuments, and cultural productions. Through such mechanisms, the conception of nationhood becomes institutionalised, and national identity is solidified. Three critical factors underpinning this process include: a collective remembrance of shared fate, cultural and linguistic ties that comprise the fundamental basis of social communication, and the promotion of equality among group members asserting their national identity – the foundation for civil society (Hroch, 2000). In the case of Székelyness, these elements are

palpably present; however, the context remains fluid, with continuous efforts undertaken to articulate signs of differentiation and self-identification, as illustrated by, for example, the symbolic representation of the Székely gate (Gagyí, 2004).

6.4: Perception of Russian Immigrants in Hungary: Perception, Policies and Issues

The Russian minority in Hungary is not officially recognised, and its demographic presence is estimated to comprise approximately 22,000 individuals. Prior to the 2016 micro-census, there was a notable lack of available data regarding the demographic characteristics of Russians in Hungary. This census was pivotal as it was the first to include non-official minorities, such as Chinese, Korean, Arabic, and Russian populations, within Hungary's demographic assessments. The survey provided information concerning nationality, mother tongue, and language usage among these minorities. The findings revealed that Russians, as a national group, account for 0,2% of Hungary's total population, while 1,6% of individuals reported proficiency in the Russian language. It is noteworthy that a substantial portion of the Russian-speaking demographic does not identify as ethnically Russian. Varying lengths of residence, citizenship status, and use of the Russian language within families characterise the diversity in this population.

According to Sergei Gnitiev's 2021 study, the integration of Russians into Hungarian society is incomplete. All participants in his research identified themselves as bilingual, often linking their bilingualism to distinct personality traits associated with each language. Some respondents reported a successful amalgamation of cultural identities, feeling a sense of belonging to both their Russian heritage and Hungarian society. Therefore, these participants strive to integrate into Hungarian society while concurrently preserving their Russian cultural identity and linguistic heritage. However, they collectively acknowledged that the necessity of navigating different languages in various settings, such as workplaces or public spheres, leads to a transformation of their personal identity, influenced by the environmental context. In contrast, other study participants expressed a reluctance to abandon their Russian roots, thus finding it challenging to embrace foreign cultural norms, despite their bilingual status.

Given that Hungary is characterised by ethnic homogeneity, the persistence of a robust dual identity, that is, the simultaneous maintenance of both Russian cultural affiliation and Hungarian civic membership, can result in ambivalent attitudes among the population of

Hungary. Unlike more pluralistic societies where maintaining several identities is normalised, Hungary's national narrative remains closely tied to a shared language, history, and folklore, with comparatively little institutional space for enduring cultural "otherness," entailing both foreigners and ethnic minorities. Consequently, Hungarians may view Russian-Hungarians' visible cultural practices, such as continued use of the Russian language in public, celebration of Russian Orthodox holidays, or communal gatherings centred on Russian heritage, as signs of incomplete integration or even a lack of willingness to assimilate. This can translate into subtle social distancing or negative stereotyping, particularly in times when political debates about migration intensify majority insecurities (as illustrated later in the text).

However, simultaneously, Hungary and Russia today share remarkably similar ways in which they conceptualise national identity as both place heavy emphasis on historical continuity, spiritual or religious traditions, and the ideal of a cohesive civilizational community standing apart from Western liberal individualism. In Russia, the state's emphasis on "traditional values" and a civilizational nationalism that valorises Orthodoxy and Slavic heritage corresponds in many respects with Hungary's conservative turn toward Christian cultural identity and scepticism of cosmopolitanism. As a result, the Russian-Hungarian minority often embodies a cultural hybridity that resonates with, rather than clashes against, prevailing identity paradigms on both sides. Their dual identity can thus be perceived by Hungarians not as a challenge to the national cohesion, but as an organic expression of shared ideas that emphasise historical memory, religious tradition, and the primacy of collective bonds over individualistic modernity.

In this light, the potential frictions arising from Russians' desire to preserve their ethnic identity within Hungarian society may be less destabilising than they appear. While the Hungarians might initially perceive Russian cultural distinctiveness as an obstacle to full integration, the general alignment in value systems between the two nations provides a stable normative framework within which dual identities can coexist. Additionally, as discussed in Chapter 4, Russia uses various soft-power means mainly through organisations such as the Russian Houses that seek to introduce the Russian culture to Hungarians and improve the dialogue between the two cultures. Furthermore, there is a variety of bi-cultural organisations and associations that aim at enhancing the cooperation and cultural dialogue between the countries through various art and educational events. This may result in a more favourable outlook of Russians, even when they do not wish to assimilate completely into the Hungarian society.

As previously discussed, Hungarian society exhibits a tendency toward insularity regarding immigrants, a phenomenon that can be partly ascribed to prevailing political discourses surrounding migration. During the migration crisis of 2015, Prime Minister Viktor Orbán characterised migrants as a legitimate security threat, framing this threat in cultural and, to some extent, religious terms. He portrayed the influx of migrants as a potential danger to Hungarian national identity and social cohesion. The ramifications of his populist rhetoric have resonated not only within Hungary but across the European Union. This construction of social identity, in conjunction with the securitisation narrative surrounding the migrant crisis, has engendered a pervasive climate of anti-immigrant sentiment among the Hungarian population, reigniting previously taboo discussions concerning immigration, multiculturalism, demographic shifts, national sovereignty, and ethnocentric politics. Public opinion polling underscores these sentiments; for instance, in 2016, 76% of Hungarians expressed concerns that an increase in refugees would elevate terrorism risks, and 82% believed that refugees exacerbate social conditions by competing for welfare resources and job opportunities. So, this construction of national identity can be interpreted by applying the social identity theory that highlights the negative labelling of out-groups may result in the spread of nationalistic views.

Despite Orbán having a “no migration” stance, evidence of a more complex approach emerged following Russia’s invasion of Ukraine. While he continues to depict immigrants as a threat, he has begun to differentiate between migrants from Eastern European regions and those arriving from other areas, particularly the Middle East and North Africa. Cultural references within his discourse suggest a specific antagonism towards Muslim immigrants.

Given these developments and political discourses, it is germane to examine Hungarian public attitudes toward Russians. In 2016, 16% of Hungarians participating in a survey claimed that their country should have the closest relationship with Russia. To put it into perspective, 44% claimed that Hungary should have such a relationship with Germany, while 13% with the UK (Krekó, 2019). Generally, Krekó (2019) shows that there has been a gradual improvement in sentiments towards Russia: in 1992, Russia scored 36 points on a scale of sympathy measured between 0 (very bad) and 100 (very good), while in 2018, the score was 48. The author argues that the possible factors behind this increasing attraction towards Russia could be a growing economic potential and strength of Russia, and the perception of Putin as a strong leader (Krekó, 2019).

Following the onset of the Russian full-scale invasion of Ukraine, initial sentiments among Hungarians towards both Russia and Ukraine were predominantly negative¹⁴. This response can be attributed to a social inclination to remain neutral in the conflict and concerns regarding potential increases in immigration due to Hungary's geographic proximity to the warzone. By 2023, however, these attitudes revealed a shift: while 23% of Hungarians expressed favourable views toward Russia, nearly half of the population advocated for a reduction in sanctions against the country. Furthermore, the willingness to accept refugees from military conflicts decreased; in 2022, 63% of Hungarians supported taking in refugees, a figure that reduced to 49% by 2023¹⁵. This decline reflects a broader change in public perception regarding the ongoing conflict. Notably, a subsequent opinion poll indicated that the percentage of Hungarians favouring closer ties with Russia doubled, growing from 13% in 2022 to 26% in 2023 (Bíró-Nagy et al., 2023). This suggests a gradual, albeit subtle, increase in favourable attitudes toward Russia, particularly in indirect contexts.

Regarding Russian immigrants, data from 2023 suggests a moderate perception, with approximately 40% of Hungarians expressing positive sentiments toward this group. To contextualise this number, ethnic Hungarian immigrants enjoyed positive perceptions from nearly 80% of the population, whereas merely over 20% of respondents viewed Arab immigrants favourably (Pepinsky et al., 2024). So, while Hungarians outside the country, especially if living in the neighbouring countries, may experience some pressure from the local political elites, Russians in Hungary enjoy both social and political acceptance, without evoking strong negative associations. This relatively neutral stance toward Russian immigrants, coupled with an overall improvement in attitudes toward Russia, may be linked to Hungary's evolving migration policies aimed at Russian nationals and political discourses around Russians.

¹⁴ HORVÁTH KÁVAI, Andrea: *Opposition voters do not share their parties' pro-Ukraine stance.* - <https://telex.hu/english/2022/05/27/opposition-voters-do-not-share-their-parties-pro-ukraine-stance> [Last accessed January 13, 2025].

¹⁵ FAGAN, M., CLANCY, L., GUBBALA, S., AUSTIN, S.: *Poles and Hungarians Differ Over Views of Russia and the U.S.: Two-thirds in Poland want increased sanctions on Russia; fewer than one-in-ten Hungarians agree.* - <https://www.pewresearch.org/global/2023/10/02/poles-and-hungarians-differ-over-views-of-russia-and-the-us/> [Last accessed January 13, 2025].

So, given the shifts in the political discourse around immigration and the results of various surveys on the perception of Russia and Russians, it can be argued that Russians in Hungary can be perceived neutrally or even slightly positively. This is based on the fact that Russians are white Christian newcomers rather than constructed as culturally distant immigrants from the Middle East or Africa. Therefore, it can be suggested that in a society where the latter cultures are constructed in the dominant political discourse through the prism of security concerns and cultural incompatibility, the arrival of Russian migrants evokes far less anxiety. Russian-Hungarians share visual and religious markers such as Slavic European looks and Christian rituals that are comparable to Hungary's self-image as a Christian nation grounded in Central and Eastern European traditions. Unlike immigrants from the Middle East, who are frequently cast in public discourse as potential bearers of radicalism or as unable to integrate linguistically and culturally, Russians are received as coming from a somewhat similar culture whose rites and holidays parallel those of Hungary's own Catholic and Protestant communities. This shared Christian heritage can mitigate cultural distance, making the preservation of a dual Russian–Hungarian identity appear less threatening to the ethnic Hungarians.

Moreover, available survey evidence suggests that Hungarians maintain a relatively neutral or even slightly positive stance toward Russia and, by extension, the immigrants from there. From the surveys cited above, it can be suggested that Hungarians tend to neither romanticise nor demonise Russia, but rather consider it pragmatically in terms of possible gains that the country and its nationals can bring to Hungary. This diffuse ambivalence contrasts sharply with the marked scepticism directed at Arab immigrants, where merely 20% enjoy a positive perception in public opinion polls. In short, Russians benefit from an associative advantage: their whiteness, shared Christian background, and historical ties with Hungary anchor them within an accepted cultural framework.

Taken together, the political discourse and the public opinion polls, it can be suggested that Russians benefit from an associative advantage: their whiteness, shared Christian background, and close national identity constructs to those of Hungary. The presence of Russians in Hungary is unlikely to catalyse profound polarisation. On the contrary, their bicultural orientation can be read as an extension of a shared Central and Eastern European civilizational space, one that underscores common heritage more than deep-seated difference.

As outlined in Chapter 4, “The Problems of Russian Emigration Stages Identification and Study,” Hungary has implemented several immigration initiatives that may appeal to Russians

considering emigration. These include programs that offer residence permits to entrepreneurs establishing businesses in Hungary, accompanied by various tax incentives that have been in place since 2016. Additionally, educational initiatives facilitated by the Balassi Institute and the Tempus Public Foundation have been developed to attract Russian students to Hungarian higher education institutions. Since 2022, Hungary has also introduced a digital nomad program designed to draw talented IT professionals and digital workers to the country. In 2024, a start-up visa was launched, specifically targeting foreign entrepreneurs interested in launching innovative businesses in Hungary. Notably, in 2024, Hungary announced that the National Card initiative, which allows “guest workers” from eight countries to enter the country without undergoing security screenings, would extend to Russian and Belarusian nationals. Holders of this National Card may qualify for permanent residency after maintaining their status for a minimum of three years.

Analysing these immigration policies within a framework of potential “gains” and “losses” (as discussed in Chapter 4), it becomes evident that Hungary stands to benefit from these initiatives, particularly as they are designed to attract economically active population groups. The arrival of skilled businesspeople and professionals seeking to advance their careers in Hungary represents an opportunity for economic enrichment and human capital development within the country. Consequently, it is advisable for Hungary to implement policies that foster a welcoming environment for these new immigrants, encouraging them to view Hungary as a viable long-term residence rather than a transit point. This is particularly critical for the digital nomad program, which currently has a limited one-year duration with the possibility of extending it for one more year. Moreover, Hungary could re-evaluate its policies concerning the families of immigrants, as many current regulations impose significant limitations. For instance, spouses may enter the country but are not permitted to work, and the digital nomad program does not provide provisions for the relocation of family members. Such restrictions may deter potential immigrants, particularly those of economically active age, the period of life frequently coinciding with family building. Policies that accommodate family relocation have the potential to enhance Hungary’s attractiveness as a destination for skilled migrants and mitigate the risks of brain drain and human capital loss in cases when Russian immigrants move to other countries.

CHAPTER 7: CONCEPTS OF IDENTITY AND INTEGRATION APPROACHES

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7.1: Introduction

International migration has been and remains an essential issue in the world. Various economic, political and social factors impact it. Castles et al., (2014) note people have always been mobile as they have permanently looked for new opportunities and better lifestyles. Migrants are motivated by various factors, from an opportunity to find a better job to living in a better climate, from being more socially protected to running away from persecution in their home country. In the last 50 years, the migration flows have intensified due to technological advances but also political and social processes happening in various parts of the world; therefore, the problem of migration got into the spotlight of the research agenda (Hooghe et al., 2008).

This chapter focuses on integrating immigrants from Russia and Ukraine (Russian speaking) into Hungary. Hungary is an interesting country to consider in terms of migration. Firstly, its location right in the heart of Europe makes it a vantage point for immigrants that consider the country as a transition point in their routes or a destination in Europe. Secondly, Hungary only recently opened for migration routes with the fall of the Soviet bloc; therefore, the society is still adapting to the new situation in the country, and the political system is still looking for ways of integrating immigrants. Thirdly, Hungary is a monoethnic country that, however, recognises the existence of ethnic minority groups in its territory. The last point also explains the choice of Russian and Ukrainian immigrants as although they might come from a similar background; they might undergo various integration paths in Hungary. It is due to the status of Ukrainians as a recognised ethnic minority in the country.

Therefore, this paper aims to reconstruct the main ways of integrating regular immigrants from Russia and Ukraine into Hungary as comparative study of different integration models. To achieve it, firstly, the author performs the literature review to understand the main practices of integration described in the literature and how the various political regimes impact them (*Literature review*). Then, to contextualise better the Hungarian experience, the experiences of different developed countries are described in the following section (*Approaches to immigrants' integration in various countries*) and the current situation in Hungary in terms of statistics, legislation and research outcomes in the field of migration (*Hungary and immigration: current state of affairs*). Based on all the previous sections of the paper, the reconstruction of possible integration ways is performed in *Possibilities for integration of Russian and Ukrainian immigrants in Hungary*. Lastly, the chapter concludes with a brief overview of the Hungarian situation, possible policy outcomes and directions for the policy-making towards immigrants' integration.

7.2: Literature Review on Identity and Integration

Migration is a complex social, economic, political and cultural phenomenon studied from many perspectives. However, the literature agrees that immigrants' integration is an important process that plays one of the crucial roles in understanding the phenomenon of migration (Papp et al., 2019). Park (1928) was among the first authors who proposed a theoretical assimilation model. Park considered the assimilation of immigrants and ethnic minorities into majority society to be straightforward and inconvertible. Therefore, according to this model, immigrants should assimilate into the culture of the receiving society by internalising its language and cultural customs.

Gordon (1964) further developed the assimilation model highlighting the complexity of the process and its different phases. In particular, he suggested the following ones:

- Cultural assimilation means the internalisation of the cultural practices of the receiving society;
- Structural assimilation implies the integration into the institutions and main social structures of the receiving society;
- Identification assimilation during which an immigrant identifies themselves with the majority of the receiving society.

With the development and spread of such ideas as multiculturalism and ethnic pluralism, the integration model has become more pronounced in academic literature. Although integration also implies that immigrants become members of the receiving society, unlike the assimilation model, it suggests that they might preserve their ethnic and cultural identity (Papp et al., 2019). Therefore, integration leads to a combination of identities: on the one hand, preserving one's culture of origin; on the other hand, internalising some cultural and behavioural features of a new culture.

Just like assimilation, integration is a multidimensional process that entails (Papp et al., 2019):

- Cognitive integration which means that an immigrant learns the language, norms, habits and behavioural patterns of the receiving society;
- Structural integration which implies that an immigrant learns and internalises institutional norms of the receiving society;
- Social integration during which an immigrant develops social networks with other immigrants, local residents and accumulates social capital;
- Emotional integration which means that an immigrant develops an emotional connection with the identity of a receiving society.

Therefore, integration is a complex process that has multiple dimensions. In the course of integration, immigrants seek to integrate into the receiving society's economic, social, and political structures. Additionally, they seek to adapt to and internalise the culture, values, and behavioural standards of the receiving society (Entzinger & Biezeveld, 2003).

Segregation and social exclusion are processes that are opposite to that of integration. However, they might happen due to the existence of economic, social and ethnic hierarchies in the receiving society. These hierarchies impact the ability of an immigrant to have access to such resources as job opportunities, accommodation, and education in society (Balcerzak, 2016; Simionescu et al., 2017).

Therefore, integration leads to establishing a complex relationship between immigrants and the receiving society. Additionally, integration is highly dependent on the latter's level of openness and prejudice (Bijl et al., 2009). The research also indicates the existence of a close link between, on the one hand, the established process of integration and, on the other hand, the history and the type of political system in a country. Walzer (1997) identified five regimes of

toleration differing in their approaches to the management of cultural, linguistic and religious diversity:

- *Multinational empires* consist of autonomous and semiautonomous communities which might have their political, legal, cultural, and religious independence. At the same time, the groups do not have a choice in leaving the empire as they are forced to coexist by an imperial bureaucracy that, however, does not interfere in the internal affairs of each group as long as taxes are paid and peace is maintained;
- *The international society* also consists of autonomous communities, but there is no bureaucracy that governs the communities. Therefore, communities or states that are a part of the global society should find an acceptable equilibrium of power. As a consequence, toleration is an integral part of sovereignty;
- *Consociations* are the concurrence of several communities that can negotiate on a constitutional arrangement, main institutions, division of offices, etc. Usually, communities have lived together for an extended period before the negotiations;
- *Nation-States* are characterised by a single dominant group's cultural and linguistic monopoly. Although the minorities could enjoy their freedom of religious expression, culture and language, it is allowed only in their private sphere. In such a way, the monopoly is not challenged.
- *Immigrant societies* consist of people who left their homelands and come to a new place. They usually arrive individually or with their families but not in formed groups; consequently, they mix with others. The state is neutral in its attitudes towards all the groups.

The Nation-States are spread the most. Given that the nation can be defined as a group with a common culture and beliefs, integration plays a crucial role in shaping the nation and constructing its identity. At the same time, the Nation-States might take a more assimilating approach toward immigrants and various groups residing in its territory as it aims at political, cultural, and linguistic unification. Hence, although the notion of assimilation is not officially used anymore, the notion of integration still reflects some of its features. Specifically, Nation-States anticipate that immigrants would learn the official language, respect and follow their culture and values, and comply with the State's accepted and common way of life.

The literature also suggests the following two main integration models: republican and multiculturalist models (Bertossi, 2011). Although these models have the same aim of ensuring

the equality of citizens, they differ in the modes of its promotion and ensuring. While the first one rejects all the differences, the latter promotes them. Thus, the republican model is based on the principle of blindness to cultural and religious differences; therefore, such societies seek to promote the same rights to all, despite possible differences. In contrast, the multiculturalist model is based on accepting cultural and religious differences, and such societies seek to promote the equality of individual opportunities. Therefore, there is the right to live according to one's culture and religion within the multiculturalist model. France was an example of the republican model in the European context, while the United Kingdom and the Netherlands illustrated the multiculturalist one. However, since the end of the 1990s, there has been a tendency to mix the two models of integration, as will be discussed in more detail in the next section of this paper.

While republican or multiculturalist models mainly focus on the policies and actions undertaken by governments, the current body of academic literature also highlights the role of social networks and social capital in the immigrants' integration. More specifically, immigrants' ability to find and establish social networks and accumulate social capital plays a crucial part in their integration into the receiving society. Social networks and capital can be helpful in finding social ties, work and accommodation, dealing with bureaucratic issues, etc. (Cartwright et al., 2008). Depending on the country of origin and destination, some minority groups have better established social networks than others. Social capital might facilitate integration in two major ways (Papp et al., 2019):

- Values similarity: immigrants and members of the receiving society share similar values, which facilitate social cohesion;
- The similarity of interests: immigrants and members of the receiving society share similar interests in such areas as power, economy, labour division.

Stone and Hughes (2002) suggest that there are two types of social networks: formal and informal. The former refers to the relationships formed within institutions, voluntary groups, etc. The latter refers to the relationships formed within families, friendship networks, neighbourhoods, etc. It is essential to develop both for an immigrant as formal and informal networks facilitate their integration. Furthermore, these two types of social networks are closely intertwined. Thus, an informal relationship might expand and transform into a formal one. The presence of immigrants' ethnic community in the receiving society might offer additional

integration opportunities; especially it concerns labour market and socio-cultural integration. Moreover, this integration might be even independent of the majority of the receiving society.

7.3: Approaches to Immigrants' Integration in Various Countries

France is an example of the Nation-State from Walzer's (1997) classification with an inclination toward the republican model. Thus, in 2004, wearing a veil was banned in schools as it challenged the majority's norms of behaviour. Therefore, the government seeks to promote an official "blindness" towards differences in religion, culture, traditions, etc. Simultaneously, the French government aims to promote policies combatting social inequalities. For example, to encourage social diversity, there should be a particular share of social housing in each urban community, as the urban guideline bill (July 13, 1991) states. Therefore, there is a slight drift towards the multiculturalist model.

Canada is an example of a softer Nation-State regime with the dominance of the multiculturalist model as it promotes integration that "does not imply the loss of an individual's identity and original characteristics or his original language and culture" (Davisdon Dunton et al., 1969). Therefore, the Canadian approach implies that an immigrant can preserve their culture of origin and doing it does not hamper their participation in Canadian society. In such a way, the Canadian state seeks to treat equally the cultures already existing in the territory and those brought by the immigrants. Consequently, the Canadian perspective suggests that integration is a mutual process that involves both the immigrants and the host society. Even though Canada fosters cultural and religious differences, it still requires a person applying for citizenship to demonstrate the knowledge of at least one of the two official languages (French or English), the main Canadian institutions, the country's main laws and citizens' responsibilities.

Switzerland can be regarded as a consociation as it is characterised by the cohabitation of communities together. Each community has its own clear territory, schools, culture, language, etc. At the same time, Switzerland's approach towards immigrants is more of assimilation that requires immigrants to internalise the norms of the hosting community.

The examples of Switzerland and Canada illustrate the difference between commonly confused notions of "integration" and "multiculturalism." While the first concept might accept the cohabitation of various communities that are indigenous in the state and, simultaneously, might

incline towards the assimilation of immigrants, the latter treats indigenous and newcomers' cultures equally.

The Netherland is an example of a consociation that has experienced a transition from the multiculturalist to republican model. In 1983, the Paper of Minorities was published that fostered respect for cultural and religious identity, individual opportunities for them and fought discrimination. The Paper also contributed to the extension of the "pillarisation" of Dutch society. Initially, there were four pillars: protestant, catholic, social-democrat and liberal, while after the Paper, it extended to Muslim. Each pillar has its own schools, universities, political parties, media, unions, and hospitals. However, since the 1990s, the Dutch system has been criticised frequently. The main criticism has been aimed at the situation in which the groups could live alongside each other without interacting. Therefore, there is no integration into society as there are no shared or common values. Moreover, at the beginning of the 2000s, there were racist incidents against the Muslim communities and, simultaneously, assassinations made by Islamists. As a result of these processes, in 2004, the government adopted a new integration policy. Thus, the policy introduced the integration test. Additionally, the promotion of the culture and language of origin was abolished. For example, the Law of May 24, 2004, abolished the opportunity to learn the mother tongues of immigrants in primary schools, and public institutions are recommended not to distribute documents in immigrants' language of origin.

The example of the United Kingdom is another interesting illustration of a shift from the multiculturalist model to the republican one. Additionally, it shows how the historical and political contexts might define the dominance of one of them. As a result of the independence of several British colonies, the UK government granted all of the citizens in the Commonwealth the right to settle, work and vote. Following it, immigrants originating from Africa, the Caribbean, Asia and the Indian subcontinent came to settle in the UK. However, they faced a wave of racism, which pushed the government to respond and create the integration policy (the Race Relations Act, 1965). The legislation promotes the multiculturalist integration model, fostering equal opportunities in relation to culture and religion. Since the beginning of the 2000s, the UK's political discourse towards immigrants has changed. Thus, The Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act was adopted in 2002, which established citizens' test for people applying for citizenship. The test checks the level of English, knowledge of the main institutions, history and legislation of the country. Therefore, it contributes to fostering a common identity and shared values.

Germany could be an illustration of an opposite trend as it moved from a republican to a multicultural approach. For a long time, Germany has been an example of a country in which citizenship was based on the right of blood and common linguistic and cultural traits. However, the legislation became more relaxed and aimed at integration with time. Thus, there is an opportunity to obtain German citizenship after living legally for eight years in the country. However, there is still a demand to pass the citizenship test.

7.4: Hungary and Immigration: Current State of Affairs

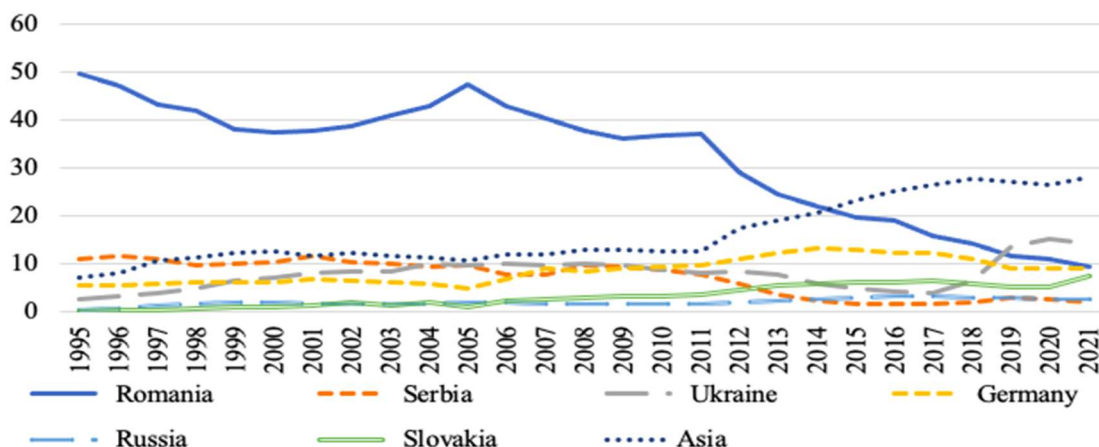
Hungary could be considered a relatively mono-ethnic country (Cartwright et al., 2008). Partially, it might be attributed to the history of the country. Hungary became open to migratory routes relatively recently. More specifically, it happened with the societal transformation that Hungary experienced in the 1990s during its transition from communist rule to an open market (Drbohlav, 2012). In that period, Central and Eastern European (CEE) countries became an important destination for immigrants coming from less developed countries in Eastern Europe (primarily Ukraine and Romania) and the Far East (Vietnam and China). Hungary quickly became both a transit and destination country for immigrants from these two regions.

Drawing on the statistical data, it is possible to conclude that the proportion of foreigners and ethnic minorities present in the country is relatively low. Thus, for example, one of the biggest groups is ethnic minorities. According to the Act CLXXIX of 2011 on the Rights of Nationalities, nationalities are groups residing in Hungary for at least one century, distinguished by their language, culture and traditions and manifesting a sense of cohesion with the aim of preservation of these. The Annex to the Act recognises thirteen national minorities in Hungary: Armenian, Bulgarian, Croatian, German, Greek, Polish, Roma, Romanian, Ruthenian, Serbian, Slovakian, Slovenian, and Ukrainian. According to the census of 2011, around 6% of the Hungarian population considered themselves ethnic minorities. The largest ethnic minority group is that of the Roma, accounting for approximately 3% of the Hungarian people.

According to the data provided by the Hungarian Central Statistical Office, foreigners residing in Hungary are the second biggest group of non-Hungarian origins living in the country. Thus, the official statistics demonstrate that the share of foreigners has been fluctuating between one and two per cent of the entire country's population. It reached its peaks in 2011, 2020 and 2021 when the share of foreigners was just over 2%. However, as Graph 2 shows, there have been

some changes in the composition of countries of origin of the foreigners. For example, while the share of Romanians has been shrinking, people coming from Asia have been contributing more prominently since 2011. Additionally, Graph 2 illustrates that the proportion of Ukrainians has risen rapidly since 2017, when a visa-free regime for short-stay travel was established between Ukraine and the European Union.

Other groups of foreigners living in Hungary are relatively low. For example, in 2020, the share of immigrating foreign citizens was around 0.45% (or 43785 people), the percentage of naturalised people was 0.02% of the total Hungarian population, and the number of asylum seekers and people granted international protection status was 247 people. Certainly, there have been some variations in the last years due to different global and local processes; however, the contribution of these groups of foreigners and immigrants has been relatively modest.



Graph 2. Foreign citizens residing in Hungary by country of citizenship (in %% from total foreign citizens residing in Hungary) [2. ábra. Magyarországon tartózkodó külföldi állampolgárok állampolgárság szerint (a Magyarországon tartózkodó összes külföldi állampolgár %-ában)]

Data source: the Hungarian Central Statistical Office. The Office provides the absolute numbers of foreign citizens residing in Hungary; therefore, the author calculated percentages from the total number of foreign citizens residing in the country.

To better understand the current situation with immigration and ethnic minorities, it is worth also briefly analysing the current legislation in the field. Although there is no self-standing integration legislation, several legal documents are pertinent to the studied topic. Thus, the Fundamental Law of Hungary (2011) grants ethnic minorities some rights. According to Article XXIX, every Hungarian citizen, considering themselves belonging to an ethnic minority, has the right to preserve their identity. Additionally, the Article grants the following rights to the

ethnic minorities: the right to collective participation in public life, to foster minority culture, to use their mother language, to have education in their mother language, to use their names in their mother language and to set up local and national minority self-governments. The analysis of the self-governments shows that there are two significant ways of using it. On the one hand, self-governance might encourage further social and economic integration into the majority society, as in the case of the self-governments of the Roma minorities. The other minority groups mainly exploit self-governance to preserve their cultural and linguistic identities (Cartwright et al., 2008).

Act CLXXIX of 2011 on the Right of Nationalities states individual and collective rights to people belonging to nationalities living in Hungary. Among the individual rights are the right to honour the nationality traditions relating to the family, foster their family relations, conduct their family celebrations and church ceremonies in their mother language, freely use their mother tongue verbally and in writing, to acquaint themselves with, foster, enrich and pass on their history, culture and traditions, and others. The collective rights include preserving, fostering, reinforcing and passing on their identity, establishing and operating institutions and taking over institutions from other agencies within the statutory boundaries, setting up associations, local and national self-governments, and others.

The Act also protects ethnic minorities from assimilation. In particular, Article 9 of the Act forbids any policies or practices that:

- Aim at or lead to the assimilation of nationalities into the majority nation or the exclusion and segregation of nationalities from the majority nation;
- Persecute or intimidate a nationality or individuals belonging to them due to their affiliation, make their living conditions more cumbersome or prevent them from the exercise of their rights;
- Aim at the forced removal or relocation of a nationality.

Although the documents promote equality and aim to eliminate any discrimination, there are some problems with discrimination against some ethnic minorities in Hungary. Mainly, it concerns the Roma people who are consistently discriminated against in such fields as employment, housing, and others (Kóczé, 2015). In Budapest, the housing problem is acute for the Roma people as they are frequently concentrated in dilapidated areas, which leads to the formation of physical and symbolical ‘ghettos’ (Keresztély et al., 2017). Furthermore, as it appears from the study by Keresztély et al. (2017), there is a division within Roma society itself

as there are ‘desirable’ and ‘undesirable’ Roma. The political discourse also encourages discrimination as it creates an image of Roma as unable to integrate into the Hungarian society due to their culture and morality (Kóczé, 2015).

As to the integration of various groups of immigrants, the following legislation is key for understanding the current situation in Hungary. Act LV on Hungarian Citizenship (1993) promotes the unification of citizenship within a family and aims at reducing the causes of statelessness. The Act provides for the acquisition (and termination) of Hungarian citizenship by right, naturalisation or other legal grounds. In 2010, amendments were introduced to the Act, making it possible for non-Hungarians who have Hungarian ascendants or can prove their Hungarian origin to be naturalised on preferential terms (even if they have never been legal residents of the country). Additionally, the Act requires people applying for Hungarian citizenship to pass the exam in basic constitutional studies in the Hungarian language. Therefore, it means that an applicant should know the main institutions of the country and the Hungarian language.

In 2003, the Hungarian government adopted Act CXXV on Equal Treatment and the Promotion of Equal Opportunities. According to the Act, the government is responsible for promoting equal opportunities. The Act also denotes possible grounds for discrimination that include national or ethnic origin and areas where discrimination might occur (education, employment, social security and health care, housing, education and training, services, etc.). The Act highlights the importance of prevention of discrimination based on these grounds and in the areas.

The research shows that although the Act states that there should be equality in education, there are some signs of discrimination in the Hungarian educational system. Primarily, it happens as the educational system, especially that from primary to high school, is not well-prepared to receive immigrant children. For instance, one of the criteria for determining the choice of school or class is the level of knowledge of the Hungarian language of an immigrant child (Cartwright et al., 2008). As a result, children with poor language knowledge might attend classes below their age range.

After Hungary became a member of the European Union in 2004, the government adopted the White Paper in 2006, which states that all EU countries should undertake actions to promote social inclusion to tackle the possible marginalisation of immigrants. Besides, the document argues that integration brings about economic benefits due to immigrants’ contribution to the

economy and reducing reliance on public services. Therefore, the White Paper proposes the following steps for integrating immigrants: preparedness of public services (housing, health, and education) for receiving immigrants, combined language and vocational training, availability of specially and trained mentors who would guide and provide support at the local level.

The Hungarian government adopted several legal documents related to the matters of migration in 2007. Firstly, Act II on the Admission and Right for Residence of Third-Country Nationals. The Act provides for different types of short- and long-term (or permanent) residence permits along with various grounds for restricting or denying them. Section 86/F of the Act also states that there should be no discrimination based on the knowledge of the Hungarian language; therefore, an applicant might use any language they understand and could be provided with a translator's services (depending on their involvement, the cost is born by an applicant or the immigration office).

In 2007, the Hungarian government adopted the first Migration Strategy for seven years. In 2014, the new Migration Strategy was adopted with a duration till 2020. One of the main aims of the Strategy is to facilitate open-minded and receptive attitudes toward immigrants. The document considers migration to be a complex phenomenon that impacts a country's economy, social relations, security and public order. According to the strategy, Hungary should support all forms of legal migration, contribute to the integration of legal migrants and people granted international protection, combat any form of illegal immigration and abuses regarding residency. The Migration Strategy also highlights that the immigrants should learn and respect such institutional norms as the European Union norms, the Fundamental Law, and other country legislation. Additionally, immigrants are expected to respect the norms and rules of social coexistence adopted in society.

Lastly, Act LXXX on Asylum (2007) is also an important document facilitating an understanding of the current framework in Hungary. The Act states that there is the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund that could be spent on the needs of asylum seekers in Hungary. The Act also allows that a person applying for asylum in the country can do so in their mother tongue as well as the results can be communicated in it. It should also be borne in mind that the Hungarian government introduced some amendments to the Act in 2015 on the background of the refugee crisis that affected Europe in general and Hungary in particular. For example, the government introduced lists of "safe" and "unsafe" third countries for asylum seekers. Also,

the notion of a “mass migration crisis” was introduced that allows the police and the army to participate in the asylum process.

To comprehend better the current situation in Hungary, it is worth quickly overviewing the attitudes of the Hungarian society towards immigrants. As the analysis of the survey data in CEE countries shows, Hungarian society is relatively closed in its attitudes towards migrants. In particular, in comparison with other countries from the CEE region, Hungarians are less open toward immigrants with different from the Hungarian ethnic or racial background and those coming from less economically developed countries outside of Europe (Botrić, 2016). Additionally, Hungarian society is rather pessimistic in its perception of the impact of immigrants on their country and society.

Similar results might be found in other research on the attitudes of Hungarians towards immigrants. From the current body of literature, it appears that Hungarians have a high level of concern that immigrants might seize their employment opportunities. For example, Oláh et al. (2017) show that the youth, especially those having labour experience, express concern that immigrants might take their jobs. Moreover, even ethnic Hungarians born in neighbouring countries (especially Romania) might face some negative attitudes from the country’s population (Fox, 2004). Mainly, such perception is formed due to the conviction that even these migrants pose a threat to the Hungarians in the labour market. As the study by Fox (2004) shows, one of the results of such attitudes is that immigrants and ethnic Hungarians born in other countries seek to avoid being placed physically or symbolically in the same group as the Roma. Mostly, it happens due to the highly spread negative stigmatisation of Roma people in the country.

Before discussing possible ways of integrating Russian and Ukrainian immigrants, it is germane to account for existing integration models in the country. Based on the models of integration and regimes of toleration discussed in *Literature review*, it is possible to suggest that Hungary could be referred to as Nation-States in Waltzer’s (1997) classification. Mainly, it is based on the presence of a Hungarian ethnic majority in the country that practically has a linguistic and cultural monopoly. Undoubtedly, there are some signs of consociation due to the presence of recognised national minorities. These minorities have the right to self-governance, use their language in private and public spheres, cultural and religious expression. Additionally, these minorities have coexisted with each other and the Hungarian majority for an extended period in the same territory. However, given a very moderate proportion of these nationalities in the

Hungarian population and the specificity of exercising their right to self-government (as discussed previously in the case of the Roma minority), it is possible to conclude that Hungary has more prominent signs of the Nation-State.

The Hungarian legislation also shows a mixture of republican and multiculturalist integration models. On the one hand, there are more prominent signs of the multiculturalist model in relation to ethnic minorities (one of which is the Ukrainian minority) in Hungary. As shown in this section, ethnic minorities can enjoy their rights to use their language, culture, religion, etc. Therefore, the state officially promotes acceptance of cultural and religious differences and promotes individual and collective rights of national minorities. Furthermore, the legislation openly prohibits any assimilation attempts or discrimination against these national minorities. However, the research shows that there are some problems with the implementation of this legislation due to a high level of prejudice against some ethnic minorities (especially the Roma people) which affects both policies and practices (physical and symbolical segregation, attempts of assimilation through the education system, etc.).

On the other hand, the legislation seems to adopt a more republican approach towards immigrants. It could be concluded based on the requirement of passing a course in constitutional studies in the Hungarian language for obtaining citizenship. This requirement implies that immigrants should at least learn and respect the country's institutional arrangements and learn the country's language. However, there is no such requirement for other types of immigrants who do not wish to apply for citizenship but stay legally in the country. Furthermore, there are some situations in which the immigration office might bear translation services costs. It should also be noted that the research shows that the Hungarian institutions are ill-prepared to deal with immigrants not knowing the language. As illustrated in the example of the school system, immigrants have little choice in finding a school or a class for students who do not speak Hungarian.

7.5: Possibilities for Integration of Russian and Ukrainian Immigrants in Hungary

Given that Ukrainians are a recognised ethnic minority in Hungary, it is possible to assume that there are different integration paths for immigrants from Russia and Ukraine. To make the analysis more complete, Hungary as both destination and transition country is considered. Thus, if a Russian immigrant considers Hungary as their destination country and wants to receive

Hungarian citizenship, the following integration scenario is possible based on the current Hungarian legislation and referring to Papp et al. (2019). Such an immigrant needs to be integrated cognitively and structurally. Specifically, they should learn at least the language and institutional norms of the receiving society. Emotional and social integration depend heavily on an immigrant's ability to establish social networks and accumulate social capital. As Graph 2 shows, the proportion of Russians living in Hungary is relatively small; therefore, it might be difficult to establish social networks with a group of Russian immigrants in the country. One of the main ways for developing social networks seems to be through education, work, or specialised groups (hobby, interests, etc.). In such a way, a Russian immigrant might develop social networks with other immigrants and local inhabitants, facilitating their social and emotional integration.

Alternatively, suppose a Ukrainian immigrant wants to apply for Hungarian citizenship considering the country as their destination. In that case, they also have to be integrated cognitively and structurally due to the legal requirements. However, social and emotional integration might develop differently due to the recognition of Ukrainians as an ethnic minority group in Hungary. Therefore, a Ukrainian immigrant might find social networks and accumulate social capital more efficiently by reaching out to the Ukrainian communities established in the country. Besides, connecting to these communities can facilitate preserving their cultural, religious and linguistic identity, despite the need to integrate cognitively and structurally into the Hungarian majority. Consequently, it might be easier for a Ukrainian immigrant to be integrated emotionally into Hungary due to the existence of Ukrainian minority groups. Additionally, just like a Russian immigrant, a Ukrainian one might seek to expand their social networks and accumulate social capital through education, work or free-time activities.

If Hungary is considered a transition point for Russian immigrants, they might obtain a residence permit for various reasons (education, work, health, etc.). In such a case, an immigrant is required to be integrated neither cognitively nor structurally, as the requirements for residence permits are softer than those for citizenship. However, obviously, a Russian immigrant might successfully establish social ties and accumulate social capital by connecting to individuals and groups from their education, work, vocational activities, etc. Such social relations might be concentrated on immigrants only if they do not wish to study the country's language or the Hungarian society as well. Therefore, there might be at least social integration of Russian immigrants if they consider Hungary a transition point.

Suppose a Ukrainian immigrant considers Hungary as a transition country. In that case, they do not have to be cognitively or structurally integrated into society, too, if they apply for various types of residence permits. However, unlike Russian immigrants, they might find it easier to be socially and emotionally integrated into Hungarian society again due to the recognised status of Ukrainians as a nationality minority. Hence, a Ukrainian immigrant might turn to these minority groups and organisations to establish social networks and feel integrated while at the same time preserving their cultural identity.

Summing it up, it is possible to conclude that immigrants coming from both Russia and Ukraine wishing to obtain citizenship in Hungary should be integrated cognitively and structurally into the receiving society. If the immigrants from these countries consider Hungary as a transitional point in their migration routes, there are no formal requirements for them. The main difference between these two groups of immigrants is in the ways of obtaining social capital and establishing social networks. In particular, for an immigrant from Russia, it might be more complicated to establish both formal and informal social contacts. At the same time, a Ukrainian one might rely on the Ukrainian communities and organisations existing in Hungary due to the status of Ukrainians as a national minority. Additionally, this status of Ukrainians facilitates preserving the language, cultural and religious identity of the immigrants, while Russian immigrants do not have such an opportunity formally. Therefore, the main difference is in the mechanisms of social and emotional integration of Russian and Ukrainian immigrants.

7.6: Conclusion

This chapter has investigated the main possible models of integration of Russian and Ukrainian immigrants into Hungarian society. The integration is considered depending on how immigrants consider Hungary: a country of destination or transition as it greatly affects the integration. The paper contributes to the existing body of academic knowledge in two major ways. Firstly, it discusses the currently existing integration model in Hungary. Secondly, it suggests a reconstruction of possible integration models of immigrants coming from a relatively common cultural background – Russian and Ukrainian.

As the research results show, if immigrants from these countries wish to obtain citizenship in the country, they need to undergo cognitive and structural integration due to the legal requirements. Alternatively, if they consider Hungary a transition point, they do not need to do

it. The main difference between an immigrant from Russia and Ukraine lies in social and emotional integration. While the former can struggle with establishing solid social networks in Hungarian society, the latter might find it easier due to the official recognition of Ukrainians as one of the ethnic minorities. Therefore, there might be some Ukrainian communities or organisations a migrant can reach out to. An important consequence of this difference is that Ukrainians might preserve their original identity formed in their homeland, while it might be more challenging for Russians. Therefore, it might be concluded that the Hungarian state applies a mixture of republican and multiculturalism models, as, on the one hand, it requires some people to adopt the new norms and respect the institutions of the country and, on the other hand, it facilitates the preservation of cultures of recognised ethnic minorities.

The research reflects one of the main policy problems of Hungary, which is a lack of a self-standing integration program or policy. Among the consequences of such policy absence is that some groups of immigrants might feel more discriminated against than others, as while some should internalise the new norms, others might preserve their identity. Therefore, it seems that the Hungarian government should undertake an attempt to develop a unified integration model aiming at combatting any form of discrimination and equal treatment of all the immigrants, be it within the republican or multiculturalist model.

Future research might investigate the difference outlined in the current paper in-depth by conducting qualitative research on Russian and Ukrainian immigrants in Hungary. Such research might reveal the main motivation for moving to Hungary (as both a transition or destination country) and whether the differences discussed in this paper have any influence on the immigrants' motivation. Besides, it is essential to understand the main mechanisms of establishing social networks and acquiring social capital that Russian and Ukrainian immigrants use, as they are vital for the process of integration. Another possible route for research is to study the Hungarian situation in a comparative context. For instance, the research could be undertaken in Hungary and another country that just recently became open to migration routes. In such a way, the study might contribute to understanding the main trends developing in such countries. Alternatively, a comparison might be made between Hungary and a country that has been receiving immigrants for a long period. Such research might highlight the specificities of the Hungarian context.

CHAPTER 8: COMPARATIVE HISTORICAL ANALYSES OF MIGRATION POLICY

8.1: Introduction

Migration policy has become a central issue for states contending with the pressures of globalization, demographic shifts, and growing political polarization. These policies shape the movement of people, influence labour market structures, and play a key role in constructing national identity and delineating the boundaries of citizenship and belonging. Despite the global spread of migration regimes, there is no clear understanding or explanatory framework for how such policies are formed, as each country's approach is deeply embedded in its unique political, social, and historical context.

In Chapter 7, we explored how national migration policies reflect broader integration strategies and identity narratives. We examined how various countries frame their migration agendas, whether through assimilation, multiculturalism, or other integration models, and introduced and analysed the case of Hungary, highlighting its evolving stance on migration, views on minorities and possible measures in integration approaches.

Given the inherent complexity of migration policy formation and implementation, shaped by factors such as political economy, institutional design, and national agendas, there is a need for further and deeper analysis. Hungary presents a particularly instructive case, as a sovereign state within the European Union navigating multiple migration-related challenges, namely, the 2015 migration crisis, a national policy pivot between 2016 and 2019, its pandemic-era responses in 2019–2020, and the recent legislative changes effective from January 1, 2024.

This chapter provides a theoretical overview of the main academic approaches to migration policymaking, including liberalism, realism, institutionalism, constructivism, political economy, and multi-level governance. It also outlines the stages of the migration policy cycle and typologies of national models. By situating the Hungarian case within these theoretical frameworks, we aim to illuminate the diverse and often competing logics that underlie contemporary migration governance, both within a single national context and across the European Union as a whole.

8.2: Theoretical Perspectives and Migration Policy Formation

To begin, it is necessary to outline the issue of migration policy formulation. While migration is generally classified as the “inflow” and “outflow” of people from a country, including the indigenous population, the migration policies of most states are primarily focused on the inflow of people, their arrival, admission, settlement, and subsequent integration. These policies mainly target foreigners or citizens categorized as first-country immigrants or “returnees” (including ethnic migrants), second-country immigrants (i.e., immigrants from other European Union Member States), or third-country immigrants. A third-country national is defined as “a person who is not a citizen of the European Union and who is not a national of a country participating in the European Economic Area (EEA) or Switzerland” (European Commission, 2020). This distinction separates EU/EEA/Swiss nationals, who enjoy freedom of movement under EU treaties, from all other foreigners, who require visas, residence permits, or work authorizations.

By contrast, migration policies rarely address or target the domestic population leaving the country temporarily or permanently. Such policies are typically formulated in response to the political or economic needs of the state, serving national or institutional agendas and often reflecting the status and priorities of the indigenous population.

Traditionally, migration policies are examined through political, economic, or social lenses. In this chapter, however, we approach migration policy as part of the broader national agenda, incorporating dimensions such as national identity, societal maturity, and openness, while situating them within historical context and the processes of political opinion formation. It is therefore important to recognize that migration policy, as illustrated by the Hungarian case, constitutes a form of social construction influenced by political factors (notably securitization), whereas the motivations of Russian immigrants moving to Hungary are shaped primarily by economic or political drivers (see Chapter 4).

Scholars commonly highlight several theoretical frameworks for understanding migration policy: liberalism and realism, neo-institutionalism, political economy, constructivism, securitization and risk governance, and multi-level governance.

Liberalism and realism offer contrasting explanations for state approaches to migration. Liberalism views migration through the lens of human rights, economic interdependence, and institutional cooperation, often favouring open borders and humanitarian norms (Hollifield,

2004). Realism, on the other hand, prioritizes sovereignty and national security, interpreting migration as a potential threat to state order and stability (Rudolph, 2003).

Neo-institutionalism emphasizes the significance of institutional arrangements, legal constraints, and bureaucratic legacies. Migration law and policy often become path-dependent and resistant to reform due to institutional inertia (Pierson, 2000). Legal frameworks and international treaties also limit unilateral state action (Guiraudon & Lahav, 2000).

Political economy approaches focus on the interaction between economic interests and state actors. Migration policy is viewed as a response to labour market dynamics, with businesses often supporting liberal migration regimes to address labour shortages, while workers' organizations may advocate for restrictions (Freeman, 1995). Electoral incentives further influence this dynamic, particularly during periods of economic uncertainty (Massey et al., 1998).

Securitization theory explains how migration can be framed as a security threat, thereby legitimizing exceptional measures such as detention, deportation, or militarized border controls (Huysmans, 2006). This framing has intensified following events such as the 9/11 attacks and subsequent refugee influxes, leading to heightened surveillance and enforcement at both national and supranational levels (Bigo, 2002).

Multi-level governance theory is particularly relevant to federated systems and supranational entities such as the EU, where migration governance involves complex negotiations between national governments, regional actors, and international institutions (Geddes & Scholten, 2016). Such interactions often result in fragmented or inconsistent policies, depending on political alignments across levels.

Constructivism posits that migration policy is socially constructed through narratives, discourses, and identity politics. It examines how societies classify migrants, for instance, as refugees versus economic migrants, or legal versus irregular, and how these classifications evolve over time (Boswell, 2007). Media portrayals and historical memory shape public attitudes, which in turn influence policy preferences (Geddes, 2003). Migration policy as “constructed” is often deeply rooted in national identity, collective trauma or pride, and cultural narratives, determining who is imagined to “belong” (Anderson, 1991).

Constructivist approaches yield both inclusive and restrictive examples. Canada's official multiculturalism and “nation of immigrants” narrative, while not free of contradictions, has

supported a relatively open migration regime. By contrast, Germany long resisted identifying as a “country of immigration,” framing its Gastarbeiter (“guest workers”) as temporary labourers rather than prospective citizens, until a shift under Chancellor Merkel. France and Denmark illustrate assimilationist approaches, requiring immigrants to adopt the host society’s language, traditions, and cultural norms.

While constructivism provides valuable insights into national migration policy formation, its practical application often depends on complementary theoretical perspectives, particularly neo-institutionalism in the EU context, where migration policies are shaped by overarching frameworks and the principle of free movement for goods, services, people, and capital, with restrictions largely applying to third-country nationals.

Notable constructivist scholars include Saskia Sassen, who analyses migration as emerging from the structures of the global economy and political order rather than simply the movement of people (Sassen, 1999); Christina Boswell, who argues that migration policy is often shaped by symbolic politics rather than evidence-based reasoning (Boswell, 2007); and Andrew Geddes, whose work explores how political discourse shapes divergent migration policies within the EU (Geddes, 2003; Geddes & Hadj-Abdou, 2020). Although Geddes does not focus specifically on Hungary, his research has informed more recent analyses such as Bradford & Cullen’s study of the Hungarian government’s post-2015 framing of migration as a “crisis,” employing populist symbolism, cultural memory, and anti-immigrant tropes despite economic reliance on certain migrant labour.

Szalai refines securitization theory by arguing that Hungary’s migration narrative during the 2015 “migration crisis” was not simply imported from Western European contexts but was strategically tailored to domestic audiences. This securitization campaign was proactive, preceding significant migratory inflows, and maintained dominance in public discourse with notable persistence (Szalai, 2023, p. 149). While Szalai’s approach aligns with the classical Copenhagen School, it also expands securitization beyond discourse to include material practices such as border fortifications, legal restrictions, state-sponsored media campaigns, and detention infrastructure, measures that also served to undermine civil society and limit EU oversight (see also neo-institutionalism).

Constructivism, both in migration and identity studies, is often criticised for difficulties in empirically measuring discourse or sentiment, for underestimating economic and institutional

constraints (Hollifield, 2004), and for overemphasizing media narratives while overlooking bureaucratic processes or the agency of migrants themselves (Favell, 2001).

Szalai's scholarship on Hungarian migration policy has not yet received extensive standalone critical review, but certain theoretical and analytical gaps can be identified. First, both securitization theory and Szalai's application of it tend to prioritise elite-driven narratives, with limited attention to counter-discourses from civil society, independent media, or migrant communities. From a critical security studies perspective (Aradau, 2004; Huysmans, 2006), these risks reinforcing state-hegemonic narratives and underestimating resistance or alternative framings. Furthermore, audience reception, a key dimension in securitization theory (Balzacq, 2005), is largely absent, possibly due to the limited visibility of public protest until more recent years, when anti-government mobilization became more pronounced.

Second, while Szalai situates Hungary's framing within Western European precedents, he does not systematically compare cases or trace Hungary's migration discourse prior to 2015 (Geddes, 2003), limiting the claim of "uniqueness."

Third, his focus on discursive securitization leaves relatively little analysis of concrete policy measures, such as legislative reforms (e.g., the "Stop Soros" law), resource allocation, or bureaucratic practices. This weakens the integration of discourse with practice, a key objective of the "sociological" turn in securitization studies (Balzacq, 2011).

To address these limitations, further research could incorporate works such as Juhász's *Securitization of Migration in Hungary and the Case of Endless State of Crisis Due to Mass Migration* (2020), which analyses the institutionalization of migration as a state of crisis; Szalai & Göbl's (2015) historical discourse study of Hungary's anti-migration campaigns; and Bernáth & Messing (2015) and Kiss (2016), who examine media framing and xenophobic continuity in elite narratives.

Despite the robust theoretical framework surrounding Hungary's migration policy, there remains a lack of targeted analysis on how specific policy shifts have affected particular migrant communities, in this case, Russians residing in Hungary. The next section will examine these dynamics within their historical, societal, and legislative context under the European Union framework.

8.3: Migration and the Formation of Sentiments in Hungary

To understand this interplay, it is first necessary to situate Hungary's migration trajectory within its historical context. Until 2015, Hungary's experience with immigration was limited in scope and relatively homogeneous, failing to generate significant institutional pressure or widespread social anxiety. Migration was primarily linked to geopolitical transformations, such as the dissolution of the Austro-Hungarian Empire and the Treaty of Trianon, the Second World War, and subsequent developments including the fall of the Iron Curtain, the Yugoslav Wars, the war in Kosovo and Migration Crisis of 2015.

The formation and evolution of public sentiments in relation to migration have historically been shaped by several distinct moments and narratives. These include the labelling of "others" in the post-Trianon period (especially ethnic Hungarians from annexed territories); the political manipulation of ethnic categories during the Second World War (notably antisemitism and anti-Roma sentiment); post-Soviet attitudes shaped by the 1956 revolution against Soviet repression (anti-Russian sentiment); and anti-Muslim campaigns during and after the Kosovo War, which intensified significantly during the 2015 migration crisis.

When examining migration patterns and influxes, it is logical to begin with the post-First World War dissolution of the Austro-Hungarian Empire and the Treaty of Trianon. In the aftermath, Hungary experienced an influx of ethnic Hungarians from annexed territories (Jánosi, 2019). This pattern of resettlement persisted well into the mid-20th century, as confirmed by census data. By 1949, only around one percent of the Hungarian population identified as non-Hungarian (KSH, as cited in Jánosi, 2019).

A second significant trend followed the fall of the Iron Curtain in 1989, which persisted until 1991. During this period, Hungary saw a brief influx of ethnic Germans returning from Western Europe, who were generally accommodated as refugees (Hajduk, 2008).

The next notable phase occurred during the 1998–1999 Kosovo War. Despite a significant influx of refugees into the region, Hungary received relatively few asylum applications. Migration patterns remained relatively quiet until around 2013, when events such as the North Kosovo crisis (2011–2013) and the broader migration crisis of 2015, driven largely by conflicts in the Middle East and North Africa, brought dramatic change. Although Kosovars were geographically proximate, they accounted for only one-third of asylum applications; the remaining two-thirds came from African and Asian countries (Gödri, 2015). This marked not

only a quantitative increase in migration but also a qualitative shift in its demographic and cultural character.

Regarding the formation and development of sentiments, Hungary's public perceptions have evolved alongside these migration trends, deeply influenced by historically embedded narratives of "othering." For example, in the early 20th century, antisemitism gained political traction, culminating in the deportation and genocide of Hungarian Jews during the Second World War. Roma communities, similarly, marginalized for centuries, were subject to forced assimilation policies from the 18th century under rulers such as Maria Theresa, who outlawed their language and customs. In the interwar period, Hungary, alongside other European states, adopted "Gypsy legitimization cards" as part of an international initiative. The situation worsened during the Second World War, when many Hungarian Roma were deported to concentration camps alongside Jewish citizens.

As Horváth et al. (2011) confirm, Roma communities were portrayed as culturally incompatible, and state-led integration efforts often reinforced their marginalization. While neither Jewish nor Roma communities were recent migrants, many having lived in Hungary for centuries, adopting the Hungarian language and certain cultural practices, they were still perceived as "other" by the ethnically homogeneous majority. Such attitudes also extended to ethnic Hungarian migrants from neighbouring states who, despite sharing a language, were still regarded as culturally distinct. Initial sympathy for these groups often gave way to ambivalence or exclusion when economic competition emerged (Juhász, 1995; Tóth & Turai, 2003). This rejection of "internal others", perhaps, created a foundation for more generalised and persistent xenophobia.

Several explanations for this phenomenon are possible. From a primordialist perspective, it may reflect a collective fear of "national death," potentially linked to an immature or unstable national identity, itself a response to prior historical and political crises. Alternatively, it could be seen as a product of political manipulation and governance failures, a topic further examined in *Migrant Chances and Experiences in Hungary* (Krekó & Juhász, 2012).

Hungary's experience under Soviet domination, and especially the 1956 Revolution, represents another formative influence on national sentiment. While no public opinion data exists from the immediate post-1956 period, symbolic acts such as the toppling of the Stalin statue, the removal of Soviet memorials, and slogans like "Ruszkik, haza!" ("Russians, go home!"), captured the national mood. Despite political change, these symbols endure in discourse. In

2022, Fidesz MP Zsolt Németh invoked this very slogan in response to the Russian invasion of Ukraine, highlighting its continued emotional resonance (Telex, 2022; The Observer QIAA, 2021). This example illustrates how historical trauma interacts with pre-existing narratives of “otherness,” influencing perceptions of both “internal others” and external adversaries. When national identity is weak or uncertain, such trauma may activate defensive mechanisms against perceived threats to identity integrity.

Another important phase in the evolution of nationalist sentiment emerged in the post-EU accession period. Pre-existing attitudes, amplified by political campaigning, found renewed expression during the 2013–2015 migration crisis. This was widely perceived as a “direct threat,” reinforcing public opposition to culturally distant groups. Given the pre-existing climate of suspicion, political actors, notably Jobbik, were able to mobilize and intensify public fears. Public opinion research confirms that this discursive shift was mirrored by a hardening of societal attitudes: Simonovits and Szalai (2013) show that migrants from Africa, Asia, and the Middle East were increasingly perceived as culturally incompatible and economically threatening, while Sik (2016) documents the rise of xenophobia even before 2015. This trajectory of exclusion and securitization reflects both historical memory and deliberate political engineering.

It is important to note that these different sentiment strands, antisemitism, anti-Roma prejudice, and anti-Muslim/anti-immigrant hostility, have not replaced one another over time. Instead, they coexist, independently and continuously. Political “de-nationalisation” efforts have had little impact on these underlying identity structures.

The case of Russian nationals in Hungary is particularly instructive, and paradoxical. Although Russians constitute a small share of the immigrant population, they are still perceived through the lens of historical trauma and geopolitical suspicion. This perception is reinforced by Hungary’s consistently low openness to immigration. Surveys indicate that fewer than 10% of Hungarians view immigration as having a positive cultural impact, a figure similar to that reported in Russia itself (Ipsos, 2016). The European Social Survey further shows that Hungary scores poorly on social distance indices, with a significant share of the population opposing both neighbourhood proximity and marital ties with immigrants, including Russians.

Although the Orbán government maintains a pragmatic pro-Russian diplomatic stance, driven largely by economic and energy considerations, public identification with Russia remains limited. A 2023 Pew Research Center survey found that only about 3% of Hungarians expressed

a favourable view of Russia, while nearly half held explicitly unfavourable opinions (Pew Research Center, 2023).

In the following section, we will examine more closely how political campaigning has nurtured and reinforced this collective trauma.

8.4: Political Campaign Construction and Migration Policy Changes

As discussed earlier, migration in Hungary was not perceived as a major issue in the past because it was relatively homogeneous and limited primarily to resettlers. While this chapter does not focus on the migration policy of the 20th century, it is known that during that period, migration was managed without significant problems. Despite the restrained nature of migration at the time, as we have noted, the first concepts of “othering” in social sentiments began to emerge. Therefore, with the prominent turbulent events of the late 1990s, there were no major migration-related crises, but there was a growing recognition that migration and migration policies would eventually need to change, especially in light of Hungary’s accession to the European Union in 2004.

Hungary’s accession to the European Union in 2004 was preceded by a pivotal period of legal, political, and institutional transformation. In this context, migration policy, particularly concerning asylum and border management, emerged as a key component of Hungary’s pre-accession obligations under the Copenhagen Criteria (European Commission, 2022). As Geddes (2003) observes, the process of harmonization was driven less by domestic migratory pressures, which remained relatively low at the time, and more by the necessity of complying with externally imposed standards.

During this transitional phase, Hungary ratified the 1951 Geneva Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol without reservation, incorporated provisions of the EU Dublin Convention, and accepted the EU’s visa and border control regimes. These measures aligned the country with the emerging Schengen acquis even prior to its formal integration into the Schengen Area (European Commission, 2003). Crucially, Hungary’s asylum legislation was restructured to reflect European norms and principles, including safe third country doctrines, the prohibition of refoulement, and procedural safeguards. At this stage, migration was largely treated as a technical and bureaucratic issue, subordinate to the strategic objective of European Union membership.

In parallel with legal harmonization, Hungary's migration governance infrastructure underwent significant institutional restructuring. The most critical transformation occurred within the Office of Immigration and Nationality (OIN), the main body responsible for managing asylum applications, residency permits, and border enforcement. Beginning in the late 1990s, and accelerating during the EU accession negotiations, the OIN was reorganized and professionalized, with increased staffing, training, and alignment with EU-wide practices.

According to Göbl and Szalai (2015), these changes were not purely administrative but reflected deeper processes of Europeanization, where national institutions were reshaped to meet externally defined norms. The Hungarian Border Guard (Határőrség), previously part of a militarized Cold War apparatus, was gradually integrated into the civilian police structure, and new technologies such as EURODAC (fingerprint database) and SIS (Schengen Information System) were introduced to ensure interoperability with other member states.

Training programs supported by the European Commission's PHARE funding scheme provided technical assistance in refugee status determination, visa issuance, and human rights standards. This reflected a shift in institutional culture: from one centered on control and surveillance, to one increasingly attentive to rule-of-law principles and rights-based procedures. Still, as observers noted at the time, implementation was uneven. While legal texts reflected best practices, day-to-day institutional operations lagged, and public attitudes remained ambivalent toward immigration, particularly asylum seekers from non-European countries.

As a result of these changes, Hungary implemented a comprehensive migration framework compliant with EU standards. Importantly, it is necessary to highlight how the social construction of migration emerged during this time and how it was reflected in public opinion and sentiments.

While migration remained a peripheral issue in Hungarian political discourse through the early 2000s, this changed as political polarization intensified, particularly following the 2006 political scandals. The far-right Jobbik party, established in 2003, began to instrumentalize migration as a symbolic issue, linking it with crime, terrorism, and the erosion of national identity. Even in a context of low immigration levels, Jobbik's rhetoric positioned migration as a civilizational threat (Juhász, 2020). By the early 2010s, Fidesz adopted and mainstreamed these narratives, with Viktor Orbán increasingly framing migration in existential terms. Although the legal and policy environment had not yet dramatically changed, the symbolic function of migration was becoming central to political strategy. Migration served as a proxy

for contesting European Union authority, promoting national sovereignty, and mobilizing the electorate.

In the post-2015 period, these sentiments were increasingly codified into law, associated with the inflow of Middle Eastern and African immigrants. The Hungarian Constitution was amended several times to embed an anti-immigration vision of national identity. Provisions were introduced that prohibited the settlement of foreign populations without parliamentary approval and defined the Hungarian nation in explicitly Christian terms (Kiss, 2016). These changes demonstrate how migration discourse, rooted in historical experiences and cultural memory, was ultimately institutionalized as a central component of state ideology.

As migration discourse became more prominent, so too did the development of exclusionary narratives that differentiated between “deserving” and “undeserving” migrants. The concept of the “illegitimate migrant”, typically racialized, culturally alien, and economically threatening, began to take shape in public messaging, media coverage, and political speeches.

Bernáth and Messing (2015) show that by 2013–2014, even before the major refugee flows of 2015, Hungarian political actors were engaging in a discursive narrowing of who could claim protection or inclusion. Migrants were increasingly framed not only as illegal border-crossers but also as fundamentally incompatible with Hungarian culture, threatening social cohesion and public safety. This framing went beyond legal status; it marked a shift in how migration itself was morally and symbolically constructed.

The figure of the migrant was no longer seen as a potential neighbour, worker, or refugee, but as a potential criminal or invader. Importantly, this construction of illegitimacy was not supported by real demographic pressures; Hungary continued to receive a relatively low number of asylum applications, but it reflected a strategic reframing of risk and difference in a way that served political objectives.

These rhetorical moves would prove crucial in justifying more aggressive policies down the line. By defining certain migrants as inherently illegitimate, the state positioned itself as morally justified in pursuing extraordinary measures, including surveillance, detention, and legal exceptionalism.

Despite Hungary’s formal commitment to the Common European Asylum System (CEAS), the late 2000s and early 2010s saw the beginning of practical divergence from EU norms. Though the legal framework remained in place, enforcement became increasingly selective. As Szalai

and Göbl (2015) argue, Hungary began to exploit grey areas and loopholes in asylum law, such as delaying registration, limiting access to legal counsel, and minimizing transparency in asylum adjudication.

These practices were subtle and did not immediately provoke sanctions, but they revealed a growing disconnect between EU obligations and domestic implementation. At this stage, Hungary's migration policy remained outwardly compliant with European standards but increasingly served national political goals. Procedural delays, poor detention conditions, and limited integration measures signalled that Hungary was no longer treating asylum as a rights-based framework but rather as a strategically managed problem.

In parallel, government communication began to shift. Instead of highlighting Hungary's role as a responsible EU member upholding shared humanitarian standards, politicians began to question the legitimacy of European norms themselves, portraying them as naive, ineffective, or culturally corrosive.

This divergence, still largely unnoticed in broader EU debates, would soon evolve into open defiance. But already by 2015, Hungary had laid the institutional and rhetorical groundwork to reposition itself not as a member of a liberal humanitarian consensus, but as a defender of national sovereignty in the face of global migration.

The year 2015 marked a turning point in Hungarian migration policy and discourse. Faced with a significant increase in asylum seekers passing through the country, largely en route to Western Europe, the Orbán government launched what scholars have widely referred to as a full-scale securitization campaign (Szalai, 2023). The government constructed a narrative of existential threat, not only to Hungary's sovereignty but to European civilization itself. This message was amplified through a combination of public billboards, national consultations, televised addresses, and carefully orchestrated press statements. Slogans such as "If you come to Hungary, you must respect our culture" appeared in public spaces. At the same time, government surveys asked citizens if they agreed that immigration increased the risk of terrorism. These initiatives formed a coordinated effort to reframe migration from a humanitarian challenge into a national security crisis, justifying extraordinary policy responses.

In parallel with rhetorical securitization, Hungary implemented a sweeping array of legal and physical border control measures. A razor-wire fence was erected along the Serbian and Croatian borders in record time. So-called "transit zones" were established, effectively

extraterritorial spaces where asylum seekers could be held for extended periods under minimal legal protection. Emergency laws passed in September 2015 enabled pushbacks of asylum seekers to Serbia, criminalized illegal border crossing, and drastically reduced access to appeal mechanisms (Juhász, 2020). These measures formed a new legal architecture that undermined Hungary's obligations under international refugee law and institutionalized a system of exclusion.

The securitization of migration was reinforced by a media ecosystem that largely echoed government messaging. State-aligned television and newspapers portrayed asylum seekers as violent, ungrateful, and fundamentally foreign. The use of fear-inducing imagery, crowds of men, fences, burning tents, became central to this narrative (Bernáth & Messing, 2015). These representations drew heavily from broader far-right European discourses but were uniquely adapted to Hungarian historical tropes, including memories of Ottoman invasion and Soviet domination. The result was a powerful symbolic framework that cast Hungary as a “fortress nation,” standing firm against external threats.

Building on the momentum of the 2015 campaign, the Hungarian government passed the so-called “Stop Soros” legislative package in 2018. This set of laws criminalized assistance to undocumented migrants and restricted the operations of civil society organizations working on refugee and human rights issues. The package extended the legal framework of exclusion and explicitly named financier George Soros as a symbol of foreign interference in national affairs (Juhász, 2020). The law served as both a policy tool and a cultural marker, embedding anti-immigration ideology into Hungary's legal code.

Hungarian migration policy during this period became closely intertwined with nationalist and Christian-identitarian rhetoric. Political speeches regularly emphasized Hungary's Christian heritage and its role in defending Europe's cultural boundaries. Migrants, particularly those from Muslim-majority countries, were depicted as incompatible with national values and civilization (Szalai, 2023). This framing reinforced a binary between “native” and “alien,” solidifying a national identity predicated on religious and ethnic exclusion.

Hungary's geopolitical narrative shifted from victimhood under foreign domination to active resistance. The country positioned itself as a bulwark not only against Eastern migration flows but also against Western liberalism and EU “meddling” (Bocskor, 2018). This self-styling as a sovereign protector of tradition and order became central to both domestic legitimacy and regional diplomacy.

Legal institutions played a crucial role in legitimizing Hungary's increasingly restrictive migration policies. The Constitutional Court upheld the emergency laws passed in 2015 and expanded the government's powers under the justification of protecting national security. These rulings effectively created a parallel legal regime, one in which the rights of migrants could be suspended or bypassed under conditions of "crisis" (Juhász, 2020).

Hungary's hardline policies have brought it into repeated conflict with the European Union's asylum framework. The country rejected the EU's refugee relocation quotas during the 2015 crisis and has implemented national practices that diverge sharply from the CEAS, including border closures and non-cooperation with relocation mechanisms (Szalai, 2023). These actions have strained Hungary's relationship with EU institutions and deepened its political isolation within the Union.

Hungary has faced multiple infringement procedures and legal condemnations by the European Court of Justice (ECJ). In several high-profile cases, including those concerning transit zones and pushbacks, the ECJ ruled that Hungary had violated EU law. Yet, as Juhász (2020) notes, compliance with these rulings has often been symbolic or delayed, revealing the limits of the EU's enforcement capacity.

The Hungarian case highlights a broader structural challenge within the EU, such as the difficulty of maintaining a unified legal order when member states oppose shared norms. While EU law remains formally binding, Hungary's behaviour reveals the political and institutional fragility of supranational governance in contested domains like migration (Geddes, 2003). This divergence raises critical questions about the future of EU solidarity and integration.

On another note, in contrast to asylum-seeking applicants, we can observe a favourable but restricted migration in civil non-refugee cases, resulting in intergovernmental and NGO collaborations and programs such as *Stipendium Hungaricum*, which promotes student exchanges between Hungary and, among others, post-Soviet countries, including Russia, Ukraine, Belarus, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Kazakhstan, and others, starting almost at the same time as migration crisis. This thaw continued in further political and diplomatic relationship development. It can be found in promoting cultural proximity, often framed through a shared 'invented' or 'rethought' ancestry, a form of historical reconstruction. While these migration flows were regulated under the legal migration framework through various short and long-term permits (student visas, work visas, family reunification visas, and research visas), they were

viewed as part of a major rapprochement that, however, did not receive a positive response in public opinion regarding Russians, as noted earlier.

More interestingly, with the promotion of student exchange and related programs, a noticeable practice emerged over the years, immigrants often arrived with their entire families. They used student visas as a shortcut to economic advancement. In many cases, one person would obtain a student visa, while a family member would obtain a family reunification visa, which granted access to the job market. Migration policy enforcement responded, and prior to June 2022, family reunification visa holders, whether a foreign partner married to a Hungarian citizen or a foreign partner joining another foreigner, could no longer automatically access the job market. They were instead required to go through the job-seeker process and secure employer sponsorship for a work visa. Since June 2022, introduction of single application system was forced that allows simultaneous application for both residence and work permit if employment is intended.

Even if this may seem administratively straightforward, the internal structure of the Hungarian job market prioritizes Hungarian citizens. To hire a foreign national, the job must first be officially posted at the job centre and offered in open competition to locals. Only after proving that no Hungarian applicant has the required skills (which may include specific language requirements, for example) can an employer hire the foreign candidate. While this system may seem logical and consistent with broader symbolic patterns limiting culturally different immigrants, such as Muslims, it becomes more complex in the case of marrying a Hungarian citizen, which reintroduces the concept of “otherness” and connects again to wider debates on cultural inclusion, kinship, and national identity.

In contrast, common practice in the European Union is that a family member automatically has the right to work in the destination country without additional bureaucracy. However, the situation changes in Hungary if a foreign partner married to a Hungarian has a child: in such cases, the foreign partner can obtain Hungarian citizenship after five years without a complex examination, or after ten years without children (simplified naturalization). The normal naturalization, if not married, takes eight years after receiving the address card (lakcím kártya).

While these legislative changes were already significant in limiting the inflow of economic migrants, in practice, the restrictions on student and family reunification visas led to new approaches. Companies such as Bolt and Wolt, both food delivery services, for example, began hiring low-skilled immigrants indirectly through self-employment arrangements, using forms

such as Korlátolt Felelősségű Társaság (Kft.), egyéni vállalkozó, kisadózó vállalkozások tételes adója (KATA), and személyi jövedelemadó (SZJA). Self-employment allowed foreigners to apply for a self-employed or gainful activity residence permit. However, these arrangements were also subject to legal changes in 2022.

While KATA was the most popular self-employment form, it had a cap of 12 million forints per year and a monthly flat tax of 50,000 forints, and it allowed invoicing both individuals and companies. Following the 2022 amendment, KATA entrepreneurs could invoice only individuals, forcing others to switch to SZJA, a tax scheme that allowed invoicing but resulted in higher taxation.

Even these changes were not the end of reforms. On January 1, 2024, Hungary introduced a new migration scheme of laws, abolishing the “single permit”, which had previously combined work and residence, and replacing it with multi-purpose permits such as Guest Worker, Skilled Worker (Hungarian Card), Intra-Corporate Transfer, EU Blue Card, and the particularly noteworthy National Card. Additionally, Hungary abolished certain other-purpose permits previously granted for activities such as digital nomadism and medical treatment.

This new migration scheme further restricted the conditions under which foreigners could stay in Hungary. For example, Guest Worker permits are limited to two years, extendable by only one additional year, after which a new application must be made. Holders of this permit cannot obtain long-term or permanent residence, cannot change categories, and cannot bring family members. The Guest Worker program applies only to workers from certain countries in specific occupations sponsored by approved employers.

By contrast, the Hungarian Card (Magyar Kártya) is designed for highly skilled migrants in fields such as engineering and IT. It allows family reunification, eligibility for permanent residence, and category changes. The “Golden Visa” scheme targets investors willing to commit at least €250,000 to real estate funds, property, or higher education donations. It grants a ten-year residence permit, renewable for another ten years.

Perhaps most interestingly, the National Card (Nemzeti Kártya) reflects political preferences aligned with historic and humanitarian agreements. It is valid for three years, allows employment without a separate work permit, and serves as a prototype of the earlier combined work-and-residence permit. It is available to citizens of eight countries: Serbia, Ukraine, Belarus, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Moldova, Montenegro, North Macedonia, and the Russian

Federation (Government Decree No. 179/2024, VII. 8). Holders can apply for permanent residency and change employers or purposes of stay. For permanent residency, applicants must pass a cultural examination demonstrating knowledge of the Hungarian language and culture. For naturalization and passport acquisition, advanced knowledge of the language, culture, history, and constitution are required.

This reflects not only the selective choice of immigrants and politically engineered migration preferences but also the ongoing fragmentation of EU cohesion, a process that began in 2015 and has materialized in Hungary's uniquely designed national migration policy, despite the agreements made during EU accession. Notably, the new migration law requires only A2–B1 Hungarian proficiency for permanent residency (with cultural knowledge), but advanced knowledge for citizenship. In effect, the law specifies exactly who can stay, for how long, under what terms, and openly favours selected categories of migrants.

CHAPTER 9: INTERVIEW OUTCOMES

9.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the empirical outcomes of the interview study, bringing together the voices and lived experiences of Russian-speaking migrants who have settled in Hungary over the past two decades. The narratives collected across the cases reflect a wide range of trajectories, some shaped by education and professional opportunity, others by family circumstances, political upheaval, or personal preference. Taken together, these accounts allow us to explore how identity, belonging, and integration are negotiated in everyday life, and how individuals' strategies of adaptation confirm, challenge, or complicate the hypotheses and research questions set out in the methodological framework.

Unlike quantitative data, which seeks patterns in measurable variables, qualitative interviews reveal the depth of contradictions and ambivalences that accompany the migrant experience. Many respondents describe their arrival as accidental or unplanned, while others frame it as a conscious step toward cosmopolitanism or escape from political repression. The interviews also shed light on the centrality of education, labor market opportunities, and social networks in shaping settlement, while simultaneously illustrating the structural and symbolic barriers like legal, linguistic, cultural, and economic, that migrants must navigate.

At the core of these narratives lies the tension between Russianness and belonging in Hungary. For some, Russian identity remains deeply rooted in language, cultural practices, and transnational family ties; for others, Russianness is complicated by shame, rejection, or deliberate distancing in the wake of geopolitical developments. Similarly, the meaning of "integration" appears uneven and multifaceted: while certain respondents achieve professional recognition and legal stability, they do not always embrace cultural assimilation, instead occupying a space "in-between" that is both enabling and constraining.

The chapter proceeds not by dividing the material into rigid sections, but by weaving the cases into a comparative narrative that addresses the central research questions: How do Russian-speaking migrants construct identity abroad? What strategies of integration emerge across different life trajectories? How do politics, both Russian and Hungarian, shape the possibilities of belonging? And to what extent do the experiences observed support or challenge the initial hypotheses? By approaching the data thematically and holistically, this chapter seeks to

illuminate the diverse yet interlinked ways in which migration is lived and narrated, offering both empirical richness and theoretical insight for understanding the contemporary Russian diaspora in Central Europe.

For further details of the data, we suggest to refer to the Appendices, namely, Appendix 1, 2, 3 and 4.

9.2 Negotiating Russianness and Belonging: Interview Outcomes from Migrants in Hungary

The interviews conducted with twenty Russian-speaking migrants in Hungary reveal a complex picture of identity, integration, and belonging. While each life story is unique, common themes emerge that illuminate the interplay between cultural identity, professional adaptation, and political positioning. These outcomes speak directly to the research questions and allow us to evaluate the hypotheses guiding this study.

Across the cases, the most consistent finding concerns the role of language in shaping identity and integration. For many respondents, Russianness was not a matter of ethnicity or origin but of language and cultural memory. Several cases, such as those of respondents with mixed heritage (e.g., Udmurt, Jewish, Crimean, or Ukrainian backgrounds), emphasized that they identified as Russian primarily because Russian was the household language and the medium of childhood socialization. This confirms the hypothesis that language functions as the core marker of Russian identity abroad, even more than bloodline or birthplace. Respondents repeatedly explained that the Russian language was inseparable from their sense of self, whether they positioned it as a source of pride, shame, or nostalgia.

At the same time, the interviews demonstrate how language acquisition in Hungary became the critical gateway to professional integration. Respondents who arrived through education programs (Cases 1, 2, 5, 12, 20) faced early challenges in mastering Hungarian, but those who succeeded eventually built stable careers, sometimes even in highly demanding fields like law (Case 19). Their stories support the hypothesis that structural integration depends less on cultural assimilation than on practical mastery of Hungarian for professional use. Yet, importantly, such integration did not erase the sense of cultural in-betweenness. Nearly all long-term migrants acknowledged that they occupy a liminal position: no longer fully Russian, but not entirely Hungarian either.

Identity negotiations were particularly visible among respondents who emphasized ambiguity and hybridity. Case 20, for instance, rejected the label “Russkiy” in favor of “Rossiyanin,” preferring a civic over an ethnic identity, while Case 19 described herself as Russian despite her Udmurt heritage, stressing that her Russianness was shaped by childhood culture and not bloodline. These findings highlight that migrant identities resist simple national categories. Instead, identity is layered: tied to language, culture, and community, but constantly reshaped by political events and host-country experiences.

A second central theme across cases is the role of politics in shaping belonging. Respondents’ narratives illustrate a generational and temporal shift. Earlier arrivals in the 1990s and early 2000s (e.g., Cases 7, 10, 15, 19) often described themselves as initially apolitical or patriotic, motivated primarily by education, career, or family. Over time, however, political events — most decisively the annexation of Crimea in 2014 and the war in Ukraine in 2022 — altered how they positioned themselves vis-à-vis Russianness. Several respondents expressed shame or even horror about being Russian after the invasion, directly linking national politics to personal identity. Case 19 exemplifies this transformation: once a patriotic young woman, she now refuses to return to Russia until regime change occurs, describing the war as fascism reborn. Similarly, Case 20 drew explicit parallels between authoritarian developments in Russia and Hungary, while simultaneously rejecting any possibility of return.

This finding strongly confirms the hypothesis that transnational political crises reshape migrant self-identification and belonging. Being Russian abroad is no longer neutral; it now carries stigma, prompting defensive redefinitions, distancing, or reframing of traditions (such as May 9, which some respondents reinterpreted as mourning rather than celebration).

The interviews also provide insight into social integration patterns. Early in their stay, most respondents relied on Russian-speaking circles, facilitated either by shared dormitories or diasporic networks. Over time, some expanded their networks to include Hungarian colleagues, neighbors, or partners, yet few reported full assimilation. Mixed marriages, such as in Case 19, often reinforced Russian as the home language, while children acquired Hungarian through school. This pattern confirms the hypothesis that diaspora networks create durable cultural bubbles, enabling migrants to integrate structurally while remaining culturally distinct. Respondents often described themselves as living in a “middle state,” neither fully assimilated nor fully separate, but inhabiting a hybrid social position.

A related dimension concerns professional integration, which reveals clear clustering across cases. Student migrants (Cases 1, 2, 5, 12, 20) generally saw Hungary as a stepping-stone, with many describing themselves not as “immigrants” but as “expats,” oriented toward international careers rather than permanent settlement. In contrast, long-term settlers (Cases 7, 10, 15, 19) built their entire professional lives in Hungary, often emphasizing their contributions to Hungarian society — whether in law, education, or business. These findings nuance the hypothesis that economic and professional integration correlate with permanence: in fact, some highly integrated professionals still see themselves as temporary, while others become anchored despite only partial cultural assimilation.

Cultural practices further illustrate this in-betweenness. While nearly all respondents maintained Russian traditions (especially New Year and Orthodox holidays), many also adopted Hungarian customs, often for their children’s sake. Some emphasized the dual celebration of Orthodox and Catholic holidays, interpreting it as enrichment rather than conflict. Others stressed the selective adoption of EU habits, such as waste sorting or reliance on public transport, which they saw as part of living “the European way.” Such accounts suggest that migrants actively curate hybrid cultural repertoires, sustaining Russian memory while adopting convenient or meaningful Hungarian and European practices.

When asked about future plans, most respondents firmly rejected the possibility of returning to Russia. The reasons were layered: political repression, war, economic instability, or simply a sense that their lives had moved elsewhere. Even those with strong family ties in Russia, like Case 19, declared an absolute refusal to return under the current regime. For younger respondents, such as Case 20, the refusal was even more categorical: Russia was never considered a future home, as their orientation was explicitly international. This confirms the hypothesis that return migration becomes improbable once structural integration and political alienation converge.

At the same time, few respondents expressed strong attachment to Hungary as a permanent homeland. Instead, they framed their belonging pragmatically: Hungary as a place of opportunity, safety, or professional anchoring, but not necessarily as the endpoint of their migration journey. Especially among younger migrants, Hungary was described as a temporary station on a longer international trajectory. In this sense, Hungary functions both as a host society and a transit point, with migrants’ identities stretching beyond national borders.

In summary, the interview outcomes demonstrate that Russian-speaking migrants in Hungary navigate identity and integration in layered, often ambivalent ways. Language is the anchor of Russianness, but Hungarian fluency is the key to structural integration. Cultural assimilation remains partial, with most respondents inhabiting hybrid “middle states.” Political events — particularly the war in Ukraine — have profoundly reshaped how migrants see themselves, producing shame, distancing, or redefinitions of Russianness. Social networks remain largely diasporic, though professional ties expand integration. Return to Russia is overwhelmingly rejected, while permanent settlement in Hungary is often conditional, shaped by family, profession, or politics. These findings, taken together, support the core hypotheses: that language and politics are decisive in shaping migrant identity, that integration is more structural than cultural, and that transnational crises create turning points in belonging.

9.3 Conclusion

The interviews collected for this study have provided rich empirical material that directly engages with the research questions posed at the outset. The first question, concerning how Russian-speaking migrants construct their identity abroad, finds no uniform answer but instead reveals layered and shifting strategies. While many respondents anchor Russianness in language, cultural memory, and family traditions, others actively distance themselves from Russian identity in light of recent geopolitical events. For those of mixed ethnic background or born in Soviet borderlands, identity emerges as even more ambiguous, often defined less by ethnicity than by civic belonging and everyday practices. These outcomes confirm the hypothesis that identity among migrants is fluid and situational, shaped by the interaction of personal biography with the social and political environment.

The second research question, focusing on strategies of integration, demonstrates that structural and cultural dimensions unfold unevenly. Respondents who arrived through educational or professional channels often achieved legal and occupational stability yet retained Russian-speaking households and primarily Russian or international social circles. In this sense, the hypothesis that structural integration can be achieved without full assimilation is strongly supported. Integration appears less as a linear process than as a negotiation of spheres: professional, social, and familial. Respondents routinely inhabit a “middle state,” neither fully

Russian nor fully Hungarian, but grounded in hybrid practices that allow them to maintain continuity with their origins while adapting selectively to the host society.

The third question, concerning the role of politics, reveals the most dramatic shifts. Russian state aggression has produced an acute moral rupture in migrants' self-perception, leading some to experience shame and disidentification with their homeland, while others embrace oppositional civic stances and transnational solidarity. Hungarian politics, meanwhile, is experienced both as a structural constraint and as a parallel to Russian authoritarianism, though mitigated by EU membership. The hypothesis that politics would shape the boundaries of belonging is strongly corroborated: migrants' willingness to remain in Hungary, to engage civically, and to imagine alternative futures is directly tied to the political climate in both Russia and Hungary.

Taken together, these findings extend existing theories of migration and diaspora by suggesting that Russian-speaking migrants in Central Europe do not conform neatly to either assimilationist or transnational models. Instead, what emerges is a pattern better described as anchored in-betweenness: a mode of belonging in which migrants secure professional and legal anchors in the host country while sustaining cultural and linguistic continuity with their origins, all the while negotiating the shifting moral and political meanings of Russianness. This "anchored in-betweenness" is not a static identity but a dynamic process of navigation—between languages, between cultural repertoires, between states, and between political regimes.

From a grounded theory perspective, this suggests a new conceptual framework for understanding post-Soviet migration in the European context. Rather than framing identity and integration as opposites on a continuum, it is more productive to theorize them as parallel and partially intersecting fields in which migrants invest different kinds of capital: legal and professional capital in the host society, cultural and linguistic capital in transnational networks, and moral capital in civic or oppositional engagement. The outcome is not assimilation or resistance, but a hybrid and pragmatic strategy of survival and meaning-making under conditions of political rupture.

In conclusion, the interview outcomes demonstrate that Russian-speaking migrants in Hungary articulate a belonging that is conditional, layered, and often fragile. Their stories underline the importance of situating identity construction not only in cultural continuity or adaptation, but also in the political ruptures that redefine what it means to be Russian abroad. The concept of anchored in-betweenness, developed here through grounded analysis, offers a theoretical lens

that may prove useful beyond the Russian case, illuminating broader patterns of migrant negotiation in contexts of authoritarianism, displacement, and contested belonging.

CHAPTER 10: CONCLUSION

The findings of this study, combining analysis of Hungarian migration policies with the narratives of Russian immigrants themselves, reveal a complex and often paradoxical picture of mobility, settlement, and belonging. Russian migration to Hungary emerges as shaped by a unique interplay of motivations, structural constraints, and identity negotiations, all situated within Hungary's ambivalent migration regime and broader European debates.

When examining the motivations behind migration, it becomes clear that Russian immigrants arrive in Hungary for a constellation of reasons rather than a single dominant driver. Economic opportunities, especially in IT, engineering, and academic fields, frequently serve as the practical foundation for relocation, while political unease, exacerbated first by the annexation of Crimea and more recently by the full-scale invasion of Ukraine, adds urgency and moral justification to the decision. Cultural considerations, such as Hungary's relative proximity, perceived tolerance, and child-friendly environment, also play a significant role, particularly for families. Importantly, different waves of migrants express these motivations differently: the post-Soviet generation often framed Hungary as a pragmatic, accessible destination, while the most recent arrivals emphasize political alienation from Russia and the impossibility of return. This divergence substantiates the hypothesis that motivations are temporally situated, shifting as political crises redefine both, Russia's trajectory and Hungary's relative attractiveness.

The question of settlement patterns further complicates the picture. Interviews reveal that while some Russians initially imagined Hungary as a transit space to more prosperous EU countries, many ultimately developed strategies of long-term residence, often through "soft migration" channels such as study programs or self-employment permits. For others, family reunification or business opportunities cemented their presence. Hungarian visa regimes, particularly the *Stipendium Hungaricum* program and later the introduction of selective permits such as the National Card, created pathways that encouraged permanence for certain categories of migrants while simultaneously restricting broader mobility. The contrast between temporary "guest worker" restrictions and privileged routes for Russian, Serbian, and Ukrainian nationals illustrates how policy actively structures settlement trajectories. Rather than perceiving Hungary merely as a stepping stone, many Russians recalibrated their migration projects toward permanence, especially as political developments in Russia foreclosed the option of return. This

dynamic confirms the hypothesis that policy, law, and opportunity structures are decisive in shaping whether migration becomes transitional or enduring.

Integration trajectories reveal a similarly layered and non-linear pattern. Some Russian migrants integrate socially through hobbies, study, or professional networks, forming bonds with Hungarians in contexts such as cycling or university life, while others remain anchored in Russian-speaking environments, sustained by digital communities and transnational ties. Duration of stay influences adaptation, but not uniformly: long-term residents sometimes report limited language acquisition, underscoring the possibility of structural integration without cultural assimilation. For others, however, small but meaningful adoptions of Hungarian habits, ranging from visiting local bakeries to embracing less intrusive social norms, signal a selective integration process. Host-society attitudes play an ambivalent role: Russians are not the primary targets of anti-migrant campaigns but nonetheless remain shadowed by historical trauma, Cold War legacies, and recent anti-Russian sentiment linked to the war in Ukraine. This climate complicates their identity work, as many choose to present themselves as “European” or simply “Hungarian residents” rather than emphasizing Russian identity. These findings highlight the differentiated nature of integration, confirming the hypothesis that settlement intentions and identity strategies are closely intertwined.

Migration policy and historical context constitute the structural frame within which these personal trajectories unfold. Hungary’s securitized migration discourse since 2015, rooted in symbolic constructions of “alien others,” has reinforced exclusionary attitudes even as selective openness is extended to specific groups. Russians occupy an ambivalent position: while state-level pragmatism and energy diplomacy sustain preferential frameworks, societal perceptions remain largely negative, reflecting long-standing anti-Russian sentiment. Compared to other EU countries, Hungary does not position itself as an especially attractive destination for Russians in terms of broad social acceptance, yet its unique policy instruments, study programs, selective residence cards, and relatively low costs of living, offer tangible opportunities that many migrants successfully leverage. This paradox illustrates how migration governance is both restrictive and enabling, closing certain doors while opening others.

Taken together, the findings suggest that Russian migration to Hungary cannot be understood simply as a story of push and pull factors, nor as a linear progression from arrival to integration. Instead, the Hungarian case demonstrates what can be conceptualized as selective anchored in-betweenness: a mode of migrant existence shaped by policies that favour certain entry channels,

by individual strategies of cautious settlement, and by a wider European environment that simultaneously constrains and enables mobility. This theoretical contribution, grounded in the data, extends beyond existing models of assimilation or transnationalism. It captures how migrants situate themselves between permanence and transience, between cultural distance and pragmatic adaptation, and between contested political identities and everyday practices of belonging.

The novelty of this study lies in demonstrating how Hungarian migration policy, with its securitized discourse yet selective openings, directly shapes the lived outcomes of a small but revealing group of migrants. Russian immigrants' narratives show how personal agency interacts with structural constraints, producing hybrid strategies that are neither full integration nor simple transit. Instead, migration to Hungary emerges as a process of negotiated permanence, where migrants anchor themselves institutionally while maintaining cultural fluidity, thereby embodying a new form of diaspora life that is simultaneously pragmatic, provisional, and enduring.

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APPENDICES

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Appendix 1: Table 1. The First Wave of Russian Emigration by Residence Countries.

Appendix 2: Collected Interviews

Appendix 3: Comparative Coding Matrix

Appendix 4: Emerging Comparative Patterns

Appendix 5: The List of Publications to Date by the Applicant Submitting the Doctoral Dissertation

Appendix 1: Table 1. The First Wave of Russian Emigration by Residence Countries

Country of Residence	Estimated Number of Accepted Russian Emigrants in thousands
France	500
Germany	35
The Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, Slovenes	30
Bulgaria	15
Poland	30
South America	15
Turkey	3
Romania	10
Greece	10
Austria	1
Hungary	5
Czechoslovakia	10
Free City of Danzig	From 2 to 3
Belgium	10
British colonies	50
Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania	50
Syria, Palestine	5
Finland	5
China	50

Canada	50
Australia	2
Philippines and other islands	50

Source: Zelenin and Leukhova (2015, p. 263).

Appendix 2: Collected Interviews

CASE 1

Case 1. Memo

Person 1, a Russian national, relocated to Slovakia in 2015, citing political circumstances as the primary motivation for her departure. She initially obtained a temporary residence permit under the category “other,” enabling her to pursue studies in the Slovak language. Over time, she secured permanent residency in Slovakia and established her own business. In 2021, she moved to Budapest, Hungary, where she currently resides. She remains unmarried and has no children.

Prior to her emigration, Person 1 was associated with the high-profile media-covered case informally known as the “Writers’ Case” or “Markvo Case.” In Moscow, she occupied a senior position at Bureau 17, an organization dedicated to cultural and educational initiatives, which had successfully obtained public funding and government tenders to deliver major creative projects. Among its most notable undertakings was *Books in the Park*, a large-scale series of public literary lectures held in Moscow’s parks, attracting a wide spectrum of contemporary authors and artists, including those with divergent political perspectives.

In 2014, the Russian media outlet *LifeNews* published an article entitled *The Kremlin Secretly Financed Navalny* (Life, 2014), alleging that Bureau 17 and its director, Alexandrina Markvo, had misappropriated more than 100 million rubles between 2010 and 2014. The report claimed that the company’s involvement stemmed from Markvo’s personal relationship with activist Vladimir Ashurkov, a political associate of Alexei Navalny. The subsequent investigation accused Bureau 17 of diverting funds intended for the *News from the Classics* literary competition, as well as for the promotion of reading in public spaces. It was further noted that opposition-leaning authors such as Dmitry Bykov, Lev Rubinstein, and Boris Akunin participated in the events organized by Markvo (BBC, 2015).

Following these allegations, the Investigative Committee initiated proceedings against the organization’s employees. Markvo was placed on a federal wanted list and arrested in absentia, ultimately emigrating to London with Ashurkov. Several staff members also left the country,

some applying for political asylum. Person 1, concerned about the risk of persecution due to her role in the company, chose to relocate to Slovakia under a student visa.

After her emigration, Person 1 returned to Russia on several occasions to attend interrogations. In 2020, the Markvo case was formally closed. Nonetheless, she has no intention of resettling in Russia. Over the course of her residence in Slovakia, she integrated into the host society, demonstrated by her proficiency in the Slovak language and familiarity with local culture, and achieved financial independence through ownership of a Slovak-registered business. Her later decision to move to Hungary was motivated by personal affinity for the country, social connections in Budapest, and the purchase of a property there.

As a first-generation migrant, Person 1 intends to embed herself in Hungarian society through entrepreneurship and cultural engagement, despite not yet speaking Hungarian, which she plans to study. Her migration trajectory challenges common expectations: rather than adhering to the nostalgic patriotism often associated with earlier waves of political émigrés, she exemplifies a newer pattern of voluntary, self-directed mobility. While her departure from Russia was influenced by politically charged circumstances, her subsequent integration and economic contribution to her host countries suggest a “global Russian” identity, cosmopolitan in orientation and adaptable across national contexts. Furthermore, her remote management of her business aligns with contemporary patterns of digital nomadism, further reinforcing her transnational orientation.

Case 1. Interview

Q¹⁶: When did you emigrate?

A¹⁷: In 2015.

Q: Why did you emigrate?

A: There are several reasons, but the main one is that the company I worked for was accused of having connections with Navalny. They began to drag us around the investigative committees and so on. I did not feel safe in Russia, so I quickly found an opportunity to leave there.

¹⁶ ‘Q’ means question.

¹⁷ ‘A’ means answer.

Q: What was the main legal reason for your emigration? Did you apply for political asylum?

A: No, I applied and got a study visa for the Slovak language course in Slovakia, as a temporary country. A month later, I was already there.

Q: How long have you lived in Slovakia until now?

A: 6.5 years

Q: Did you succeed in learning Slovak in the end?

A: Yes, that's fine.

Q: How has your life changed there in terms of work, activity?

A: I was lucky, I returned to the previous company I worked for, before the company that was accused of having ties with Navalny. This is one cultural project of liberal views. It is quite large and almost everyone who works for it lives abroad and already many people are banned from entering Russia because of that. Almost everyone works remotely and meets in Russia when it's needed and there is no other way.

Q: Do you visit Russia sometime?

A: Yes, I will visit Russia. But the first year it was not clear whether it was safe to go there. Because it wasn't clear and I wasn't even sure how I would survive financially...one of my friends said that if I did not have money and I would not be able to work, he would support me financially because it was not known whether we were allowed to visit Russia.

Q: Do you feel safe in Russia?

A: Now yes, because the case was closed last year [2020]. One of the case members received a sentence, the other one is in absentia because she is also not in Russia. More than 5 years have passed.

Q: What was the case's name, Markvo?

A: Yes, that was Markvo's case.

Q: What was the company's name you worked for? A company called Bureau 17?

A: Yes.

Q: What kind of project did you do there?

A: I have done almost all the projects of Bureau 17. For example, a pop market festival, “Books in Parks”, a top trainer's competition, participation in various international projects in Paris, New York, and Madrid.

Q: Was the company engaged in cultural activities?

A: Yes, of course. We only dealt with culture. No political actions were carried out. We worked with the Moscow government, but we did good quality cultural projects, where sometimes, of course, we could invite different people to talk, such as Dmitry Bykov [the writer], some journalists of more liberal views, but these were just such public discussions without campaigning or something.

Q: Why do you think this project was eventually called political? In the media, it is now described as political.

A: As the owner of the company [Alexandra Markvo], she later married Vladimir Ashurkov [the oppositioner], who was then the director of FBK [Anti-corruption Foundation, marked as an extremist's organization in Russia]. They tied it up and suggested that in this way the Kremlin financed Navalny through our company, in which all of us, 5 people who worked were accused. Although this was completely untrue.

Q: That is, you also think that this is not true?

A: No, this is not true, because the budgets are small and since we did everything. There wasn't even a possibility that money still could not remain.

Q: The case involves a budget of about 60 million rubles, is that true?

A: You know, I'll tell you this, I was interrogated. I came for the investigation process, and they asked me, “What do you see in the picture from the event?”. I said, “I see the TV”. The policeman answered, “And according to the technical specification there is a projector and a screen. So, the money has been stolen!”

Imagine the situation. If they were spent, relatively speaking, on the terms of reference for an event, and this is a free event. Participants were not paid there. Once one of them fell ill, had to change the date or cancel the event, and so the free tickets. The event is cancelled for a reason. This is one of the biggest disadvantages of funds, they want every coin accounted for within the plan and have no room for the possible reasons 'something went wrong. For them, it means that they were not spent by the technical guideline. In no cultural project, it is impossible to

spend everything ideally and according to the technical guideline. An event is a living organism, everything changes. Sixty million rubbles are the sum that we received for over five years by the company for all-all-all projects. They counted the loss there about 3-4 million.

Q: Which of the writers ended up emigrating?

A: Akunin [the writer]. I don't think it has anything to do with us. I think he was at some international exhibition or a book market festival with us. He probably didn't want to go to the interrogation.

Q: How did you find out that you were involved in this case? Have you received a summons or?

A: In general, we all learned about it from the media that our company was accused of. The next day, the directors were contacted by the investigative committee, asked to provide information, and summons for questioning were sent to all employees.

Q: When you were invited for interrogation, were you initially scared? Have you thought that it might be a one-day case?

A: No, I knew that it will last longer because that was a purely political action, invented for the anti-PR of the same Navalny. Moscow was just more liberal in those years [2014 and before]. In those years, in the park, we could hold some kind of discussion not on a political topic. Ok, not with the participation of Navalny, of course, but with Ksenia Sobchak [the former presidential candidate 2018, now oppositionist], who was in opposition. Ilya Yashin [oppositioner] also took part in one of our projects. People of semi-liberal views took part and it was encouraging. It is not like it was encouraging, it could be simply done, because of liberal freedoms. And then they [the Russian government] began to tighten the screws. What we have faced with the case of Markvo was the second step, and the first one was when the autumn of that year [2014] began.

We did the bookmarklet festival, on Krasnaya Presnya [the park in Moscow], two days before the festival, a report was released about the “cultural traitors” who performed in Ukraine, including Diana Arbenina [a Russian singer, musician, poet, and leader of the rock group Nochnye Snaipery]. She was our headliner, she was going to read poetry in the park. She was banned. We could not do anything, they made it clear to everyone that we had to cancel her performance. Because if we didn't cancel, then they would cancel us. For the company, this is a lot of money that you simply wouldn't be paid, and even more, we would receive a fine to pay

for a government contract because we didn't follow. And the other situation is...even if you spent a million [rubles] for a project there, and you did not hold the festival for any reason, then you must return the budget money to the Moscow government. You would not only bear the costs yourself, but you also have to return this money with a penalty. Therefore, we had no choice, we had to somehow hold the festival. This is also a political issue. A few months later, this article [Markvo case] came out about the fact that our company is accused. It was clear that they were already tightening the political screws through cultural influence.

At the first interrogations with a lawyer, I was asked about five times, "Who, who did you work with, what was the position". Then they started asking in more detail.

On the one hand, you know the truth, on the other hand, you know that every word dropped can be turned out against the company's director [Alexandra Markvo]. Therefore, you think how wouldn't tell too much information so that they won't turn it over in any way, because nobody needs your truth there.

Q: So, did you assume that they knew the answer to what they asked you about and just lead you in the specific direction?

A: No, I don't think so. From the very beginning, they just figured out what was happening, and then, a year and a half later, when I got to the chief of interrogation, he told me directly, "So, I need such and such information from you, I know that it was so, and so, and so. If you don't tell, we can say that you are perjury."

Investigators fell into two categories. The first one was something like "look at this picture, how many microphones do you see, and what do you say if there are three microphones in the picture, and five microphones each?" Usually, the answer was "I don't remember, because it was five years ago!" In 2017, I was asked about the project we had in 2011. They considered a couple of projects there, it was enough for them to find a sufficient amount for the article they indicated. For example, we had park projects and, if it rained, the park did not allow an event to be held on that day due to heavy rain. According to the technical guideline, we had to hold an event every weekend. For example, on Saturday the park was closed, then you postponed it to another day with the same program. But that was illegal, according to the technical guideline.

On the one hand, you did everything. You did not sleep at night because you supervised installation, dismantling... and generally worked six and a half days a week. On the other hand,

it was considered the forfeit of a contract. Although the events were held, just in connection with some circumstances.

Q: Let us summarize again. Did you move in the first year the investigation started?

A: Yes, I moved immediately, simply because it was not clear. It is clear that it was a political matter, before that there was already one thing. It was not clear how it would develop, because in our country if they wanted to, they could accuse even a cleaning lady. The investigative committee is not the most pleasant thing in life.

Q: How many times did you come to the investigative committee?

A: I can't say, but every time I visited Russia for sure. Maybe six times in total. My colleague, who remained in Russia, went there as if to work. Two times a month or twenty times in total.

Q: Had it ever happened that you or your family members were subjected to some kind of intimidation?

A: No. But, for example, when I had the apartment search by the police, it was already at the end of 2016, they said, "It's good that you came because all the others had already been searched". It was a search for a show. The court said that all witnesses should be searched. It is clear that they didn't find anything there because I had tenants living there already, but they directly said that if I wouldn't have come, then they would have to break the door at my address registration in Moscow because the term and warrant for the search were already approaching the deadline. The court gave the warrant. But I don't know if it can be considered intimidation, it's probably just a fact.

Q: What's about parents?

A: My parents were not intimidated, but I know that some parents of my colleagues were. My parents do not live in Moscow.

Q: Tell me, why did you initially choose Slovakia for emigration?

A: I just typed the request in Yandex [one of the largest search engines in Russia]: 'In which EU country can I get the documents the fastest?' The easiest way was to study the Slovak language.

Q: Was it difficult for you to draw up the documents?

A: No, the documents were very easy to process and issue. I needed the police clearance certificate, money, course booking and some more.

Q: Did you just follow the guidelines on the Slovak site, and thus you got a visa?

A: No, I paid an intermediary who arranged everything for me. That time it was pretty cheap. All together with the year of study, all documents and fees, it cost about one thousand five hundred euros. There were simply not so many immigrants that year. A year later it was a lot of Ukrainian migrants came.

Q: When you went there for the courses, did you plan to stay there for a long time? What was your plan anyway?

A: I thought I would live there for a couple of years and then move to Vienna. Slovakia is not such a dreamy place to live after Moscow. Well, then I somehow fell in love with Hungary and moved here.

Q: When you moved to Slovakia, was it difficult for you to build a social circle? Who were you mainly in the social circle?

A: Yes, it is difficult, because highly intelligent and educated people are still hard to find in Slovakia. Mostly they would go to Austria, Amsterdam, London, but these cities were completely beyond my financial capabilities. Simple people would go to Slovakia or the Czech Republic. From the circle of poets, writers, journalists and photographers, I came to the circle of students, managers who sold glasses in Ukraine, seamstresses and others. But some guys came there to do business, and we quickly became friends, because we had similar views.

Q: Do you communicate more with Russian-speaking people, Slovak or generally expats?

A: Russian-speaking people, because I don't know what to talk about with Slovaks at all. They are very conservative, and I began to communicate with expats only later, when my circle expanded, people appeared who work in international companies, and not just students who came to courses in the Slovak language.

Q: Did you use the opportunity to learn the Slovak language just for emigration That is, you did not have a special desire, but you could sacrifice it for the sake of emigration?

A: Yes, I was worried about how the situation might unfold, because I was the program director for these projects. Even though I was not officially registered, my name was on all the press releases. After the director and the creator, the third person was me, to whom they could come

with questions. If you are a program director, where is your program, why is it not like that? So, I was worried, I wanted to leave Russia as quickly as possible.

Q: What is your level of proficiency in Slovak?

A: I think it's around B2 [upper intermediate].

Q: When you lived in Slovakia, did you start celebrating some of their national holidays? Have you somehow changed your cultural routine, Russian identification, shall we say so?

A: Not really, there are no interesting holidays in Slovakia. Well, there is the day of Cyril and Methodius, the liberation of Slovakia from the Nazis, the day of the Slovak popular uprising. They are so Catholic, they have Catholic holidays. In any case, you live with this calendar. Of course, I did not celebrate Catholic Easter, but I enjoyed the holidays with great pleasure for relaxation.

Q: Did you learn Slovak history at this time?

A: Yes, I did.

Q: Did you integrate as an emigrant?

A: I think yes. Additionally, I already have a permanent residence. In a couple of years, I can apply for a passport. I think I will do it, simply because within 10 years it is already possible to obtain a passport and it will be faster there than here.

Q: How did your identity change after moving to Slovakia initially? Can you say that anything in your usual Russian routine has changed?

A: Yes, in Slovakia people don't work at all. They are very relaxed. In Moscow you work all the time, that's a lot of money, but there you never work, in Slovakia, you don't need much money. You need enough money. You can work less for enough money, instead of six and a half days a week for good money that you have no time to spend.

Q: How did you get the idea to move to Hungary? Why Hungary?

A: For two reasons. I have long wanted to leave Slovakia, because it was boring there, especially after the corona happened and everything was closed, it became simply unbearable. But I had to wait for the permanent residence, which I received almost a year ago because it opens the way to any country in Europe. I was looking for a country, at that time I had a relationship with a man from Budapest, I spent almost all of my time in Budapest. Everything

got to the point that from February to July, I was in Slovakia for only five weeks. I was either in Moscow or here. I have already spent most of this year here. I love Budapest. Budapest is a big city, similar to Moscow in terms of the rhythm of life. And to Tel Aviv. Before that, I had planned to leave for Israel, but it did not work out.

Q: When did you finally move to Hungary?

A: These days [28th of October 2021].

Q: Is it related to the purchase of an apartment here?

A: Yes. Six months ago, I bought an apartment here because I realised I had spent most of my time here. I cannot say that this is a gradual move. Again, my apartment in Slovakia has not yet been rented out [Elena owns an apartment there], but I rarely appear there.

Q: What are your plans for Hungary? Are you going to try to integrate here somehow?

A: Yes, I want to open a business here [referring to KATA]. I already have one property, maybe buy another one with the loan. I have almost all my friends here, they do not speak Russian. They are almost all expats.

Q: Do you have Hungarian friends already?

A: There are Ukrainian Hungarians, they have Hungarian passports. Other than that, I have not yet established closed ties with any Hungarians.

Q: When you started living in another country, did you change your political views? Have you started to follow Russian news less or pay more attention to local politics?

A: As a journalist, I follow all the news [Elena graduated from journalism]. Usually, in the morning I open Russian news, Slovak news, Hungarian news and Israeli news too, I often open it. But I read Slovakia, Hungary and Russia every day to be aware of the situation. Especially Slovak ones since I have a business there. If there are any subsidies because of the corona, I need to know about it. In Hungary, because I need to be aware of the news. In Russia, simply because it is interesting.

Q: Will you take part in local elections, if you are allowed to do so?

A: Of course. I will gladly take part in such things.

Q: What are your plans for the social circle? Do you have a goal to find Hungarians and get to know them better?

A: Since I do not speak Hungarian and will hardly master it above A1 [basics], there is no such goal. Honestly, I don't know about Hungarians. If they speak English, then yes, why not.

Q: What kind of image do you have in your head about Hungarians? When are you in the early stages of moving and adapting here?

A: I can only compare Hungarians with the Slovaks in this regard. Slovaks, are more conservative, there were even two jokes. One is that when Slovaks are leaving Slovakia, we always note them on the planes [because of the social behavior]. And another one, a typical Slovak goes once a year in the Tatras, the second time a year a typical Slovak has a vacation in Croatia, and the other 364 days he drinks beer every evening. It seems to me that the Hungarians are livelier. I don't have a relationship now, so I started communicating on Tinder [dating app] again. There are a lot of interesting people, they are always motivated to go out, go to theatres or museums. It seems to me that they have a higher cultural level.

Q: By the way, are you married? Do you have kids?

A: Not yet

Q: Are you planning to create children with a Russian-speaking person or are you still open to all possibilities. Do you have any preferences?

A: I am open to all possibilities. Recently I have been dating Russian-speaking Israelis. It all depends on the cultural level of the person. A person who moved from country to country will understand me more, than a person who moved from Ivanovo [the industrial city in Russia] to Austria because he stole some money. I am open to everything, but it turns out one-sided. I have nothing against the Hungarian men.

CASE 2

Case 2. Memo

The respondent, born in Taganrog in 1996, holds a bachelor's degree in tourism from Southern Federal University and an MSc in Economics from Eszterházy Károly Catholic University. Currently, she is pursuing a PhD in virtual tourism at the Hungarian University of Agriculture and Life Sciences. Her dissertation explores the transfer of virtual reality technologies to classical tourism, focusing on the development of immersive tours accessible even without specialized equipment. She perceives potential beneficiaries in tourists unable to travel physically or financially, as well as operators seeking new market niches.

Her migration path began in 2017 with a six-month stay under the Stipendium Hungaricum program, originally motivated by the desire to travel in Europe rather than a specific interest in Hungary. She returned in 2018 for a full master's program, and subsequently continued to doctoral studies, seeing scholarships and institutional support as a practical way to remain in Europe. Initially she had not intended to emigrate, but personal circumstances—most notably her relationship with her Jordanian partner—anchored her in Hungary. She has not acquired professional work experience beyond academia, relying instead on scholarship support, housing, and limited financial help from her parents.

The respondent stresses that Hungary itself was never a strategic destination, describing it instead as a gateway to broader European opportunities. She appreciates small Hungarian towns like Eger and Gödöllő for their coziness and atmosphere, while criticizing Budapest as dirty and bureaucracy as slow. Weak English proficiency among Hungarians and her own lack of Hungarian language skills limit her job prospects. She admits she does not intend to learn Hungarian seriously, as she does not plan long-term settlement. Rather, she sees her Hungarian experience as temporary, with ambitions to continue her academic path in Western or Northern Europe, ideally in the Netherlands or Canada.

Her social circle in Hungary reflects her partner's connections, consisting mostly of Arabs, with minimal ties to Russians and Hungarians (1–2% each). She participates little in Hungarian social or political life, but values her role as a researcher contributing to the host country's scientific development. She did not experience direct discrimination, though she acknowledges that generational differences in Hungary shape attitudes toward Russians. She celebrates

Russian holidays such as New Year and Easter, often with the international community, and occasionally encounters new traditions like Shrovetide, while Hungarian holidays remain outside her personal interest.

She defines Russian identity in fluid terms, blurred by her international environment, though she maintains cultural ties through food and Orthodox tradition, while personally leaning toward agnosticism. She follows Russian politics passively, drawing parallels between Russia and Hungary: both, in her view, are characterized by entrenched leaders, corruption, and limited civic initiative. She emphasizes that her economic well-being is currently higher in Hungary, yet notes structural weaknesses in healthcare and bureaucracy.

The respondent frames her migration strategy as open-ended and exploratory, marked less by attachment to Hungary than by her desire to live in diverse cultural contexts. She does not rule out returning to Russia, but only as a last resort, treating it as a springboard for another departure. Hungary, in her view, offers better living conditions than Russia, yet remains an interim stop rather than a final destination.

Case 2. Interview

Q: Could you introduce yourself?

A: [anonym]

Q: What's your date of birth?

A: June 3, 1996

Q: Where are you from?

A: Taganrog, Rostov region, Russia

Q: What is your education?

A: MSc, Economics, Eszterházy Károly Catholic University [University in Hungary]

Q: What's about your bachelor's?

A: Bachelor's degree, tour operator & travel agency activity, Southern Federal University [Rostov-on-Don, Russia]

Q: How old were you when you completed your bachelor's degree?

A: I was 22.

Q: So, what is your activity at the moment?

A: I'm enrolled in a Ph.D. program at the Hungarian University of Agriculture and Life Sciences, Gödöllő campus [city in Hungary].

Q: What is the topic of the dissertation?

A: Virtual tourism. The idea is to study how virtual reality, tools, and its principles can be transferred to the classic tourism sector, in particular the organization of virtual tours. That is, the organization of full-fledged tours when you completely immerse yourself in virtual reality without virtual glasses and any other equipment of augmented reality.

Q: Who would benefit from this?

A: I think it would be useful for tourists who may not have the physical or financial capacity to go on a real tour. It also opens up a new niche for tour operators, travel agents. And, of course, in this case, money will be allocated for the development of these virtual reality technologies themselves.

Q: What is your marital status today?

A: In a relationship with a Jordan guy.

Q: When did you move to Hungary?

A: First, I came for six months in September 2017, and for good in 2018 in September

Q: Why did you emigrate?

A: Studies

Q: When you say “studies”, did you have a direct aim to study in Hungary or rather used it as a tool following your aims, goals, plans?

A: Rather, I used it as a tool

Q: Why?

A: I originally came to travel. That is, it was an opportunity to come to Europe, you have a Schengen visa, when you can travel anywhere, it was before the coronavirus. Then I met my boyfriend and already returned here to be together with him.

Q: What was your profession before? Have you ever worked?

A: I did not work, I have no experience at all.

Q: Do you have a scholarship here?

A: Yes, the university scholarship [refers to the Stipendium Hungaricum scholarship]

Q: Did your parents help you initially financially or not?

A: Yes, they did.

Q: How would you rate your family's financial situation?

A: I'd say we are middle-class with an average income in Russia

Q: How did you decide to emigrate? Was it a strategic decision, did you want to go to Hungary or did you want to go to another country?

A: Initially, in 2017, I just wanted to go somewhere. It's just that somewhere not to Russia, to travel, to see how things are "there", maybe to pump up my English. When I arrived, it was the same program [Stipendium Hungaricum] for only six months, here I was only traveling. That is, all these 3-4 months it was only traveling [meaning: she didn't have a purpose to stay]. Financial support came from parents, from the university [Russian university], additionally, a scholarship here. In principle, I counted on one semester here and then planned to return home, I did not plan to emigrate. Then I met my boyfriend and decided to return. Since I was completing the 4th year of my bachelor's degree in Russia, I had the opportunity to return to my master's degree. I submitted documents in the same way and was selected. In September 2018 I was already here. Studying for a master's degree, living in a dormitory, nothing special. When I finished my master's degree, I decided to continue with graduate school. Again, that was influenced by the fact that it's easier for me to be here since they [Hungarian government, Tempus foundation, university] pay me a scholarship, they give me a hostel, I study and I can stay in the country for 4 years. I still don't have work experience, because I mostly study.

Q: Do I understand correctly that you were not particularly interested in Hungary, but more in the opportunity to travel in the EU?

A: Yes, I was lucky that I found this program. It allowed me to stay in the country for a long time and sponsored me in some way. It provides an opportunity to study. But it could be any other country, not necessarily Hungary.

Q: Have you worked here or tried to find a job?

A: At some point, I tried to find a job, but the corona hit, so everything turned out to be more complicated. Now I plan to either look for something in tourism, or wait another year while I

study, and then start working on my research work. I think at that moment I will have more opportunities to find a job.

Q: What year are you in graduate school?

A: 2nd year.

Q: What are your plans after graduation?

A: I will graduate in 1.5-2 years, it takes 4 years of doctoral school. I plan to find some postgraduate program, not necessarily Hungary. Most likely it will be in some Scandinavian countries, for example, Denmark, Germany, the Netherlands. But ideally, find something in Canada and move there.

Q: Why is it like that exactly?

A: I would like to see other countries. I was in the Netherlands, I liked it, I fell in love with the country, I want to live there. But again, there is some opportunity to move to Canada. I heard about a program that provides citizenship on a competitive basis, and in principle, this is also an interesting option to try to apply for.

Q: Why don't you want to stay in Hungary? What are the defining or repulsive factors that you do not consider Hungary as such a country to stay in the future?

A: I like the country very much and the cities in which I lived before [Eger, Gödöllő]. They are very small but cozy, they have their atmosphere. For example, nature, the mountains nearby. Everything is fine. Budapest is also a big developed city, the only thing I don't like is that it is rather dirty, and, in principle, some kind of bureaucracy is very repulsive everywhere. It takes 2 months to issue some documents. I'm not very good at communicating in Hungarian. And the Hungarians themselves do not speak English. That is, in Budapest, it is still somehow possible, but outside the capital, it is not. This limits your job search. I thought that I had been living here for 4 years for sure, I already discovered the country, found out what and how. I want something new, new experience, new countries and people.

Q: What was your path of movement through the cities here?

A: I lived in Eger, Gödöllő [cities in Hungary]. I have been living in Budapest since September.

Q: What do you think, what makes a Russian person a Russian and what elements of a Russian person can you define in yourself, which are unshakable values for you when you communicate with other cultures?

A: I don't know. At some point, the experience of living abroad and communication in such an international society somehow blurred this 'identity' framework. There are no definite features of any nationality. If we take all Russians, we can say that most of them do not speak English, perhaps they are more closed-minded than other international people. But again, everything depends on each person, we are all different. I have met Russians who are quite open and cheerful, ready to communicate with everyone, at the same time Russians who are typical blondes with blue eyes, super cold with a scourge face. It all depends on the person. I do not particularly notice Russian features in myself. The biggest one is my love for traditional [Russian] cuisine. After 2 years of living here, I missed cutlets, vinaigrette, borscht, I have to cook it. But by nature, I do not particularly single out.

Q: What is your religion?

A: Russian Christian Orthodox, but I'm more of an agnostic.

Q: After moving to Hungary, do you continue to follow Russian politics? What is your attitude towards it?

A: Yes, I continue to follow. It seems to me that Russia and Hungary are similar. An irreplaceable leader who leads the country and has no replacement. It's sad. I continue to follow what is happening in Russia since I still have Russian citizenship, I pay taxes and so on. My family lives there, naturally, I am worried about the situation, I keep my finger on the pulse [Russian expression that means following something actively].

Q: Do you take an active part in the Russian elections? Do you passively follow it?

A: No, I don't participate but I passively follow

Q: Can you say that your economic well-being is better here than it could be in Russia?

A: Yes, for now, yes

Q: Do you celebrate Russian holidays?

A: Yes, together with the international community. We celebrate New Year Eve intensely [one of the Russian greatest celebrations], although here it is mainly Christmas. So, I still celebrate New Year's Eve with my community here. I discovered Shrovetide for myself because in Russia I didn't do this, but here there are pancakes and all kinds of fillings. I celebrate Russian Easter too.

Q: Do you also celebrate Hungarian holidays?

A: No, not really.

Q: About your social circle here. If you could define your social circle by nationalities, ethnicities, how would it be?

A: Here I mainly communicate with Arabs, because my boyfriend is an Arab, his social circle is my social circle. Well, there are separate units of any nationality. Kazakhs, Vietnamese, Africans, Russians, but mostly Arabs.

Q: What is the percentage of Russians in your entire circle of communication here?

A: 1-2%

Q: What about the Hungarians, do you have them in your circle?

A: Yes, about the same, 1-2%

Q: Are there any habits that you got right here? Those that have perhaps influenced your identity?

A: No, I can't single out anything special. Maybe I started sorting the garbage. This is something new for me.

Q: Do you think that life in Europe is better than in Russia?

A: The question is twofold. It depends on which country in Europe. Hungary is nevertheless closer to us both in mentality and terms of living standards than Germany or the Netherlands. There is still something better, something worse. The same medicine in Russia is cheaper and of better quality. Here I somehow came across this, but there were minimal successful results.

Q: Where is life better: in Russia or Hungary?

A: I find it difficult to answer. For me, Hungary is better. But I understand that it is good in Russia too. I felt it. The taste of vegetables in Russia is even better. Perhaps because I lived in the south. I'm better here, but again I would try to improve my situation and move to another country.

Q: Are you considering returning to Russia at some point?

A: As the most, most, most emergency case. If all my ideas, plans, opportunities fail, then perhaps I will return and most likely only to find another opportunity to leave. Not necessarily to Europe, possibly to Asia. Not because Russia is so bad, but because I want to try different places, different countries, live in different communities

Q: Do you speak Hungarian?

A: Very, very, very little. Basic moments, but not fluently.

Q: Why?

A: There was a language course, life in a small town pushed me to the need to study. I have no close friends with whom I could communicate in Hungarian. All Hungarians I communicate with speak fluent English and I don't need to learn Hungarian. Additionally, I do not consider the possibility that I will stay here for a long time. While I study, I study. I study in English, I look for a job, but I don't need it so much that I'd like to learn the language. Moreover, Hungarian is used only in Hungary. If I move it will be a dead language for me.

Q: Are you open to building a family with a Hungarian, if there will be an opportunity?

A: In theory, yes, why not? But at the moment I have a boyfriend with whom everything is serious. It is possible to build a family in Hungary, but this is a failure. I would still like to move to the west.

Q: Do you participate in the social and political life of Hungary?

A: No

Q: What value do you bring to this country as an immigrant?

Q: In terms of study and terms of research. I live in Hungary; my studies include Hungarian people and serve Hungarian interests. If any research or project is successful, I will implement them in Hungary, since I live here and conduct my study here. Therefore, some kind of mission is my potential contribution to scientific development. They allowed me to study here, gain knowledge. I would like to give back what I've been taught.

Q: Have you ever faced any nationalist sentiments against Russian here?

A: No, I did have this experience, but I had a friend who studied in China and her neighbor, a Hungarian woman, had a negative attitude towards Russians and Slavs. She was 40 years old. I know Hungarians 50-70 years old, or the younger generation. The average reacted negatively to the USSR and Russia. I understand that hatred can only come from here. But at the same time, the adult and young generation have a positive attitude towards Russians.

Q: Why do you want to emigrate from Hungary?

A: Mainly because of the economic situation. Everything rises in price; the scholarship does not increase. The political reason, the precarious position of Hungary, can be expelled from the EU. All this gossip affects my attitude. I understand that when I finish my studies and stay here, it may not be an EU country anymore, I will lose all the privileges of all travel and work. It pushes you to want to leave.

Q: What would be the influencing factor for you to stay here?

A: Maybe if I get a good job. If I got a job here, then yes, I probably would have stayed here. But if I had the opportunity to work in another country, I would have left. Again, because I am interested in seeing different countries, places where it is possible to live, to compare them with what I had.

Q: How well do you know Hungarian history?

A: I rather know the aspects that connected Hungary and Russia. Perhaps some moments from world history are associated with Austria. There were no courses where I'd learn more about Hungarian history, it's all like general history knowledge.

Q: So, do I understand right that it's not interesting for you?

A: No, I don't know much and it's out of my interest sphere.

Q: Why?

A: Every time I come, it seems like this is the last time. But for some reason I still stay for a couple of years, so I am busy with some pressing matters. Study, research, articles. I don't have free time to learn about the history of the country, about the holidays. But it should be. I live here, communicate with people. But again, because I want to move, I see no reason to waste time on this country if I leave in two years.

Q: Can you say that the political situation in Russia could be better?

A: Yes, I could

Q: And the economic one?

A: I think so

Q: What about Hungary?

A: Yes, that could be too. It seems to me that the problem of all these can be put in three matters: corruption, the irremovability of power and, perhaps, the general indifference of people to the

situation. Hungarians are somehow lacking in initiative. They have a job, they have been told to do this, this and that. They don't even have a thought to do something more or somehow adapt to the situation. Based on what they should do, change it or solve some problem. For example, they will forward it to the manager and wait for a simple answer. In this regard, yes, they don't have initiative. This is not resolved at one level, but also the highest levels of the state, economic structures

Q: Is it better to live in Hungary than in Russia?

A: Yes, better, but you can find even better.

CASE 3

Case 3. Memo

Person's 3 trajectory presents a particularly compelling case. She pursued her studies at the Central European University, one of the most liberal academic institutions in Hungary. Her interview reveals a notable transformation in both worldview and social perception, shaped significantly by her educational experience. Upon returning to Russia, she experienced a pronounced sense of cultural dissonance, no longer identifying herself as Russian but instead perceiving herself as an outsider. The values of European liberalism and personal freedoms that she had internalized stood in stark contrast to the sociopolitical realities she encountered in her home country. This illustrates a clear shift in her identity under the influence of European societal norms.

It is noteworthy that Person 3 did not articulate oppositional or critical views regarding Russian politics or public life; rather, she characterized herself as apolitical. By happenstance, her existing Russian social network facilitated her return to Hungary as part of a circular migration process. Subsequently, she entered into marriage with a Hungarian citizen and became a parent, a development that underscores her full integration into Hungarian society.

This case supports the hypothesis that mixed Russian–Hungarian marriages may enhance the likelihood of successful integration and adaptation within the host country. Such unions potentially foster both social and cultural embeddedness, thereby accelerating the assimilation process.

Case 3. Interview

Q: How long ago did you leave Russia?

A: My first year abroad was in 2003-2004. I went to the United States while still a schoolgirl because I got a grant there. I spent an academic year there, then returned to Russia. The Russian period began. In 2008-2009, I spent most of the year abroad. I studied to be a teacher of Russian as a foreign language, so I had internships one after another. I lived in Finland for about 3 months, then somewhere at the same time in Poland, and then I won a grant in CEU [Central European University] and left for the 2009-2010 academic year to Hungary. I studied here for a year and returned to Russia. In 2012 I returned to Hungary again and since then I have been

here. That is, if you count from 2012, then this is 9 years, well, I would say 12 years in total. But in Hungary specifically it has been 10 years, but with a break.

Q: Between your internships, did you study at a university in Russia?

A: Yes, at the Herzen State Pedagogical University of Russia, Faculty of Philology, specialization in teaching Russian as a foreign language.

Q: How did your worldview and attitude towards Russia change along with your internships when you were abroad?

A: It started to change dramatically here, when I was studying in CEU, when I came to Hungary, because when I was on an internship at one of the secondary schools in Turku, Finland, then the next big internship was in Poland, there still my mission was to carry Russian culture to the masses. That is, here I am, a teacher of Russian as a foreign language, talking about Pushkin, Lomonosov, space, everything is cool, great, we sing Russian songs, listen to Russian poetry, talk about beautiful places in Russia. I felt like I was a promoter of Russia. We choose what we don't want to talk about, we add all the best. We carry this image to the masses. When I came here to study, the students were mostly from Eastern Europe. There were a lot of Yugoslavs in our faculty, also a country with a not very simple recent history, there were Poles, there were a lot of guys from all countries of the former Soviet Union. And we were all a little surprised when we learned that the look at a not-so-long history is very different. When you listen to different points of view and at the same time you communicate closely with people from all over the world, you understand that everything is not so simple. You begin to look at all this more critically, you begin to look closely, to understand slowly for yourself. I'm not saying that everything is bad in Russia, but everything is fine here, you just start to look differently and here is the question "does it suit me or not?" For a year I liked it, of course, I am such an independent and strong woman, I can do this and that, and so on.

When I returned to Russia, I suddenly realized that such free thinking was present only within the framework of the university. I now understand that it is not everywhere in Hungary either, but then it seemed to me that no, in Hungary this was not the case. And then I came back and somehow, what kind of patriarchal way of life, why everyone puts me in my place, and so on. At that moment it triggered me. I began to think that no, some kind of desynchronization in my head. I still treat Russian culture with great trepidation, there are still important moments that determine who I am, what I am. After all, I am a linguist, the Russian language is a very

important thing for me, the key to understanding Russian culture and so on. At the same time, I realized that this is all great, but in Russian society, I did not feel very comfortable after graduating from university. I began to look for escape routes, and I became catastrophically uncomfortable. When I returned to Russia, for financial reasons I urgently needed to find a job. It was found, but not in St. Petersburg, as I wanted, but in the Leningrad region. Employers forgot to tell me that yes, the bus goes to St. Petersburg for 2 hours, if it doesn't break down, there will be no traffic jams, etc., but it runs 3 times a day, and I didn't have my car then. There was a very small town there. After Budapest, all this intellectual movement, I felt insanely sad. My social circle here catastrophically did not understand me. We had an absolute conflict of worldviews. At that time, I decided that no, it needs to be finished, I want to go back.

Q: Do I understand correctly that you had some kind of alienation from Russian society?

A: I cannot say that about Russian society as a whole. I still have friends with whom we perfectly understood each other. It seems to me that this discord would appear even when I graduated from the Herzen State Pedagogical University of Russia, because Saint Petersburg in Saint Petersburg, and that small city where I worked had only 70k inhabitants, where there was nothing. There was only 1 cafe when I was 20-21 years old. My colleagues of the same age were already all married, they had completely different interests. I did not fall into this context, I was alone, I did not have a family, and there were no candidates for the role of husband. A conflict would have arisen anyway, but Budapest made it all worse.

Q: Besides these reasons, did you feel that the economic and political situation in Russia is not suitable for you?

A: I did not think about the economic situation, not because everything suited me, but because I am a philologist, I cannot calculate whether it is good or bad. Money was paid and thanks to God. As for the political situation, then it was 2011, then there were some bright hopes among people. I was not actively involved in all this, because activism is not my anthem. I have great respect for people who can climb the barricade, but I can't. I watched all this with sympathy and there was a feeling that something was about to change. And then, when it became clear that nothing had changed, I already moved to Hungary. At that time, I cannot say that the political situation was so hopeless.

Q: What was your job position at that time?

A: I worked in Tikhvin [the city in the Leningrad region, Russia] for exactly one year because there was a contract. If I terminated the contract, I would have to pay a forfeit. I worked as a translator at a carriage building plant. The work was great. Working with the text, the word - that's my thing. Many engineers came. I was translating when they were installing the equipment. Then they conducted training for Russian personnel. There was a ton of legal and technical documentation, everything was on me for the first six months. Then I could no longer cope, I could not be in ten places at the same time, they recruited a whole staff of translators, but initially, I was alone. It was cool. I believe that I grew up there as a linguist, as a specialist who works with words. When a year passed, I started looking for something similar in St. Petersburg and found it. I worked for another year as a technical translation editor. Translations were sent to me every day; my task was to edit the text so that later it could be sent to the customer. The main one was the Atomstroyexport [company], which is now building a nuclear power plant in Paks [the city in Hungary]. At that time, the project was already being prepared, because we translated the Paks documentation. I liked the job. In St. Petersburg, there were already cafes, cinemas, friends, everything that was needed. But all the same, there was a thought to move, I wanted to return. I explained to myself that it was warm here. But I think the problem was deeper, I didn't quite fit into the context.

Q: How did you get back to Budapest?

A: This is also a very interesting story. I didn't have a goal to return to Budapest, I just wanted to emigrate. I just started looking for all kinds of projects. In general, at first, I had the idea "should I study more?" I wanted to find an Erasmus project that would pay my tuition. I searched for six months, but in the end, it didn't take me anywhere. It was very disappointing. I realized that I had to go the other way. I started looking for a job. Found it. The work was on cruise ships. There is a very long interview process. I passed the first one, they said that they want to hire me in the summer, but I had to go through some more interviews. And then the Brazilian TV series begins [It's a sarcastic way to describe the life situation]. In Hungary, I still have a friend from the Herzen State Pedagogical University of Russia There was such story that when I received a grant to the university, she met a Russian boy who lived in Hungary on a summer vacation. They deeply fell in love, I went to study, and she went to him, but not to Budapest, but another city. But we talked constantly. I left, she got married, gave birth to a child. And she became bored and dreary with the decree, it occurred to her that she needed to be my match-maker and marry me off to some friend of her husband's. She laid it all out for

me, I nodded, and I thought, “Poor girl, she sits within 4 walls in her small town with a small child. Her husband is at work all day.” She said to me, “Well, I'll find someone for you then”. I said, “Well, try it!” And now, according to my Hungarian husband, the Russian wife of his friend begins to pester with stories about some Russian girl in St. Petersburg, with whom he urgently needed to get to know each other, because we are so compatible with each other. She gave my number and instructed him to write urgently. I forgot about that arrangement. I was sitting at work and a message came to me on Facebook, “Hi, my name is so and so, I'm a friend of your husband's friend, if I don't write to you, she will kill me. Please tell her what I wrote to you.” It was written in such a funny way, I answered him in the same spirit hee-hee-ha-ha. And we shared joke after joke, in the end, I no longer worked, but corresponded with some incomprehensible boy. I came home, we were still texting each other, a week passed - the same thing, two weeks passed, he said, “I'll come to visit you in Russia.” I thought, “ha-ha, now I will tell you how to apply for a visa, and you will not go anywhere.” That's what I wrote. It turns out that he read everything, submitted documents to the embassy and went there on day x. This was in November, and in February 2012 he had already arrived. And exactly one year later, in 2013, we got married in Budapest. In the end, I went to him. I terminated the pre-contract with the liners because he brought me to his family in September and announced both to me for the first time and to his family that I was moving in with him. I thought, “Well, everything suits me.”

I also found it very funny. I signed up for Hungarian courses, for which I got a visa. For a long time, I spun stories at the embassy about why I needed to learn Hungarian. The official story was that I am a linguist and that I urgently need to add Ugric to the Finnish language. I am eager to learn the Hungarian language. For some reason, they believed me...or pretended to believe. I was given a visa but in the “other” category. And with such a category, you cannot get a job. As long as this visa is open, it cannot be turned into a work visa. I had it open for six months, after that I would need to go back to Russia and wait for some company to open a work visa for me. I had only 2-years of work experience, I was not some kind of valuable employee, so I'd be chased by employers. Here we were sitting in Budapest, in a rented apartment, me with my “other” visa category and my husband, who graduated from the university a year ago and got his first job with a salary of 180.000 forints. I tried to freelance, but it was some ridiculous small money. We both tried to live on this. In November, it became clear that no one would hire me because of a visa. It was going to expire in March. The husband said that the

only way out was to get married, the next day we went to apply. In February we got officially married and then I was given a job.

Q: Were you eager to learn Hungarian?

A: Not really, I just needed it for a visa.

Q: Did you learn it in the end?

A: Everything is in comparison. I think I speak like an average Hungarian wife. I started actively using Hungarian when my first son was born. I have three children. The son is now 6, the daughters are 3 and 1 years old. When my son was born, I had to go to the doctors with him, then he went to the nursery, then we began to go to the playgrounds and only then did I speak the language. I can negotiate with the teacher in the Hungarian kindergarten, I can talk to the doctor, I can make an order, and so on. I understand everything they tell me, but they don't always understand me. I do not lose hope that someday I will be understood.

Q: When you moved, besides the Hungarian language, did you invest your time in the study of Hungarian history?

A: So that purposefully, no. But my husband is a historian by degree, so I had to listen to that crash Hungarian History class he was holding himself for me in everyday conversations. I live in a constant stream of historical information. When we communicate with people who have lived the same amount of time in Hungary, historical references come from me, because my husband has already told me about them.

Q: Do you celebrate Hungarian holidays?

A: Yes, I do celebrate Christmas and Easter. I celebrate, rather, in the Hungarian manner. I try to preserve Russian holidays for children, for culture, etc., but still, the main holiday will always be Hungarian. All other Hungarian holidays in the calendar, for example, March 15 [Revolution and Independence Day] or October 23 [Revolution Day], at the suggestion of my husband, are no holidays at all, but days of remembrance. On March 15, we all put on cockades, we all walk, including me. I'm a Hungarian citizen too. Since October 23 it is also associated with the USSR, such an invasion of Soviet troops in 1956 is a delicate moment. We have three children who, we want, not to have conflicts in their self-determination. The husband is still a historian, he so accurately tells that yes, there were bad politicians, that's how it happened. He

does not say that Russians are bad and Hungarians are good. Everything is very diplomatic. What will happen to my son when he goes to school, I do not know.

Q: Have you become involved in the political life of Hungary?

A: No, I did not participate in Russia either. I have never voted in Russia. To be honest, I wouldn't vote in Hungary either, but it's so important for my husband. When elections are approaching, I cannot stand aside, because all day long I hear, "So, here the political program is like this, here it is like that. This one got so many percent in this village... This cannot be, this village voted for another party." Therefore, for the Hungarian elections, I just go with him to the company.

Q: What kind of elections do you vote at?

A: For all. Since I have citizenship, I have the right to go to any.

Q: When you lived in Russia, you said that you did not pay attention to political life, and then, running ahead, said that the situation was not critical. Does this mean that, while living here, you continue to follow the policy of Russia?

A: Just a little bit. I cannot say that my opinion on the political situation in Russia is, to put it mildly, incomplete. To create a fundamental opinion, you have to sit down straight, open different sources, look, read, and draw a conclusion. Better yet, come to Russia and see. And in my case, I don't do any of this. I have friends who stayed in Russia or friends who are more political here, when they repost something to themselves, Facebook spits it out to me. Therefore, what is visible and happening in Russia, which I have, is limited to my circle of contacts. What is happening in Hungary, I also don't study deeply. I keep track of moments that directly affect me and my family.

Q: How often do you go to Russia?

A: Infrequently. Firstly, I am from the Irkutsk region, my parents live there. From Moscow, by plane, it's about 6 hours. It's very expensive. The last time I was in Russia was in December 2017. I hope that we will go next year. I have old grandmothers there, I want to show them all my children. But, to be honest, I don't feel home-seeking or an emerging desire to go there.

Q: What about your social circle here? If you could analyze which nationalities do you communicate more with?

A: Now mostly with the Russians. When I studied here, there were Bulgarians, but they all left. Then at some point, I communicated with everyone a little bit. Then I became a mother and the question arose with the maintenance of the Russian language in the newly born. There is a very active society of Russian-speaking mothers in Budapest. One way or another, I fit into it. Through some joint meetings, projects, I formed my circle of friends for Russian-speaking girls. In general, those with whom I communicate very closely, except for one or two people, are girls from Russia, well, two girls from Latvia and Ukraine. It happened so. Additionally, the husbands of the girls are of different nationalities.

Q: Do you have a lot of Hungarians in your social circle?

A: Few. Somehow it didn't work out. When I first moved, let's say my husband's friends did a lot to make me feel good in their circle. They tried very hard, at that time all my friends had left, and new ones had not yet appeared, so these Hungarian girls organized some kind of bachelorette party for me before the wedding, which helped in some matters. They are very cute, but it didn't work out somehow. And at work, in different companies, there has always been such a tendency that foreigners are separate, Hungarians are separate. I did not see the burning desire of the Hungarians to join the company of foreigners, so the social circle at work always consisted of foreigners.

Q: You said you worked here. Are you working at the moment?

A: At the moment I am on maternity leave, but I am officially registered with the company. I worked here, this is a sad story, because when I was given a visa, I had no time for choosing a profession. I had to go where they would quickly take and pay as much money as possible because I wanted to eat [some kind of essential sarcasm]. I went to customer support, I did it for some time, they raised my salary, I was praised. I changed three companies in this direction. I left one because I was not told during the interview that Hungarian was needed there, and my Hungarian at that time was not at the working proficiency. There was an age group, and I was a young girl. I went to another company, everything was cool, there was no need for Hungarian language proficiency, the company was young and cheerful. After work, we went for a walk together and so on. At that time, this was what I needed. I left that job on the first maternity leave and realized that that was not quite what I needed after all. I have a child, it wasn't quite my vibe anymore. I wanted to grow. Where I worked as a real call center. The job I found afterward was better paid. And secondly, I became an account manager, but with clients from large companies and corporations. This was already more serious than just a call center. Then

I went to the second maternity leave and from there immediately to the third. Honestly, I will go back there, because I need to go back, but I don't want to. Now I am trying to go into the freelance world and find freelance work that would pay me the same money as my current job. I decided to change my field of activity a little, and go into copywriting. I like it. I have a part-time job, but I'm insanely weak so far. Now I bought a course from Skillbox [a Russian online educational company that provides a variety of courses]. My goal is to take everything I can and start promoting myself as a copywriter. I have time until April. I don't want to drive an hour and 15 minutes from the house on the outskirts, which we bought, to work in the center. Then back. And then to pick up and take care of three children.

Q: Would you say that Russia and Hungary are to some extent similar? If so, at what points?

A: Yes, they are very similar. Society is similar. When I lived in the USA, people from my circle graduated from 12th grade and went to work, not because they are fools, but because it is not so easy to get a scholarship from a US university. If you have not got it, then you need to scrape up enough money to complete at least the initial stage. Therefore, people knew little about Russia, about everything in general. In 2003, I was asked if there are telephones and televisions in Russia. That is, people knew absolutely nothing. There is no need to explain anything here. Families work similarly, schools, kindergartens. The pensioners, the population, the problems are very similar, and so on. The sense of humor is similar. This is precise because of the historical realities. Not because they were very similar, but they were similar anyway. Nothing needs to be explained. There are, of course, differences, but fundamentally similar.

Q: Have you ever encountered nationalism in Hungary?

A: In a very weak manifestation. As a counterbalance to this, I encountered the opposite: people were delighted when they found out that I was from Russia. They said that it's so cool in Russia. They asked, "What are you doing in our stupid Hungary, I have a dream to go to Russia and live there". It was different. Even my husband's family was. When I first arrived, his grandfather, grew up professionally and financially during the socialist regime: from a village boy to almost to the director of a nuclear plant. He studied in Moscow, did not speak Russian, but somehow, he lived. For him, it was the ideal country. And when his grandson brought home a Russian girl, he was in the wildest delight. He followed me, brought me tea, coffee, straightened the pillows and in general was incredibly happy. The whole family laughed. This is a family from the mother's side. Let's say my father-in-law has a completely different history of relations with Russians. He grew up in a dysfunctional family, all their teenage years they

fought with the soldiers of the Soviet garrison who stood in their city. Therefore, he has the opinion that Russia, Soviet Union are enemies in this context. But he treats me very well. Sometimes, of course, something slips through, but I don't think he notices it. It's not always negative-negative. For example, when he talks about a film or a person that has been made or born in any Slavic country, he calls it an excellent Hungarian formulation “something Slavic there”, very dismissively. And I always dissect with this. You have such grandchildren and such a daughter-in-law. Moreover, his mother is half Polish. I say that he is also a quarter “something Slavic there”.

Q: Do you treat it as a sort of fun, sarcasm in the family?

A: My husband's family welcomed me well. I would not say that love is direct. They treat me with respect, and I treat them with respect too. The parents of the husband are divorced, the family of the father, who is with the second wife, expresses their feelings more emotionally. The mother's family is more reserved, but I can still see that they treat me with love. My children are called Daniil and Neva. Hungarians believe that the Neva is a river, I have a slightly different opinion on this matter. From the very birth, the husband's family accepted the fact that the names are Russian. The third daughter's name is Camilla, and as my friend joked, the third time we ran out of fantasy. Yes, that is, we have everything with humor. Flat, but humorous.

Q: Have you noticed that since you emigrated your Russian personality has slightly changed? Did you notice that you acquired some new habits?

A: It's hard to say, but probably yes. To understand this, you need to return to Russia and live there. Otherwise, at least spend a week, two, three there. The problem is that my identity is connected with the small town I was born in. With this city, my identity somehow ceased to come into contact with when I was already studying in St. Petersburg. I went back there and I was somehow uncomfortable. We parted for a long time in terms of habits, views of the world, the structure of everything. I haven't been in big cities for a very long time. But my husband says that I have no right to say anything about Russia because I haven't lived there for 10 years [sort of a joke], everything has changed. This is indeed the case. I came to Moscow on a business trip as a tourist. I only remember that Russia that existed in 2012.

Q: Do you think that you earn more here than you would earn in Russia?

A: It is difficult to answer because, at the time I left, my career was not at its peak. I was just getting started. I could develop in this direction, gain experience. And who knows how much I

would get. When I started working in Hungary, I received about the same as I received at that time in Russia, that is, not much. At my last job, I was getting normal at that time, above average for such a position. If this amount was converted into rubbles and offered to that 22-year-old girl, then I would jump to the ceiling. It's hard for me to judge. Plus, at some point, my husband and I started from the same financial level, the same salary. And then the first decree, the second, the third. Now my husband has built a career, he is a big boss there. Therefore, it is difficult to say for sure.

Q: Do you have a desire or motivation, plans to return to Russia or move to another country?

A: In Russia, definitely not. If I were offered to go to another country, I would probably agree, but I can't imagine that we would stay there forever. It would be interesting for me to experience living in another country until the moment children go to school. I wouldn't mind living 2-3 years abroad, earning some money to arrange life in Hungary. I am only considering the option of leaving to earn a living in Buda [the part of Budapest]. I can only see myself here. I feel good here. I cannot say that I am in love with the country. However, I catch myself on the fact that in chats, pages on Facebook, when someone writes that the country is terrible, that is not true... I am feeling deeply offended because of that. For me, this is already home. I feel at home here.

CASE 4

Case 4. Memo

Person 4 represents a distinctive case within the interview sample. Born in Almaty, Kazakhstan, she spent part of her life in Russia and acquired Russian citizenship through her maternal lineage. Subsequently, she and her family returned to Kazakhstan. While Russian is her sole native language, she has limited kinship connections to Russia. In terms of self-identification, she aligns herself with Kazakhstan as her former place of residence, while considering herself Russian in nationality and linguistic heritage, explicitly noting the absence of emotional attachment to Russia.

Since 2018, Person 4 has resided in Hungary, where she is married to a German citizen and is raising a child. She also operates a marketing business. Despite acknowledging Hungarian as one of the most complex languages, she has chosen not to learn it, citing the lack of necessity for integration given her fluency in Russian and English. These languages, serving as her native and working tongues respectively, enable her to maintain an international client base. For Alexandra, Hungary is not a final destination. Nonetheless, her child has fully integrated into Hungarian society, acquiring the Hungarian language through attendance at a local kindergarten.

From a business perspective, Person 4 perceives Hungary as a country with considerable economic potential but hindered by weak public relations, underdeveloped marketing strategies, and linguistic barriers that deter foreigners from establishing large-scale enterprises. This observation supports the notion that such constraints contribute to a cyclical pattern of migrant turnover in Hungary, as many do not view it as a viable long-term base for entrepreneurial activity.

The interview with Person 4 offers several conceptual insights. First, it reinforces the analytical distinction between nationality and ethnicity as separate dimensions of collective identity. Person's 4 reflections highlight the Russian language as a cultural marker capable of uniting diverse nationalities and ethnicities, while also underscoring the difference between being "Russian" by nationality, ethnicity, or linguistic-cultural affiliation, three distinct identity categories that are often conflated.

Second, she points to the enduring, though intangible, sense of interconnectedness among former CIS countries, a “virtual” or imagined geopolitical space lacking formal boundaries. This phenomenon allows individuals to retain a sense of territorial affinity while simultaneously identifying with their host country and other cultural, ethnic, or national frames of reference. This layered identification finds parallels in other contexts, such as the preservation of Hungarian identity among Hungarian diaspora communities abroad through the maintenance of their native language.

Third, Person 4 frames herself as a “citizen of the world,” a stance suggesting that this imagined, borderless community facilitates the forging of new social networks through strategic linguistic-cultural affiliation and professional self-definition, particularly in the context of transnational business activities.

Fourth, the interview draws attention to her political disengagement. This apolitical stance prompts reflection on whether a broader tendency toward political neutrality exists among migrants. It is conceivable that a semi-nomadic lifestyle, marked by the absence of a permanent base, reduces the perceived need for sustained political or societal integration, whether temporary or long-term.

Finally, Person’s 4 experience aligns with emerging trends observed among migrants adapting to life in Hungary, including the adoption of environmentally conscious practices such as household waste separation, illustrating how local habits and norms can gradually influence migrant lifestyles.

Case 4. Interview

Q: Where are you from?

A: I am from Almaty, Kazakhstan.

Q: You have a Russian passport, right?

A: Yes, I have a Russian passport. I happened to have it by chance. We lived in Russia for 6 years when I was still a child. My mother obtained Russian citizenship, then we returned to Kazakhstan again. When I turned 16, I got my passport and I had a choice, whether to get a Kazakh one, since I live here, or a Russian one, because my mother has citizenship. I decided to take Russian. I can get the Kazakh one at any moment, but the Russian one might suddenly

come in handy. Therefore, I took a Russian one and lived with it in Kazakhstan, and now in Hungary.

Q: What region were you born in?

A: Initially, I was born in Kazakhstan, and when I was 6 years old, my family moved to Omsk, Russia. We lived there for 6 years. But the city was very cold, and there were some other circumstances. Mom decided to return with me to Almaty, to her homeland, and we continued to live there.

Q: But do you feel like a Russian or do you still identify yourself as a Kazakh?

A: There is a difference here, the nationality is Russian, because there is nothing Kazakh in me. I have Russian, Korean, even some Roma, Jewish, Ukrainian roots – whatever, but not Kazakh. There is the concept of Kazakh and Kazakhstan. A Kazakh woman is by origin, and a Kazakh woman by place of residence. There are a lot of nationalities there, more than 100. Therefore, despite the fact that I have a Russian passport, I feel more like a Kazakhstani because of the residence. This is my “native” country [meaning the country where I spent significant time of life], I do not identify myself with Russia. In general, I know little about this country, but it happened that almost all relatives live there. Everyone left, there was no one left in Kazakhstan. I know Russia only from their stories and in general what I got to know. Recently, I have ceased to identify myself with Kazakhstan too. Of course, warm memories remain of this country, despite the fact that there are many objective gaps there. But I keep warm feelings about the country and the people. Now I identify myself as a citizen of the world. I don’t care what developed country I live in, I know that I will be fine everywhere, I will find a job and friends everywhere.

Q: You mentioned the concept of a citizen of the world. What does this mean to you?

A: For me, it’s the lack of attachment to one country, where you definitely need to live, because there are further reasons up to the mental framework “where you were born you will fit in” and so on. This is an absolutely equal attitude to any country. That is, you can come to any country and find pros and cons, but there will still be a country in which me and my family will be more comfortable. But the attitude to any nationality, geographical location is the same. We are all inhabitants of the Earth. This point in my affairs is now more comfortable. If tomorrow they change, then another point will be more appropriate. This will be my home, and no one has the

right to say that it is not. I have no purpose for travelling. I just set life goals for myself, and if movement is needed to achieve them, then it will be. If not, then no.

Q: What was your first language that you spoke or studied?

A: I have only two languages: Russian and English. I don't speak any other languages. So far, two.

Q: Do you read the news? In what languages?

A: Yes, I do. More often in Russian, it's more comfortable for me. I also translate some foreign sources with Google translate if needed. That is, I have fluent English, but Russian is more convenient, I read it faster. I can walk diagonally and read the news in a few seconds. For example, in English, I need to spend 5-10 minutes reading thoughtfully and understand what it is about.

Q: What news do you usually read? What is your area of interest?

A: I read news on the Russian resource Meduza [Meduza is a Russian- and English- language independent news outlet based in Latvia and provide news and articles mainly for Russian speaking people], which I consider more objective. I keep reading the news of Russia and the CIS, so as not to lose contact with these countries. And if I see interesting news from the world community on any topic, then I go to the source indicated there. I read an article in English or translate it in the browser. I am purposefully looking for news in business, marketing in the European press. Additionally, if I work on an oil industry project, then I read news in this sphere for months. When the project ends, then I stop reading this industry news.

Q: Have you ever had a desire to purposefully emigrate?

A: Yes, when I was 20 years old, I really wanted to move to Canada and even started learning French. But then personal circumstances developed differently, and, as it seemed to me, I pushed it to the background. I began to grow well in my career, earn money, live well, I was satisfied with being in Kazakhstan. When I turned 24 years, there was no longer a thought to leave the country.

Q: Why Canada? What are the criteria?

A: When I was 18 years old, I went on a work and travel program in the USA. I lived in the state of New York, on the great lakes. It is very close to the border with Canada, so we can say that the lifestyle there is close to this country, very calm. I lived in a small village, it was not a

metropolis. I had a very positive impression of the United States as well. But if you choose between these two countries, then I would choose Canada. Firstly, it seemed more secure and less criminal, and secondly, at that time emigration to Canada was very popular, many people talked about it, there was an eased migration policy. It was easy enough to get there, but in the USA, it is more difficult. I considered these two countries as one, but it was easier to enter Canada.

Q: Which university did you graduate from and in what specialty?

A: I graduated from two universities. The first is tourism, the second is marketing. Both are in Almaty. In the 2nd year, tourism was divided into two areas, the first is tourism, and the second is the restaurant and hotel business. I went to the second one.

Q: Did you study in Russian?

A: Yes.

Q: So, is it a quite normal practice in Kazakhstan?

A: In Kazakhstan, most people speak Russian. In schools, universities and at work in cities, 80% of cases are in Russian. There are separate schools and faculties in the Kazakh language, but they are not yet popular.

Q: How did your career start and how did it develop?

A: It started by chance. I worked in a hotel by my specialty. There I organised various conferences, etc., and showed myself very well. One of the participants was the director of a recruiting company, took my contacts, said that he likes the way I work, and if there are any interesting positions, they will contact me. Feedback came very quickly, they said there is a marketing position in an American company. Salary was 2x higher than in the hotel. This was the deciding factor. Now, looking from the outside, I understand that it was a great success, because I got into a different culture, American. This is a culture of work, communication with people, everything that I learned, it was where many people dream of getting, and at that time I did not even understand how lucky I was. I started working there, doing marketing. The duties were quite simple, so they took me without education. But over time, I realised that there was not enough base, so I entered the second higher evening education. Combined with work. In two years, I graduated from higher education, then I developed only in marketing. I was 19 years old when I came to them, I have been working for 15 years.

Q: When did you start your business? As far as I know you have it now.

A: Yes, here in Hungary. Moved 4 years ago, but opened a business 3 years ago. I had a newborn child, and when the baby was a bit older, I started my own business, also marketing.

Q: Was it in 2018?

A: Yes. We migrated to Hungary at the end of 2017. At the end of 2018, I started my own business.

Q: When did you decide to move to Hungary and what is your story?

A: The story is very simple. I was 9 months pregnant, 10 days before giving birth, my husband came up to me and said that he was offered a contract in Hungary. I quickly googled about this country, I knew very little about it. I knew that the capital was Budapest. I googled, liked the way it looked. The climate is good as well. I said let's go. And that's it. When the child was 3 months old, we moved.

Q: And legally it was a family reunion? Or how did you get the visa?

A: Yes, it was a family visa.

Q: How did you build your social circle here?

A: When I moved, I didn't have a goal to look for friends. Now I would have acted differently and would have looked, then I thought that somehow naturally I would find friends. I focused more on my child and work. At work, I got the idea to invite everyone to a seminar. I told them about marketing. It was very interesting Russian-speaking people who attended my event, and we became friends with some of them. I'd say that the work helped me, it is possible that without it, there would be fewer friends. The second moment, when my daughter went to kindergarten, there were several Russian-speaking children with their mothers. We began to communicate, one of them became a close friend.

Q: Are you surrounding yourself with Russian-speaking people only? Or do you still communicate with expats, Hungarians?

A: 80-90 percent are Russian-speaking. I also communicate with Hungarians, but with those who speak English. I can get to know a person and only then find out who he or she is a Hungarian or an expat.

Q: You mentioned business. So you started it in Hungary. Tell me, was it difficult to legally organise documents in Hungary?

A: No, it was easy. It takes 1 consultation with an accountant and a half-hour trip to the tax office.

Q: Did you open KATA [sole proprietorship]?

A: Yes, now it's a different form. But I started with KATA.

Q: How did you manage without language? Do I understand it right that you don't speak Hungarian?

A: Yes, I don't speak, but I first spoke with an accountant who speaks English, and then I found a Russian-speaking one.

Q: How do you like Hungary as a country where you can do business?

A: Good question. I'd say 95% of my clients are not from Hungary, I work with clients from the CIS, EU and worldwide, but least of all from Hungary. They exist, but they are few. In general, I consider Hungary a very potential country in some areas. I think that they know undeservedly little, for example, about Hungarian winemaking, gastronomy, and tourist places. Tourism is certainly popular, but it could be even more popular. I believe that the state lacks PR. Of course, this is a small country in terms of population, and secondly, incomes are not very high. Therefore, if there is a desire to run a big business, then it must go beyond.

Q: Do you think Hungary is generally an attractive country for business?

A: This needs to be compared. It is difficult for me to compare, because I do not know in detail the features of other countries. According to my feelings, in terms of legal, tax things, there is more or less the same as in other EU countries. There is nothing special. In terms of purchasing power, this is a very small country. If we are talking about foreign business, if they look at the countries they can enter, then Hungary will obviously not be in the first place, partly because of the complexity of the language.

Q: Your daughter actually grew up in Hungary. Does she speak Hungarian?

A: Yes, she does.

Q: Which kindergarten does she attend?

A: This is a private Hungarian kindergarten. From 1 to 3, she only spoke Hungarian when she was a baby, and now she speaks 50% Hungarian and 50% English.

Q: And how do you live with a child who knows more Hungarian than you?

A: Perfectly! I dream that my child knows more than me about everything. She even translates something to me from time to time.

Q: So, it didn't motivate you to learn more Hungarian?

A: No, because this is not our final destination. To learn Hungarian, I have to spend 2 years of my life, but I have more serious things to do.

Q: What is your destination then? Do I understand it right that you do not plan to stay in Hungary?

A: No, we never planned to stay here forever. We came under my husband's contract for several years, but in general we have a house in Germany. So far, the nearest point is Germany, but we'll see.

Q: Is it safe to live in Hungary?

A: At least in Budapest, yes. It seems to me that this is one of the safest countries.

Q: Why do you think so?

A: Firstly, I look at the statistics, and secondly, because I look around and, living in Hungary, I have not heard of any serious incidents. Moreover, I didn't even come across petty criminal dirty tricks. Of course, it should be considered that I live in one of the nicest areas of Budapest. I don't move around the city very much. All in my area. According to all my observations, I see calm streets, the absence of obvious crime, and so on.

Q: Your husband is not Hungarian?

A: He is German.

Q: Would you say that Hungary is similar to one of the CIS countries?

A: I think you can find the similarity of mentality. They say that Hungarians and Kazakhs have the same roots. I notice that some words in Hungarian are similar to Kazakh. Some constructions in speech are similar, despite the fact that the language is complex. There are echoes to the Soviet mentality. Throwing garbage, laughing out loud in public transport,

drinking, etc. In social behaviour, a slightly dismissive attitude towards others is sometimes closer to the Soviet mentality than to the European one.

Q: Have you ever encountered nationalism in Hungary? Have there been any cases?

A: No, absolutely. I have never experienced nationalism in any country in the world.

Q: Are you generally a political person or apolitical?

A: I'm closer to the second one. Living in Kazakhstan, I was absolutely apolitical. I thought it didn't make sense. There is no point in wasting even a minute of your life trying to influence something, to understand something. It is much more efficient to build your happy life and improve something around you. This is the best thing I can do for the country. Having moved to Europe, I, of course, understand that everything is different here. This is where we have influence. If we wish, we can have great influence. I do not consider myself competent in politics, because I do not understand everything.

Q: Do you take any social and political part in the life of Hungary?

A: Probably not.

Q: Do you vote?

A: I don't have permanent residence, so I don't have the right to vote. I do not take part in other things. I honestly pay taxes and do not litter on the street. That's all I do for the country.

Q: Do you know the history of Hungary and its cult figures in politics, culture, or anything?

A: In general terms, I know the history of Hungary, Budapest. I know very little about cult figures, sometimes I read about them, but I quickly forget their names, because they are very complex.

Q: Did you notice that you changed a little when you moved to Hungary? Any Hungarian habits?

A: Yes, of course I noticed. A person is shaped by his\her environment. I have become much more careful about society, about the people who surround me. Over the past 4 years, I began to sort garbage, began to smile at people more, and began to think about buying ecological things. I realised the importance of networking because, once in a new country, I realised the importance of filling my environment with quality people. It may or may not be growing up.

Q: Are you still planning to move?

A: Yes, I'm here temporarily. But if there is an opportunity to stay here longer, I will not be upset. I love this country very much.

CASE 5

Case 5. Memo

The interview with Person 5 was conducted in a tense atmosphere. Throughout the exchange, her responses appeared measured, pre-formulated, and notably restrained, often taking the form of concise, unembellished statements. This dynamic initially led to doubts about including the interview in the dissertation's theoretical sample. However, upon revisiting the material at a later stage, a coherent thematic line emerged that warranted its inclusion.

Person 5 holds a specialized and in-demand professional role as a UX designer, positioning her within the category of skilled migrants. She is relatively young and exhibits a temperament leaning more toward introversion than extroversion. Within the interview, she repeatedly conveyed a sense of disillusionment with Russian culture, particularly with what she perceives as its social fragmentation and the dominance of individualism over collective values. At one point, she implicitly drew an analogy between the mentality of the Russian population and prevailing weather patterns, an indirect critique of societal character.

While she explicitly described herself as apolitical and disengaged from the political life of both Russia and Hungary, elements of the conversation revealed an underlying critical view of the Russian government. This detachment from political identity may be interpreted as a broader phenomenon, in which some Russian migrants avoid collective self-identification with their country of origin, thereby distancing themselves from responsibility for state actions or the conduct of its citizens. Such a stance also explains her lack of interest in engaging with Russian diaspora networks in Hungary. Her immediate social circle consists primarily of expatriates from diverse backgrounds and Hungarian colleagues. She characterizes Hungarians as friendly, empathetic, and open.

In her perception, Hungarian culture forms part of a wider European cultural sphere, which she views positively. She also expressed an intention to learn the Hungarian language, an indication that she currently regards Hungary as her intended place of settlement. Despite identifying certain disadvantages, particularly the country's relative economic weakness compared with other European states, she remains willing to reside there.

As in the case of other migrants interviewed, Person's 5 relationship to national holidays in Hungary is primarily functional: she views them as non-working days rather than occasions of cultural or historical significance, and does not engage with their symbolic meaning.

Case 5. Interview

Q: How long have you been living outside of Russia?

A: Not in Russia - 5 years, in Hungary - 3 years.

Q: Where are you from? From which city?

A: St. Petersburg.

Q: Where did you study?

A: I studied at St. Petersburg State University, at the Polytechnic University. Now it is called Peter the Great University. Faculty of industrial design.

Q: Have you ever wanted to move from Russia? Did you have such an idea?

A: Always. I don't want to live in Russia and never wanted to, although I love my city. I have family and friends there, but I knew that I would live in Europe. Moved as soon as I could. First, I went to Estonia, and then here.

Q: Why was there such a desire to move?

A: I don't like Russia.

Q: In what way?

A: In general. Mentality, some kind of cold in general. I was emotionally cramped there.

Q: Were there any aggressive reasons that did not allow you to stay there?

A: No, everything was fine.

Q: What was your attitude to politics at the time when you lived in Russia? Are you active or not?

A: No, not active, but since I'm against the system, I just decided not to live there. I'm not complaining, I feel good here in Europe.

Q: Did you work in Russia after you graduated from university?

A: Yes, a little, six months. I worked as a designer in an agency.

Q: Were you satisfied with your economic condition at work?

A: At that moment, yes.

Q: Do you agree with the expression that some people say, “It is not entirely safe to live in Russia?”

A: I believe that everywhere you can find troubles. I’d say it’s more unsafe than in Europe I would say.

Q: When did you decide to move? How long did it take to get there?

A: Not for long. I really wanted this.

Q: How and why did you move to Estonia?

A: I really liked this country. At that time, I had a place to live. There were very good conditions, while I was still next to St. Petersburg. My ex boyfriend lived there, with whom I had very good, kind relations. Then I left this relationship and realised that I wanted to live in Hungary. And since it happened that I was single, I decided to move in two years. But in Estonia it was very good.

Q: Why did you choose Estonia?

A: Because it’s Europe. It was the closest country for me.

Q: You said you had a boyfriend in Estonia. But besides relationships, what else did you do in Estonia?

A: I got a job in the design industry, so I worked legally.

Q: How did you move to Hungary?

A: Just moved quickly. I decided that Budapest was really nice. I also like that it’s warm here. I quickly found a job and moved.

Q: What year did you move to Budapest?

A: I moved in 2018, in the middle of the year.

Q: How long have you been an immigrant?

A: About 5 years.

Q: Did you learn Estonian when you lived there? Did you delve into the history of the country?

A: It's a very difficult language, the same as Hungarian, so no...

Q: You found a job in Hungary and that's why you moved here. Was it difficult for you?

A: It was easy for me, because there are not many good UX designers here, as I was told. So, I found it quickly.

Q: When you migrated here, how did your social circle develop? How quickly did you find friends here, if you did of course?

A: Very fast, and incredible friends that I didn't have in Estonia or Russia. I changed, grew very quickly professionally, financially, emotionally, in all aspects. For me, the old environment in St. Petersburg is somehow outdated. There was nothing to communicate about with many people. And here I found very bright and interesting people who are with me to this day. We spend our time together very nicely.

Q: Where are they from?

A: All from different countries. I have some friends from work [IT], and outside of work, too.

Q: So, you don't get attached to the Russian community here?

A: No. I don't even know many Russians here. I didn't specifically look for it. I have nothing against it, Russian friends are just as good friends as non-Russians.

Q: Are there many Hungarians in your environment?

A: There are some, not many, but at work, yes.

Q: What would be the approximate percentage of the rest?

Q: Hard to say. I have a lot of cool guys at work, we communicate very closely, but if I put in more effort, maybe then we would be friends. But I myself do not spend time with them, so I would say that a smaller percentage. Approximately 30.

Q: Do you speak Hungarian?

A: No. I understand a little, I have been here 3 years after all, but I tried to learn it and it is very difficult. If there was a will, then maybe yes. I think I'll start doing it again soon.

Q: Do you know anything about Hungarian history?

A: Just some main things. Not much.

Q: Do you celebrate Hungarian holidays?

A: Everyone has a day off, so yes, let's say. I just know that some kind of holiday is coming and that's it. But I don't go to the city centre to celebrate it.

Q: Do you continue to celebrate Russian holidays?

A: We have almost all the same holidays. I celebrate New Year's, Christmas with the family of a former boyfriend, like a European Christmas.

Q: Would you say that Russia and Hungary are similar in cultural aspects and plans?

A: Yes, I would say so. Therefore, I live here easily among the Hungarians. They are similar to Russians, but they are more open and warmhearted. Russians are more distant and cold. Although there are different people everywhere, here it is somehow simpler with communication.

Q: In which aspect?

A: I'd say that here in Hungary you can feel that you're in Europe - people are more open and welcoming, everyone is affable and is willing to help. In Russia people are not the same unfortunately, but I can still see that the situation is changing now. But for now the atmosphere here is still much friendlier, so life is easier because of that.

Q: Do you take part in social and political life in Hungary?

A: No. I don't participate in politics at all.

Q: When you moved to Hungary, did you continue to follow the Russian news?

A: Of course, I'm updated on what's going on but I have never read the news on purpose, because I can't influence the situations that are happening in any way, and there is no point in wasting my life reading the news.

Q: Do you follow the Hungarian news?

A: No. But my colleagues always tell me when something interesting happens. So, if there's something I need to know, they tell me.

Q: Have you ever encountered nationalism in Hungary because of your Russian background?

A: No, never. Here, on the contrary, everyone is super polite, tolerant and nice, they try to help. It's even scary sometimes how people can be so kind.

Q: How has your Russian identity changed since you emigrated to Europe?

A: I became much more open. In Russia, I say hello to everyone, and everyone shies away, because this is not an accepted behaviour. Here, everybody is greeting each other and giving a smile. When I come to Russia, my greeting is met with silence. I see that things are getting better in Russia, so this is not always the case. Sometimes it happens, it's annoying. But I still think that Hungary is much nicer, warmer, and I myself have become more open.

Q: What about Russian traditions? For example, the one about girls getting married early? Has your overall attitude towards it changed?

A: Since I am interested in psychology, I look at this from a healthy point of view. I do not have a certain stereotype that, here, you need to be either a feminist or like a Russian woman. Just act as you feel. It's normal for me that someone gets married early, or vice versa. I'm fine.

Q: How do you see your life in a few years? Do you plan to move somewhere else or return to Russia?

A: I really like it here [in Hungary], I would like to live here. The economic situation, of course, is not the best, but I like Budapest. I think I'll probably stay here.

Q: What would be your determining factor for moving to another country?

A: If something terrible happens in the economy, something will change in my life from this point of view. Apart from it probably nothing.

Q: Do you think that the economic situation in Hungary is more financially beneficial for an immigrant than in Russia?

A: I think it's the same here. I do not win, but I lose to other countries. I see that I could work there, some offers, but I like Budapest, so I'd rather live here and lose financially.

CASE 6

Case 6. Memo

Person's 6 migration narrative reflects a deep and long-standing affection for Hungary, rooted in childhood memories and holidays spent in the country. Her account conveys a strong aspiration to integrate into Hungarian society, both linguistically and professionally. She possesses near-fluent proficiency in Hungarian, which she regards as an essential component of belonging and effective participation in her host society.

Her migration to Hungary represents a case of repeated, or circular, migration: she had previously resided in the country with her parents, though the earlier relocation occurred under different circumstances. This return was deliberate, shaped by her personal choice and family considerations. At the time of her most recent move, Person 6 was raising two children from a previous marriage. She explicitly associates Hungary with safety, stability, and a high quality of life for families, an association she does not extend to Russia.

In discussing her life in Russia, Person 6 refrains from broad negative assessments, apart from her concerns about the comparative lack of safety for children. She identifies as apolitical, though she acknowledges awareness of the strained relations between Russia and Ukraine. Her political engagement in Hungary is limited to incidental exposure through her professional work as a photographer, which occasionally intersects with political events.

Over time, Person 6 married in Hungary, developed a social network predominantly composed of Hungarian acquaintances, and established her own business. When asked about cultural affinities, she observed certain similarities in mentality between Russians and Hungarians, yet emphasized the substantial differences in cultural norms and everyday practices.

A noteworthy hypothesis emerging from her case is that full integration into the host society may be facilitated by residence in a sparsely populated area or in a location with few, if any, fellow Russian migrants. The absence of a concentrated diaspora community may encourage deeper engagement with the host culture and more sustained contact with local residents.

Case 6. Interview

Q: How long have you been living outside of Russia?

A: I was granted permanent residence in Hungary 5 years ago. My family is connected to this country, so I visited Hungary with a tourist visa many times. Using it, I lived as long as possible (six months a year). Once I realised that it is not enough, I started thinking about moving here. It is also worth adding that when I was in the 5th grade, I went with my father to Hungary and went to school at the embassy for 3 months. We always travelled back and forth. For me, it was like going to a countryside house.

Q: Were you born in Russia?

A: Yes, in Moscow. And grew up there.

Q: Which university did you study at?

A: Moscow City Psychological and Pedagogical University. Specialty: psychology and education.

Q: Have you worked in Moscow or in Russia in general?

A: Yes, I worked at the Moscow Academy of Education.

Q: Did you like your job?

A: I liked it, I liked the scientific sphere. The only sad thing is that it does not bring much money, but I still liked it.

Q: Did you like living in Russia in general?

A: I liked it, but I always thought that the grass is greener on the other side. I liked working and living in Moscow, but I liked being in Hungary as well. And it turned out that the more I was in Hungary than in Russia, the more I liked the first option.

Q: Were there any things that you absolutely did not like in Russia, which affected your final decision to move to Hungary?

A: Actually, they were. I moved with two kids, but in the middle of it all, there was a divorce. My husband worked for an airline company so it wasn't a big deal. But that's not why I moved. He often came here, and I went with him. Been here for as long as I want. My twins and I went to the pool, everything was great. They floundered in life jackets as I swam up and down the path. Our family lived for a month in Hungary, a month in Russia, a month in Hungary, a month in Russia. When we arrived in Russia, I started looking for a pool where I would go with my children. Everywhere they rejected us, because you can swim only with children from 6 years

old, and mine was a year old. In the end, they offered me a subscription for sixty thousand rubles a month, but when they found out that I had two children, they said that it was irresponsible and that I was harming them. And of course, lots of other rude moments. A mother with twins similar to a disabled person in Russia. There are no spaces adapted for a double stroller or once again for disabled people. In Hungary, things are different. Here I was always helped by complete strangers.

Q: What was your attitude towards politics when you lived in Russia?

A: I am very far from politics. We moved when this Russian-Ukrainian tension started. I found out about it only from the community of Russian mothers, who began to identify themselves very much because of this.

Q: How did it happen then that you finally migrated to Hungary?

A: It went very very smoothly. At some point such mini-things as a swimming pool, a supermarket, influenced the fact that I began to stay in Hungary more time, it became more comfortable and cheaper for me here. The level that I wanted and could afford, it was cheaper in Hungary than in Moscow. Then the question arose that the children should go to kindergarten. In Russia they could skip kindergarten, but in Hungary it is necessary to attend on a daily basis but not everybody is accepted. Therefore, I thought that if we manage to enrol in it, then we will go for it, if not then we will return to Moscow. I tried twice, they took us in, so everything turned out well. In the same way we went to school. At that time, I already had a relationship with my current Hungarian husband. I already worked at the mayor's office [Balaton region], so my desire to stay here was more than go back to Moscow. As a result, we were taken to school, we stayed in Hungary. This was the sign. Then I also got married.

Q: Do I understand correctly that you emigrated alone as a single mother with children?

A: Yes. My parents have a house here, so I basically migrated when everything was prepared.

Q: Do you speak Hungarian?

A: Yes, not perfect, but I can speak. I can't speak when it comes to philosophy or something more difficult. With other than that I have no problem. I even go to a Hungarian psychologist.

Q: When did you start learning the language? Did you already know Hungarian when you moved?

A: I knew it, but not that well. Learned in the process. I also kinda started learning it when my parents learned Hungarian when I was a child. But I finally decided to learn the language when I came for the summer with my children. In our village, no one spoke English, they immediately switched to German, and I knew only the basics.

Q: Do you know Hungarian history?

A: Now I know it because my children go to school and tell me about it. I also knew it because I had a friend who taught Hungarian. When we chatted with her, she talked about Hungarian art, architecture, and history.

Q: When you have started living here, did you take part in public holidays and life more?

A: Yes, because it is not a tourist town here. It's just the City Hall, schools, and a hardware store. I had to prove to Hungary that I was a useful citizen. I needed to find a job. I came to the mayor's office, and said that I could be useful. The mayor said, "Well, cool, then show us what you can do". So, I took part wherever possible.

Q: With regard to political life. When you moved, did you attend any elections or any political related events?

A: No, first of all, I still can't vote. I participated only because I worked at the city hall, I had to take pictures. I know politicians, but still far from it.

Q: What about Russian politics? We have the right to go to the embassy.

A: Yes, I do that. We go to the polls with my children. This is part of my patriotism.

Q: Do you follow Russian news?

A: Yes, but I watch it because I want to stay close to my family. They live in Moscow. I need to understand what's going on there.

Q: What about Hungarian politics?

A: My husband tells me what interests him. I don't watch it on purpose.

Q: Some people say that living in Russia is generally unsafe. Do you agree with this?

A: I agree that in Russia you need to be ten times tenser so that nothing happens to you than in Hungary.

Q: Which language do you use for communication with your husband?

A: The mix of English-Hungarian.

Q: Would you say that Russia and Hungary are similar?

A: I would say no. Hungarians look like us, but they are not us at all, they are different. For me, when they come to visit me or I come, to cook something and eat together is normal. Here we were invited to visit in the evening, and I planned that we would have dinner. In the end, we drank water and that was it. For me it was completely unusual at first, but now I'm used to it. They even say in words that they are not going to feed. Another super-obscene thing: eating with someone. Either you eat and share, or you don't eat in front of everyone. In Hungary it is normal not to share any food. It turned out to be a big cultural difference for me. Also, about help. My Russian friends, if they see that I need help, they will offer it. Hungarians will sit just like that until you ask for it yourself.

Q: Do you have many friends in your social circle in Hungary?

A: Real friends-friends, not really. I have a lot of acquaintances.

Q: Where are they mostly from?

A: Hungarians. It happened by location, because where we live, there are no Russians. You have to work hard to find them. We have a Russian community, we go for walks with them, to picnics and so on, but mostly Hungarians.

Q: Did you notice that your Russian identity changed in immigration?

A: I became more of a patriot. I think it's a defensive reaction. When the Hungarians did not understand me, did not accept me, it was easier to say that it is not you who are bad, but just because I am Russian, we are different. We Russians are like this. And it is not discussed.

Q: Did you encounter any nationalism in Hungary?

A: It's rare here, but I wouldn't say no, I never faced it. On Facebook, on the pages of our stores, I make an announcement for Russians when the delivery will be. Once an old man, who comes to us, greets us, asks how the children are, wrote, "do you make announcements to the Russian occupiers in Russian?" These mini-nasty things happen, but rarely.

Q: Do you consider Hungary as a temporary place? Are you planning to move somewhere? Maybe you plan to move elsewhere?

A: I don't consider any other country. I always have a plan that I will come back to Russia, but this is just my psychological defence.

CASE 7

Case 7. Memo

Person 7 is the daughter of a mixed Russian–Hungarian marriage. Her mother originates from Mineralnye Vody in the Stavropol Territory, located in the Caucasus region of Russia, while her father is Hungarian. She was born and raised in Kazan, in the Republic of Tatarstan, a region whose cultural landscape exemplifies Russia’s complex mosaic of local traditions, identities, and, in some cases, distinct ethnic languages. This layered structure of collective identity can be likened to a Russian *matryoshka* doll, in which a national identity encapsulates multiple sub-identities linked to regional heritage, customs, and linguistic diversity.

Person’s 7 identity was shaped within this multilayered framework. During her schooling in Kazan, she was required to study the Tatar language, although Russian remained her native tongue. Despite her ethnic connection to Hungary, Hungarian was her second language. At the age of ten, her family relocated to Hungary, marking the beginning of a significant transformation in her sense of self, particularly through exposure to institutionalized Hungarian identity formation. Initially, she identified primarily with Russian cultural and linguistic heritage, as this had been the foundation of her upbringing.

Her first major identity conflict arose in a Hungarian school environment, where the absence of Hungarian language proficiency and unfamiliarity with local cultural norms created barriers to integration. Over a decade of residence in Hungary, her identity evolved into a hybrid self-concept, which she describes as both Russian–Hungarian and Hungarian–Russian. However, the outbreak of the Russian–Ukrainian war has triggered a second identity crisis.

In this context, she expressed subtle concerns regarding ethnonational tensions and the potential for encountering nationalism. Notably, she demonstrated a pragmatic capacity to shift her self-identification toward a Hungarian identity when circumstances require it. She emphasized the strategic value of multilingualism as a means of navigating social, cultural, and professional spaces, and she continues to leverage her linguistic abilities to maintain Russian–Hungarian as well as broader international connections.

Case 7. Interview

Q: Please tell me where you are from?

A: I am from Russia, I was born in Kazan, but apart from the fact that I was born in Kazan, none of my parents are from Kazan.

Q: Where are your parents from?

A: my mother is from the Mineralnye Vody, and my father is from Hungary

Q: When did you live in Russia?

A: from 2002 to 2012.

Q: It turns out you spent 10 years, right?

A: yes

Q: What year were you born?

A: 2002

Q: Oh, so you were born and raised there?

A: yes

Q: What was your first language that you started speaking?

A: My first language was Russian, of course.

Q: When did you start learning Hungarian?

A: When I moved to Hungary, I immediately started learning Hungarian, but when we lived in Russia, I knew some words. But not so many.

Q: Why did you know Hungarian words?

A: because our dad was talking Hungarian to us. Some words were only taught to us, and we understood them.

Q: That is, do I understand correctly that you went to school in Russia?

A: yes

Q: Did you like Russia at all?

A: My school was across the street, in that respect I really liked it. But in general, I went to the Tatar gymnasium [local school], where I had to study the Tatar language, and the only thing I didn't like there... Since we generally lived in Kazan, the Republic of Tatarstan, then well, it was necessary to learn Tatar language there. Of course, I did not understand why this had to be

done, but I had to. But in the end, I still don't know Tatar. But I liked going to school, they prepared very well there. Even when I moved here, to Hungary, I noticed that what I studied here in the 5th grade in Hungary, I already knew in the 3rd grade in Russia.

Q: In general, did you like living in Russia?

A: In those years, I still didn't think about whether I liked living there. I liked it in the sense that this is my homeland, I was born there, that is, there I found my friends, somehow, well, sort of, adjusted my childhood life. I liked it.

Q: Do you have many friends left in Russia?

A: No, very little.

Q: Why did this happen?

A: Look, those friends that I had, even when I lived in Russia, they are good people, with 1 or 2 of them I remained friends, we still communicate. The rest – no, most likely, well, we didn't have to be so friendly then. But besides that, besides these friends, while in Hungary, I also found Russian friends, who are from Russia, on the Internet.

Q: that is, while living in Russia, you found more pen pals, Russians, as I understand it?

A: Yes. And at the same time, they have nothing to do with Hungary.

Q: interesting. But tell me, please, if you imagine such a Russian person, how can you characterise a "Russian person". Who can generally be called "Russian"?

A: Well, is it Russian-Russian?

Q: Yes, in your understanding. There is no correct answer here

A: In general, regarding this question, I would like to say that for me there is no such thing as Russian. And in general, for me there is no such thing as a Finn or an Austrian, or a Russian, no matter what nationality, for me all people are equal. Yes, they have some kind of their own mentality, some of their own riddles, each nation. Well, because every nation has its own traditions. I only distinguish people, everyone, regardless of the nation.

Q: But now you touched on the topic of mentality and the topic of traditions, just the same. What do you think, what is the Russian mentality and traditions? Again, there is no right answer here, this is what you think is correct.

A: As the song says: “our mentality is from paycheck to paycheck”, I would not really like to say that, but the truth is, that it is difficult for many people to live in Russia. Mentality... is a difficult question for me. Well, in general, Russians are very hospitable, many Russians believe that we will defeat America and become winners of the world. Some people are just very good at preserving and believing in traditions, like Easter, for example. For example, we did not paint eggs for Russian Easter.

Q: How do you identify yourself? Like Russian or Hungarian?

A: By the way, this is a very relevant question, because for the last months, even for the last year, I have been thinking about this issue and I agreed that I am simply combined, so to speak, half-Hungarian - half-Russian, I have both.

Q: What is it based on?

A: I'm sorry, but I used to think, when, well, the first year I moved here, I thought that I was Russian, you can't change me - I'm Russian. But after a while, I got acquainted with the Hungarian culture, traditions and how people behave here, but it all always depends on the language too, because how will you communicate with the Hungarians, how will you understand them when you do not speak their language . By the way, many Hungarians say, “how do you live here without speaking our language?” I criticise this, because you can communicate in any language, for example, in English. But apparently some Hungarians don't want to accept other nationalities if they don't speak Hungarian. But it also, it seems to me, is connected with history, because there is a lot, well, not very much... but, for example, communism entered Hungary after World War II, and after that Hungary really wanted to get rid of it, peaceful people just... Well they always fought for independence, as well as with the Habsburgs, to be united, their own, belonging to no one, not to depend on someone.

Q: And you said that when you moved here, you felt like a Russian, while you said that “you can't change me”, what do you put under this?

A: so... well, I just, because I went to school, and even in the 5-6-7th grade, then the child will not feel very comfortable, I didn't feel myself in my class, I thought I was superfluous here, in terms of... what is the name of the word, wait, I won't be able to say it for the second time... well, the social plan, as it were... a person needs his own importance in social terms, but in principle I now understand, because well... well, yes, you came from Russia, they will ask how things are going there, and who you are, but I don't know, but they just didn't want to take me

close. Get to know each other, you can stay familiar, but we are each other... no, there was no such thing as to grab the same wave and go with it, it's easy with us ... but it also depends on what kind of person you are.

Q: Do you think it was related to the language, or something else?

A: I was a very closed person, since I moved here, I did not understand anything. Well, that's why, probably, I closed myself in myself and then, at that period of time I had such ... such ... a creative life appeared. I found myself in drawing, painting, sports, and music. I did it intensively, as it were, less communication with people and more creativity, expressing yourself in just other ways.

Q: I understand. And when you lived in Russia, did you understand what was happening in terms of political, economics?

A: No, not at all.

Q: And when you moved to Hungary, how long did it take you to learn the Hungarian language to, like, a level that you became comfortable with?

A: I want to say this, a year later I was already quite normal, I spoke well at such a conversational level, a year later, but I feel really comfortable... In my opinion, you can feel comfortable in any language when you start to tell jokes and it would not look stupid, you are not afraid that your joke will be criticized or someone will not understand it, here. And it happened, so I was 16 years old. That is, 5-6 years.

Q: Have you made any Hungarian friends during this time?

A: yes. For these 5-6 years or for all this time that I am here?

Q: Well, for all the time while you are here?

A: Yes, they did.

Q: How many of them do you have, friends of acquaintances, that is, in general, how can we call them a "social circle", so to speak?

A: yes. Well, look, I have a Russian social circle, I have a Hungarian one, I also have... we call it international, because you can't gather all nationalities into one, I don't know, then you'll have to distribute percentages very specifically. Since I only learned English about two years ago, other nationalities in my friends list are coming very slowly, so far. Initially, I was directly

90% Russian-Ukrainian-Kazakh, in general, everyone who speaks Russian, 90%. After that, the percentage began to decrease, I also began to communicate more with Hungarians, because I felt more comfortable with the Hungarian language and understood them more, so ... but at the moment it's somewhere 50/50, even so.

Q: What do you think about Russians and Hungarians, are they similar in mentality?

A: Can you explain to me what "mentality" is like?

Q: that is, for example, habits, or some kind of tradition, some kind of cultural code, or just some kind of behaviour, that is, a pattern of behaviour.

A: How similar are they?

Q: yes

A: They are similar... it seems to me from 100% approximately, well, 70-80%

Q: what do you think, in what areas, on cultural, some economic, political grounds or in general the conduct of life? Any interpretation.

A: In terms of economics, definitely not, in terms of politics, well, before, after the Second World War, 100% coincided very directly, but at the moment, at the moment, it seems to me not, according to habits and lifestyle... it always depends on what the state gives you and what you can dispose of. In Hungary, I think there are a lot more opportunities to be whoever you want to be. A freer country.

Q: ... "freer" in which terms?

A: in self-expression. If you want to do something, you go and do it. Well, of course, in terms of normal, within the framework of normal, of course .. legal.

Q: I understand. When you moved, you started learning Hungarian. In general, you probably started to change, tell me, did you notice any habits that you developed in Hungary when you started living here?

A: A very noticeable habit is ketchup. In Russia I hated ketchup, but here I bought ketchup. But this is one of the most noticeable, what I got. There, in Russia, I did not engage in any creativity, here I, it seems to me, due to the fact that they did not understand me, I began to engage in creativity, I discovered new sides in myself, myself too. Also, I didn't study languages in

Russia. Here I realised that I can learn languages, I'm even good at it, and I can make new friends, communicate with people of just different nationalities.

Q: Have you noticed that you have started to be more environmentally friendly?

A: Yes, yes. I just arrived in Hungary, I saw a person walking in front of me, who picked up garbage in front of me and put it in the trash can. I may never even see such a thing in Russia. Sorting plastic, sorting paper. I smoke, and even if, for example, I run out of a cigarette and there is no trash can nearby, I will not throw it away, I will wait until I get to the next trash can, I will throw it out.

Q: What do you think, is this a personal quality or is it just some kind of public one?

A: In any case, society somehow influences this. 100%. Because it seems to me that if I had stayed to live in Russia, such qualities would not have developed in me.

Q: interesting. Then the next question. Tell me, do you read the news, or any books, blogs?

A: Hungarian?

Q: In general, any. This will be the second question, Russian or Hungarian.

A: Yes, of course, of course.

Q: What do you read?

A: What do I read? At the moment, I read everything related to my studies, my exams, which are coming up at the beginning of next month. I read a lot about history now, Hungarian grammar, language building, communication between people and other things related to this. And, I'm also interested in ... I look on Instagram most of all at the expense of what is now in fashion, in general, the fashion world.

Q: What languages do you mostly read?

A: It's always different, but the things related to studies are in Hungarian, since I study in Hungarian, and also related to studies in Russian, because some of my subjects are in Russian, everything I do is in Hungarian this is what you need right now... I don't do too much in Hungarian, I feel comfortable in Russian-English and also, in my opinion, the media in Hungary is not so developed. Media...

Q: media space?

A: Well, yes.

Q: Tell me, do you read the news?

A: I rarely read the news.

Q: Do you read Russian news?

A: Only “Ne Morgenshter” [Russian unofficial, blog news that publish on Telegram platform]

Q: That is, you only read this Telegram channel, right?

A: Well, I read it, it seems to me that it can be trusted. Also, because now these...how to say...military operations in Ukraine began, at that time a Ukrainian lived at my house and he sent me various pages, namely...their authors are Ukrainians. And he said: if you are interested in news, then you can read on these channels. Well, I’m just now watching the events of the military operation, and what’s happening there, and what’s happening all over the world. I'm looking at the “Ne Morgenshter” page... I also like to look at new clothes, music, and also cryptocurrency. I read about history, there are various interesting facts, and also entertainment content.

Q: Why is it important for you to read the news in Russian?

A: I will understand more

Q: Do you mean the world or what do you mean?

A: I will perceive the information better. If I read in Hungarian, it really doesn't matter what language to read, I’m just used to reading the news in Russian. Of course, I understand that if I read Russian, then this is the side, the point of view of the Russian side, well, Russia. And there are also authors who do not take into account whether I am on the side of Russia, or on the side of Switzerland, I am on the side of Germany, that is, he writes his own, his post, regardless of how it will positively affect me, how Germany will evaluate it or how this will be assessed by China, how it will influence its opinion. And I will generally write a fact, what happened, that is, I will not invent something superfluous there, but I will write a fact. On this date, at such a time, Elon Musk lit up the club at 5 o'clock in the morning, April 5th. Well, just a fact, the way it really happened or is happening.

Q: I understand you.

A: ...I mean, I don't like disinformation at all, and it's very difficult for me to sort, I try to get by. Whenever I find something on the Internet, I check to see if it's a lie or not.

Q: Do you read Hungarian news?

A: yes.

Q: What channels do you mostly read or watch?

A: Well, what pops up in Google is news. Most likely related to politics. There was still a lot of news before the elections, too, like the teachers' strike . It was also connected with me, I read what teachers want and so on, how it will affect me, because I will have exams. Maybe my exam will be cancelled because of this. And also when there was a strike, the teachers did not teach for a week, this also affects me. This is related to me, so I read it.

Q: I understand. Tell me, do you follow politics in Russia and Hungary?

A: Time to time

Q: Why that?

A: I don't pull too hard to find out a lot of details about politics. Most likely about the events, the scale of the event and all.

Q: Do you think Hungary's policy is similar to Russia's policy?

A: I can't tell you because I don't understand politics and... but since I can only say, in my opinion, that life in Hungary and in Russia... At the moment I don't know how much it differs, but according to the stories of my friends in Russia, it is different. Life, quality of life, then politics should also be different, it also affects our lives.

Q: What is your assessment of political power in Hungary?

A: That is, an assessment of a five-point scale?

Q: no, that is, what do you think about it?

A: About FIDESZ?

Q: Well, or maybe you don't think about it at all?

A: I think about it, but in the end I always come to such an answer that I do not influence it and I cannot do anything about it. If I really want to think about it seriously, then I should go to study at Corvinus, probably... and if you think about it seriously and try to change something, then you need to take a good position so that people listen to you. And this is very difficult, it must be done very competently, well, this is not what really interests me in my life. I'm actually

very inspired by Maria Theresa of Habsburgs, the duchess who was [Queen Erzhebet]... well, she inherited the throne and she made very big reforms and it's very, so to speak, I really like her point of view on how the world should look like. Even then, people did not seem to understand all this, and of course, different changes always bring inconvenience, but you just need to get used to them.

Q: the next question: do you take an active part in the public political life of Hungary?

A: Well, I go to vote, this is already from this year and that's it.

Q: What about Russian public political life?

A: No way.

Q: Do you go to any protests in Hungary?

A: I planned to go to a protest in support of teachers to increase their salaries, but apparently they were not so interested and therefore I did not go.

Q: Do you know about the existence of Hungarian national holidays?

A: Yes, some.

Q: What are your favourites? And do you have any favourites?

A: Hungary's favourite holidays... by the way, I want to say March 8th. It's International Women's Day, it's not celebrated that much in Hungary, and it's not such an important day in Hungary. I don't like it, I want a day off. And the holidays, well, look, this is Húsvét, this is Easter in Hungarian, this is a very good holiday. I like the holidays in Hungary even here.... Well, New Year's is not as important a holiday as Christmas. In Russia, if we celebrate Christmas, then... I actually realised here in Hungary how much Christmas is a very important holiday, in the sense that it is a family holiday. In Hungary, here, you are even somehow obliged, of course, you are not forced, but this is such a family holiday when you get together, have dinner, and celebrate. Just like Easter. But it seems to me that in Hungary, compared to Russia, that family traditions are... well, the family is more important

Q: Tell me, have you ever encountered nationalism in Hungary regarding your Russian identity?

A: Speaking of my Russian... yes, many times before the war. In Hungary they always say that if they hear that you are from Russia, then they won't list all the swear words, "bear, vodka,

Putin”, well, they rather show their respect for my nation. But after the start of the war, I no longer encountered them. I subconsciously, maybe consciously, somehow tried to avoid such contact at all in order to say that I am Russian. I don’t want to show people that I’m Russian, that I’m here. The main thing is that I just don’t want to... I don’t know what people think, everyone has their own opinion and therefore it’s better to avoid conflicts. But even, for example, last week I talked with a girl, she is from Ukraine. I said I am half Russian, but at the same time... well, she’s just alone and I’m alone, and I can talk to her about it. Although she sincerely does not like Russians, well, not Russians themselves, but she generally does not like anyone who speaks badly about her country, here. Well, I said I’m Russian, but I respect whatever you think, because the circumstances and you have the right to think so.

Q: if you had the opportunity to move to some other country, or back, for example, to Russia, would you move?

A: Depending... Yes, I would move, but it always depends on what conditions. Even when choosing a university, I thought about moving to another country and studying there. But in the end, my relationship held me back, and therefore, I still decided that I would study in Hungary, and, in principle, there is a good university here, why not.

Q: You said that you stopped saying that you are Russian a little after the war happened, is it because you are scared or do you have some other feeling about it?

A: I know, I have an acquaintance who, on my story, on the first day of the military operation, I posted that, just a photograph: a girl from Russia and a boy from Ukraine are kissing, simply, and my [Russian] buddy for no reason at all why did he start writing, that how they will win, how they will take over the world, Russians are the best, I just look at him, damn it, come on, I have known you for 5 years and you write like that, who are you, do I know you at all? And, as it were, I thought about how propaganda affects people, well, of course, every person will simply drown for his country, this is normal. I didn't mean that I wouldn't say I'm Russian. I can go and tell anyone: yes, I am Russian. But depending on what tone, in what situation. If they ask me, “where are you from”, I will say, “I am from Russia, I am Russian”. Of course, I will not write on the Internet about it ... my friends, anyone can see it, I will not say that I am Russian, God is with us, but at the same time I feel that I am Russian. I will not hide this if they ask me.

Q: Do you feel Russian because of the language, because your mother is Russian, or because you lived there?

A: all together, all together. I was born there, I grew up there, it's in me.

CASE 8

Case 8. Memo

Person 8, a young woman from Kaliningrad, Russia, was born and raised in a financially secure family until her parents' divorce when she was six years old. She has two sisters and describes her upbringing as stable and comfortable compared to others in her city. After finishing school, she aspired to study in Moscow or abroad, ideally in a communication-related field such as advertising or PR. However, financial constraints limited her options, and after failing one entrance exam to Moscow State University, she enrolled at the local Immanuel Kant Baltic Federal University, majoring in English translation and interpretation. Initially, she saw this as a setback but later came to value the quality of her professors and education. Her perspective on Moscow was shaped more by perception than experience; she had never lived there but saw it as an economic center not suited to her lifestyle. Growing up in Kaliningrad, she traveled frequently to Poland and Lithuania, comparing the infrastructure, consumer goods, and living standards of cities like Gdańsk to those in her own region, which reinforced her European orientation and desire for a similar lifestyle.

Politically, she has considered herself opposition-minded since school, influenced partly by her father, who was strongly political, though she did not share all of his views. She observed the gradual decline of media freedom in Russia, recalling how television channels once critical of the government became increasingly restricted. While she did not participate directly in political life as a teenager, she refused to attend school events promoting the ruling party. Her sense of Russian identity is tied to language, culture, and the shared post-Soviet experience, rather than ethnicity. She considers people from various CIS countries to be "Russian" in a cultural sense because of shared proverbs, media, and historical memory rooted in the Soviet Union, which she believes continues to shape identity long after its collapse.

The decision to leave Russia was a long-standing ambition. She actively sought opportunities abroad and eventually applied for the Stipendium Hungaricum scholarship after seeing it advertised at her university. She was also accepted to programs in Germany but chose Hungary because the scholarship covered her housing and living expenses, making her financially independent from her parents. Her first experience in Budapest in 2017, during a semester-long exchange, left her with a strong sense of belonging. She described the city as relaxed,

multicultural, and free of the overly rigid rules she felt in other European countries. She returned to Russia for half a year before reapplying and enrolling in a master's program in English Studies in 2018, graduating in 2023 after two academic leaves.

Despite her long stay, she did not learn Hungarian, citing a lack of free courses, discouragement from professors and peers, and a perception that the language is too difficult to learn independently. She regrets the absence of structured education on Hungarian history and culture during her studies. Her social circle in Hungary consists mainly of friends from CIS countries; she has no close Hungarian friends, which she attributes to language barriers, social clustering among student communities, and the reserved nature of Hungarians. She has not engaged in Hungarian political life but attended two anti-war protests related to Russia's invasion of Ukraine, motivated by an emotional reaction rather than sustained activism.

In her daily life, she has adopted some European habits, such as waste sorting, and developed an expectation for faster service, leading to frustration during visits to Russia. She is critical of Hungarian bureaucracy, slow banking services, high internet costs, and occasional connectivity issues, noting that certain administrative processes are faster in Russia. She follows Hungarian cultural developments through Russian-language social media but does not actively participate in national holidays, except for occasionally celebrating Western Christmas with friends.

When comparing Russia and Hungary, she sees similarities in their centralized political and economic structures, with both countries dominated by their capitals—Moscow and Budapest—while regional areas lag behind. She notes that many Hungarians view Prime Minister Orbán as a dictator and draws parallels between him and Putin, particularly in terms of political longevity and centralized governance. While she has not personally experienced anti-Russian sentiment, she recalls one isolated incident at a protest but otherwise describes Hungarians, particularly older people, as friendly toward her.

She observes differences in mentality, perceiving Hungarians as more attentive and compassionate toward others, including marginalized groups, compared to what she describes as a harsher social attitude in Russia toward the poor and minorities. While some aspects of service culture in Hungary are criticized by other Europeans, she finds it generally more polite than in Russia.

Currently, she has graduated and is awaiting a job offer in technical support at an IT company, *Unices*. She intends to remain in Hungary, hopes her boyfriend will join her, and

plans to learn Hungarian to support long-term residence. Although she acknowledges the possibility of returning to Russia under duress, such as losing her legal status—she would not voluntarily go back in the near future. She loves her home city of Kaliningrad but feels her career and lifestyle prospects are better elsewhere, preferring Hungary’s pace of life and atmosphere to the high-pressure existence she associates with Moscow or Saint Petersburg.

Case 8. Interview

Q: Please tell me about yourself. Where are you from?

A: I’m from Kaliningrad. I probably need to expand a bit.

Q: Yes, of course.

A: I’m from Kaliningrad, I was born and raised there, finished... vocal training, rituals. I came to Budapest for the first time for half a year, for a semester, through the Stipendium Hungaricum program.

Q: What kind of family were you born into, if you can describe it a bit?

A: Yes, I was born... My parents had a business until I was six. So we were, basically, from a well-off family.

Q: By “well-off,” do you mean average?

A: Yes. Well... it’s hard to say “average” because I don’t know the statistics — socially, I mean — of my city. But generally, we lived well compared to others. So I think, let’s say... financially secure... Then my parents divorced, and I have two sisters. But overall, I can say I grew up in a financially stable family.

Q: Got it. So you lived your whole life in Kaliningrad before moving to Budapest?

A: Yes, yes, yes.

Q: What did you do there? Which university did you attend?

A: I studied at the Immanuel Kant Baltic Federal University, majoring in English translation and interpretation. After finishing school, I wanted to go to Moscow or — initially — abroad. But my parents said they couldn’t afford to support me. So the only option was Moscow. But I failed one exam at Moscow State University and had to go to the local university. That was a big stress and tragedy for me because I thought nothing could be worse. But now I understand there were very good teachers, and maybe it was even a good thing that I didn’t go [to Moscow].

Q: Why did you aim for Moscow?

A: Actually, I didn't really want to go to Moscow. It was just a better life prospect. I wanted to study advertising, PR — something communication-related. And obviously, Moscow is our financial and economic center, and you can't succeed anywhere else. But I had never been to Moscow. I just had this image of it. I knew it wasn't my city. I always traveled to Europe from Kaliningrad, especially to Poland. I saw how people live there and wanted a similar life. I knew Moscow was different. Everyone I knew who moved there said you live two hours away from the center, commuting by metro daily, losing half your day in transit. I didn't want that life — just earning money and wasting time on commuting.

Q: I have two questions here — one came up spontaneously in a previous interview, but I decided to explore it further. Many of my As said something like: "Moscow is not Russia." What's your opinion on that?

A: Well, I think everyone thinks that. Of course, if all the benefits are concentrated in one city, it can't represent the whole of Russia. That's quite natural. But again, this is my very subjective opinion because I haven't lived there. It's just from what I hear from friends and acquaintances — that's how I see it. I think, yes, it's not representative of Russia at all. You can't judge an entire country by one city.

Q: And why do you think everyone wants to move to Moscow?

A: Well, generally — to earn money, logically. People go there just for the money. That's why they say, usually, Saint Petersburg is for love or for living, and Moscow is for work.

Q: So, am I right to understand that Moscow has the highest concentration of businesses and money, unlike other cities?

A: Yes, of course. All the budgets, taxes — everything is collected across the country but mainly stored and spent in one city. Naturally, people want to move there.

Q: And the other thing — you said you traveled to Europe and liked the life there better. If you could contrast that with Russia — what was wrong with Russia, in your opinion? I'm asking based on your experience.

A: I don't even know... I can only compare with my city. I've been to some other cities in Russia — Saint Petersburg, Astrakhan. I also have a relative in Novokuznetsk. Kaliningrad is quite different from the rest of Russia due to its geographic location and history — it used to

be a closed city, and my grandparents and relatives used to go to the Baltics, to Lithuania for sausage, to Poland for other things. In the 90s, many Kaliningraders were in shuttle trade — buying in Poland, selling in Kaliningrad. Same with Lithuania. As a child, I traveled a lot to Poland with my parents. So we always compared ourselves not to Russia as a whole, but to how Gdańsk was developing — a city similar to Kaliningrad in size and population.

I think the infrastructure was always very different. There were more conveniences — supermarkets, parking, parks, hotels. More businesses — cafes, restaurants. We always went there to relax or for groceries. In Kaliningrad, it was normal to go to the border for groceries and back. The product quality was better. Like in many border cities. But still, Poland and Lithuania were seen as poorer compared to the rest of the EU. Yet even there, some things were better than what we had in Kaliningrad.

Q: When you lived in Russia, how did you assess the economic and political situation?

A: Bad. My whole life — potentially bad. I was always kind of an oppositionist, even at school. I understood that Putin's regime would never end. There was this feeling of hopelessness — that nothing would ever change. My parents always told me, "Study, learn languages, and leave. It won't get any better." I was basically raised with that idea.

It's sad to realize now. But I think all my childhood, we traveled whenever we could. We went to camps — to Poland, Germany, the Czech Republic, on excursions. And you could see the difference. So I understood why my parents said that.

Q: Were you personally interested in politics? Or were you forced by circumstances to form a viewpoint?

A: I was always interested myself. My dad was very into politics, a staunch oppositionist. But I didn't agree with him on many points. I just observed political events, saw their consequences. When new laws were passed, I saw freedom in journalism shrinking, fewer and fewer independent channels.

I remember as a kid, NTV was kind of an opposition channel. They could say a lot about the government. But over time, I saw that disappearing. So it became clear — less and less freedom, and things weren't getting better. It just kept feeling... tight.

Q: Did you actively participate in Russian political life?

A: No. I was a teenager, so I don't know how I could have participated. I just got really upset when our school put up "United Russia" banners or tried to make us go somewhere — I didn't go. I skipped events in support of the party. I understood it was wrong.

Q: There's this concept, "Russian person." What do you think are the main characteristics of a Russian person, as a kind of image?

A: Probably patience. It's hard to say now, because due to political events, all these images are kind of shifting. And for me, there are just so many versions of the "Russian person." When you live abroad and when you live in Russia — the images are very distorted. So it's hard to pick something...

Q: Go ahead and talk about all of them — don't limit yourself.

A: Well, for example, the "Russian person" who has moved abroad — the ones you meet — are usually educated, intelligent, open, kind. Well, "kind"... of course there are mean people too. But probably more open, more tolerant of everything, more curious and maybe even braver.

But when you're in Russia... I don't know. Now I'd probably say — unfree, fearful. I don't know... It's hard to describe in terms of national traits or something like that.

Q: Right. So do you think being a "Russian person" is more about language and culture, or is it something more individual that differs for everyone?

A: I think it's very much tied to culture and language. Honestly, "Russian person" in terms of nationality — I don't think that matters. We have so many ethnicities and people... my friends, for example, are all from the CIS: Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Belarus. And honestly, I'd call all of them Russian. Because we all... we all use the same sayings, proverbs. We know the same historical and cultural events. And we grew up with that. That unites us. So it's not just the language — it's everything: the events around us, the things we watched... the same cartoons, we heard the same songs.

So yeah, I think "Russian person" is more about the culture they grew up in.

Q: From the Soviet space.

A: Right. It's very tied to the Soviet Union. I think the "Russian person" is deeply linked to the USSR.

Q: Do you think even after the collapse of the USSR, this identity still extends to...

A: Of course. I think it's not just extended — it's foundational. Our parents grew up there. They raised us. And we still feel that deeply. All the elements of culture, everything from film, music, art, it all comes from there. Even if we weren't there ourselves (I mean my generation), we still pick up on all of that very well.

Q: Let's move to the moment when you decided to move. When did that happen? You mentioned earlier that you always wanted to leave. But when did you clearly realize it was time?

A: Always. I always wanted to move. I was just looking for an opportunity. I always knew I'd leave somehow. I had no desire to stay in Russia. Moving to Saint Petersburg or Moscow was just a backup plan, in case nothing else worked out.

Q: And how did you find this opportunity?

A: At university we had a group, kind of like an international office. They posted various scholarships and programs you could apply for. I saw the Stipendium Hungaricum program and realized it was time to apply. Before that, I was just studying and working — not very active in looking. But then I saw their post and applied. I also applied to Germany, but I got accepted to Hungary through this scholarship.

Q: Why Hungary?

A: It wasn't the deciding factor. Honestly, I had little idea about Hungary before. I vaguely remembered passing through a small Hungarian town with my summer camp — returning from Greece on some roundabout route — and I remember it being very, very hot with a lot of bicycles. That's all I knew. I knew the capital was Budapest. That's it. I googled Budapest, saw what the city looked like, and thought — why not? It looked nice. That's all — I just decided to go.

And the key factor — the scholarship was well-funded. It covered housing; I wouldn't need to ask my parents for support. That was the deciding factor — it was accessible.

Q: What program did you enroll in?

A: It was the English and American Studies program at first — for the first half year. Then I entered a master's program — just English Studies.

Q: So you first came to Hungary on exchange for one semester. Then you went back?

A: Yes.

Q: For how long?

A: Half a year.

Q: And why did you decide to apply again?

A: I just really liked it. There was an opportunity to apply for a master's — so I did. I think I applied as soon as I got back. Submitted the same documents again — and that was it. Because there wasn't really any alternative. It was the best opportunity. I wanted to do it. And I really liked Budapest, honestly.

Q: What exactly did you like about Budapest?

A: I arrived and immediately felt like it was my city. It suited my character. And... I don't know... of all the European cities I've been to — this one is the best for me. I felt free here — to speak my language, free... like... if we go to Germany, for example — or maybe not as much — but still you feel it's not exactly a police state, but they're very strict about laws and rules. So you get tense. Here I didn't feel that at all. So many nationalities, such a friendly atmosphere. I really liked it. No one's rushing. Their lifestyle is very relaxed. That suits me.

Q: So you enrolled in a master's program in the same field?

A: Yes, that's right.

Q: And are you still studying, or have you graduated?

A: I already graduated — in February. It turned out that I came here the first time in 2017. Then I enrolled in the master's in 2018. And since I took two academic leaves, I completed the program with an extension.

Q: During that time, did you manage to learn Hungarian?

A: No, unfortunately not. When I enrolled, there were only paid Hungarian courses. I wasn't financially independent yet. But if there had been free courses, I would've gone. Now they're mandatory — I'd definitely take them.

Q: Why didn't you make an effort to learn the language on your own?

A: I thought it was pointless. Everyone discouraged me — even university professors.

Q: Seriously?

A: Yes. I'd say, "I'm thinking about learning Hungarian," and they'd go, "Why?" I do have friends who speak Hungarian, but everyone treats it as something impossible.

Q: Ah, okay.

A: And for me — I just understood that it's not a language you can learn on your own. I don't believe in that.

Q: Did you at least study Hungarian history or try to learn more?

A: Some basic facts... I read a bit. But honestly, it wasn't enough. I regret that we didn't have a university course about Hungarian history and culture. I really missed that.

Q: Why didn't you try to learn more on your own?

A: I did read a little. Maybe I'm just not curious enough. Some things I was interested in — architecture, for example. So I can't say I didn't read or learn anything. But it's the same with my hometown. I know the facts we learned at school, but I never really made an effort to deeply study the history of Kaliningrad region either.

Q: Let's talk about your friends here. When you moved, you likely had to build a new social circle. Was that hard?

A: No.

Q: Where are most of your friends from?

A: From CIS countries.

Q: Do you have many Hungarian friends?

A: No, actually none. I've been surprised by that myself. For some reason, Hungarians I met — usually... even in the dorm, it was always like this: Hungarians socialized with Hungarians, CIS people with CIS people, and everything was split into groups. The Arab world was separate too. I don't know why it turned out that way. I met Hungarians, but real friendships never formed.

Q: Do you think it's a language thing?

A: Possibly, yes. As far as I know, Hungarians are quite shy. I did have Hungarian classmates. But I don't know why... I can't say why it happened. Even those who spoke good English — maybe it's easier for them to talk to their own friends in English. Maybe it's hard to open up in a foreign language. I don't know.

Q: Do you take part in any civic or political life in Hungary?

A: No.

Q: Not at all?

A: Well, only recently — I went to two anti-war protests.

Q: Russian protests?

A: Yes, yes. Nothing related to Hungarian politics.

Q: Why is it important for you to join such movements here but not get involved in Hungarian politics?

A: It was just an emotional impulse. I was really affected by the situation and wanted to express my protest. So I went. Now I don't really see the point. But when it all started, I had a very strong emotional reaction.

Q: Over the time you've lived here, have you noticed that you've adopted any Hungarian — or generally European — habits?

A: Yes, about waste sorting. Since there's the option to separate waste here — in many of the apartments I lived in, neighbors sorted their trash — I had to get used to it too. When I went back home, I wanted to sort everything right away, but I realized there was no point.

Q: Uh-huh.

A: I didn't realize that's a habit. Also, I became irritated in Russia when standing in supermarket lines. Because I'd gotten used to how fast things move here. But of course there are also downsides in Hungary — and advantages in Russia.

Q: What downsides can you point out in Hungary, for example?

A: Banking — communication in banks. In general, the whole banking system, services — everything is slow, tedious, and inconvenient. Internet is expensive. Plus, there are often problems at home with Wi-Fi. And bureaucracy — gathering all the paperwork. You have to go through all the circles of hell.

In Russia, I think there are also bureaucratic issues in certain areas — like when you need to deal with documents — but it happens less often. Here, even basic paperwork that you could get quickly in Russia takes forever.

Q: Do you follow the news here?

A: No, honestly — not really. Only the big political events: like the election of a prime minister, president, political parties — that sort of thing.

Oh wait, I do sometimes... I read what pops up in public pages. I'm subscribed to various pages about Hungary and stuff. Like when a new park is built, or something is being renovated — anything cultural.

Q: Are those pages in which language?

A: In Russian.

Q: Okay, next question. Are you aware of Hungarian holidays?

A: Yes, yes.

Q: Do you celebrate or take part in any of them?

A: Well... not exactly. For example, we don't usually celebrate Christmas. But here, I celebrated it with my European friends — not Orthodox Christmas. Does that count as celebrating a Hungarian holiday? I don't know. Maybe yes, maybe no. Probably no, I'd say.

Q: Do you know about the 1956 Revolution holiday?

A: Yes.

Q: So, am I right in understanding that you know the history behind those holidays?

A: Yes, yes.

Q: Good. Do you think Hungary and Russia are similar in any ways you could identify?

A: Well... maybe in some ways. It's hard to say. There's something about the atmosphere... It's hard to point out something specific. But I feel like — I don't know — some kind of freedom... Hard to explain... In Russia, the "freedom" is in being able to bend the rules, I guess. There's this disregard for things. Not necessarily — maybe something like that.

Although... it's hard to say. Honestly, I don't know. Maybe in a cultural sense, there's something... But I haven't figured it out yet. There is something similar. Like this unreliability in legal matters or regulations.

Q: What's your view when comparing the political and economic situations in Russia and Hungary?

A: I think in some ways, they're probably similar. I asked some Hungarians about politics — what they think — and all of them... naturally, they don't like Orbán. They all say he's a dictator. And that he and Putin are very similar.

But honestly, I was just thinking recently that maybe Russia and Hungary are alike in the sense that Hungary, apart from Budapest, doesn't really have other large cities. And that's kind of like Russia, where everything is focused on Moscow. So everything is centered in Budapest here too. That might be a similarity.

Also, the fact that Orbán keeps getting reelected... maybe that too — this unchanging leadership situation.

I don't think I have anything else to add... except this centralized system of governance.

Q: Do these things — these phenomena — concern you?

A: Yes, yes, they do.

Q: Do you think Hungarians live better economically than people in Russia?

A: It's hard to say. You'd need to look at the statistics to speak accurately. Because I don't travel much across Budapest — I just go about my own business. So it's hard to judge the whole country.

Maybe it's... maybe it's a similar standard of living. I don't know. It's very difficult to say. Even in Russia, it's hard to define our standard of living. In Moscow — it's high. In some place like Volgograd — probably not great. There are just such drastic differences between cities in Russia that I don't know how to generalize them into one average.

Q: Have you traveled much within Hungary?

A: I've traveled — yes, but not much. I went to Lake Balaton, to Siófok, to the border with... oh, what's the name... Esztergom, Szentendre — tourist spots like that.

Q: And from Hungary, have you traveled a lot to other European Union countries?

A: No. Honestly, it just turned out that I didn't go anywhere. After I arrived here... Before that, yes — I traveled a lot. When I first came for six months — I lost my passport here. That canceled all my travel plans. Then I came back for my master's, but right before that I met my boyfriend, and I kept going back to Russia. Whenever I had the chance, I flew home. Oh, and I did go to Italy — once, with him, from Hungary.

Q: Okay. I had another question in mind... Let me ask another one for now. Have you ever faced nationalism here — specifically anti-Russian sentiment?

A: Toward me personally — no, I haven't. Only once, when I went to an anti-war protest, there was that phrase: "Russians — go home." I don't know if that qualifies as nationalism — probably not. People were just expressing their opinion. It didn't have consequences. Honestly, I've experienced more friendliness — especially from older people — when they found out I was Russian.

Q: So, another question in the Hungary–Russia category. We've already compared the two countries somewhat. Do you think the mentality of the people is similar — Hungarians and Russians?

A: Maybe there's something similar. I don't know... I think not quite. Here you really feel that Hungarians are more attentive to one another. I often see how they help each other — even talk to homeless people.

That disgust that Russians often feel toward the homeless, toward Roma, toward poor people — a kind of revulsion... I think when people get poorer, they become meaner to each other. Like, "man is wolf to man." That's maybe... I don't know. I feel like I sometimes observe that. Here, for example, many Europeans complain that the service staff are rude. Maybe that's something we share. But I think in Russia it's changing. Compared to Russia, I think the service staff here are more polite. Though this is all very subjective. I feel Hungarians are more responsive.

Q: Am I right in understanding that you've already graduated?

A: Yes, yes.

Q: What are your next plans?

A: To work. I've kind of found a job. I'm waiting for an official offer letter. So I want to start working, I want my boyfriend to move here, and for us to live here.

Q: May I ask — what sector is the job in?

A: Yes, it's a company. An IT company — Unices.

Q: Unices? Oh, I think I've heard of it.

A: Yes, yes.

Q: So you'll be working as an analyst?

A: No, in tech support. The most basic role.

Q: Got it. Do you plan to move to another European country someday?

A: Not for now.

Q: Do you want to?

A: Not really. I like it here.

Q: Do you consider returning to Russia at some point?

A: Yes.

Q: Under what circumstances?

A: If I get kicked out of here.

Q: And voluntarily? Would you want to return?

A: Probably not. Only if there's no other choice. But voluntarily — no, I wouldn't want to do that right now.

Q: What's the deeper reason behind that, if we dig into it?

A: I don't know what I'd do there. I don't know... I love my city — Kaliningrad. But I'd probably end up in Saint Petersburg or Moscow. I'm not sure yet.

We've talked about it — that if necessary, my boyfriend and I would move to Moscow. But I wouldn't want that, honestly. I know it's not for me. I don't want to live in some giant apartment block, travel two hours to work just to earn money, then come home and collapse into bed. I just don't see the point in that kind of life.

In Kaliningrad, the only option is to have your own business. To have some kind of business to maintain a decent standard of living.

Q: In that case, do you plan to learn Hungarian?

A: Yes, 100%.

CASE 9

Case 9. Memo

The respondent is a Russian-born migrant who grew up in multiple cities but spent a significant part of her life in Rostov. She holds both a bachelor's and a master's degree in technical specializations, with a focus on the automation of technological processes and production. Coming from a family of ethnic Russians with roots in the Rostov and Kuban regions, she never felt a strong attachment to a "Russian" national identity and avoids identifying herself explicitly as "Russian by nationality," preferring instead to name her country of origin without invoking ethnic terms. This detachment from "Russianness," which she associates with imperial ambitions, patriarchy, cultural gloom, and a deep-seated inability to embrace happiness, predates the war in Ukraine.

Her early adult life in Russia was shaped by mixed economic circumstances, her family lived above the average standard, never experiencing hunger, but periods of instability occurred due to her father's alcoholism. Politically, she began with little awareness, but her first year at university exposed her to the contradictions of state politics when she joined a pro-Kremlin youth organization. Disillusionment set in after witnessing electoral fraud firsthand, prompting her gradual shift toward opposition views. The pivotal moment came in 2017 after watching the investigative film *He Is Not Dimon To You*, which revealed the scale of elite corruption and motivated her to join anti-government protests. By the time of the full-scale war in Ukraine, she was embedded in a diverse but politically like-minded social circle where no one supported the invasion.

The first move abroad came in 2017, when she and her partner participated in a six-month exchange program in Hungary. Their decision was pragmatic: Hungary's Stipendium Hungaricum scholarship covered tuition and living expenses, making it a financially viable option compared to other countries such as the Czech Republic, where peers often had to sleep in cars to save money. Her prior knowledge of Hungary was minimal, but first impressions were overwhelmingly positive; even small towns like Gödöllő struck her as clean, well-equipped, and infused with a "European feel." Initial integration was eased by connections formed through shared interests, such as pole fitness, and through meeting long-term Russian-speaking residents who had successfully navigated settlement and citizenship.

Returning to Russia after that first exchange intensified her awareness of infrastructural neglect and inefficiency, from mismanaged waste disposal to monopolized municipal services. The second move to Hungary in 2018 marked a decisive emigration. While she initially considered returning to Russia after gaining skills and experience, the political climate, especially after the war began, removed that possibility. She now sees her departure as permanent until significant democratic reforms occur.

Settling in Hungary involved several stages. For three years she lived in international student dormitories, which fostered an immediate support network but also reinforced the temporary nature of her housing. The move to Budapest and into private accommodation brought stability and the ability to keep a dog, something forbidden in dorms. She identifies three core conditions for successful settlement: financial stability, linguistic competence, and a reliable social network. While her Hungarian language learning stalled—partly due to the pandemic, partly due to uncertainty about her long-term future—she maintains functional integration through English and Russian-speaking communities. Encounters with Hungarian society have been largely positive, though one incident involving police fines at a protest led her to describe Hungary as “a little Russia inside Europe” in terms of political control.

Her social circle remains diverse but is dominated by Russian speakers, Ukrainians, and Belarusians with whom she shares emotional and political affinities. She also participates in limited civic life, attending Pride events and protests against restrictive reproductive laws, actions she values both for solidarity and for fostering grassroots political demand. She has adopted certain Hungarian habits, such as eating pickled vegetables year-round and practicing environmental awareness through waste sorting, though she notes that ecological initiatives require state support to be effective.

Professionally, migration coincided with a transformation in her career trajectory. Securing remote work for an American employer significantly improved her financial independence, self-confidence, and quality of life compared to her years in Russia, where she had felt undervalued and hesitant to negotiate higher pay. She perceives her improved living standard in Hungary as the product of both her relocation and her accumulated professional experience.

Her view of Hungarian politics is critical, especially regarding Orbán’s government and its alignment with socially conservative policies. Yet she has experienced no personal discrimination; instead, she notes a shared understanding among Hungarians that individuals are not personally accountable for the actions of their leaders. She draws cultural parallels

between Hungarians and Russians, particularly in shared passivity and resignation toward political change, contrasting this with the optimism she observes among Ukrainians.

At present, she describes Hungary as an “island of calm”—a stable, safe, and convenient base rather than a permanent home. While she values the infrastructure, pet-friendly environment, and quality of life in Budapest, she remains open to relocating elsewhere in Europe. Her ultimate aspiration, however, ties back to Russia: if democratic transition occurs, she envisions returning to contribute to the country’s reconstruction, holding onto the belief that the skills and experiences she has acquired abroad will one day be needed.

Case 9. Interview

Q: Please tell me where you’re from — which city?

A: I grew up in different cities.

Q: What’s going on in your life this season?

A: In Rostov, I studied at a technical university — that’s where I met a friend. And in Borne, in Ust-Donetsk, I had a specialization in “Automation of technological processes and production.” I also did a master’s in a technical field. I completed both degrees.

Q: Tell me about your family.

A: My family was born in Russia, they’re Russian citizens, ethnic Russians. On my father’s side: my grandma — I think his mom — was born in Klin, in Rostov Oblast, and my dad was born in Rostov. That side of the family stayed in Rostov. On my mother’s side: my grandmother was from a Russian region, then they moved to Kuban, and my mom came to Rostov, to Taganrog I think, to study, and stayed in the area.

Q: When someone asks who you are, how do you answer?

A: Who’s asking?

Q: I mean in general — when foreigners usually ask...

A: Is that the actual question?

Q: Do you identify as Russian or in some other way?

A: I don’t think so. I usually name the country, say that it’s “a former part of Russia,” but I don’t say I’m “Russian by nationality.”

Q: Did this change after the war, or have you always expressed it this way?

A: I think always. I never had a strong sense of “Russianness.”

Q: And the Russian mentality — was that ever part of you?

A: No, it wasn’t.

Q: When you lived in Russia, did you like it there?

A: Before going to Hungary — probably yes. Even before I met Maisiy, I was sure that Rostov was a great city and I’d never move away. That’s what I thought. But then we started a relationship, and he began, in some sense, to cultivate my views, to help develop them in the right direction. So we took the opportunity to go on exchange, in 2017, to Hungary — and later entered a full program.

Q: So just to confirm — your worldview about Rostov and life in Russia changed when you began your relationship with your husband?

A: Yes, I think so. There were those familiar southern attitudes, listening to “gangsta” songs — it was all kind of funny. Of course, Maisiy helped, but not in a forceful way. It was already inside me — just needed room to grow.

Q: And economically, did you live well in Russia?

A: Well, compared to... actually, you interviewed Maisiy and Lena — my friends. When I talk to them, they had it worse. Can I say that?

Q: Yes, of course.

A: So, I understand that in our family we never went hungry, that never happened. We lived above average. But there were problems in the family: my dad drank heavily. He was the only one working, and when he went on drinking binges, things got hard. There were times when money ran out — just regular tough times. As a kid, it felt smoothed over. But when I grew up, I realized this was probably the third family I knew that lived like that.

Q: And your political views — when you lived in Russia, how did you see politics?

A: Well, as a child there were no “Putin” news segments — though my dad constantly watched the news, and there was also that kind of rebellious music, you know, “in defiance.” My dad watched the news, but no one really talked to me about it or showed any interest in discussing it with me.

Then during my first year at university, I joined a pro-Kremlin organization. I met some cool people there, but overall, it was... how to put it... kind of a sleazy place. The most unpleasant experience was when they involved me in voting. They said: “We’ll be helping out with the elections.” I, naive first-year fool, went along — and then they said: “We’ll be going around, voting for the right people, changing outfits between votes.” And whoever disagreed — could leave. I looked around at the people I’d been hanging out with — they stayed, so I stayed. They had some influence on me. After that, I started distancing myself from all of it.

Later, I began to take an interest in politics. I got into YouTube, watched a propaganda film about Putin. I called Maisiy (who already had opposition views at that point) and said: “Well, Putin seems like a decent guy.” He was shocked! Because he already had critical thinking. I didn’t.

Later I watched the film *“He Is Not Dimon To You”* — that was the turning point. When I saw the scale of the corruption... Everyone’s heard about “Putin’s palace,” but when you actually see it — the Nike sneakers, the luxury... That’s when I went to a protest with a friend. At the time, it was still possible — at least sort of safe. I mean, it wasn’t officially authorized, but at least we weren’t being dispersed.

Before the war, I had formed a bubble of very diverse people, but we all seemed to share common values. And when the war started — no one in that bubble supported it. Everyone was against it.

Q: And when was the first time you went to a protest?

A: It was... the protests about Dimon. 2017? Or 2016? Somewhere around then. Maisiy was away on rotation work, and I went without him.

Q: What associations do you have with the word “Russian”?

A: That’s difficult. Probably — “Russian” refers to the European part of Russia with imperial ambitions. We have many nationalities: Tuvans, Bashkirs, Ossetians... and “Russianness” is, among other things, associated with patriarchy, gloom, and the inability to be happy.

Q: So, would you say you have a clear idea of what “Russianness” means?

A: Part of it is really tied to patriarchy — you definitely feel that. And also, I’d say it’s a kind of gloom. On the one hand, there’s this imperial identity; on the other — a sense of gloom and a fundamental inability to be happy. Like... happiness? Nah, not interested.

Q: Yeah, and did you travel around Russia?

A: In my first year, I went to Karelia, to Krasnodar Krai — some kind of youth camps. But the Far East — Altai, Kamchatka, Baikal — all those amazing places I wanted to see... unfortunately, no. It's probably just as expensive as going to Europe, plus the infrastructure isn't developed. So it's not easy. And when the chance came, I was more interested in seeing other countries.

Though of course I'd like to go to Lapland, to Finland. Lena, for example, has been to Kaliningrad, to Sakhalin, all sorts of places — that's a great experience, I think. As for me — I've never been beyond Rostov Oblast, only once to Moscow, once to Saint Petersburg, and then Karelia — that's the furthest I've gone. But Karelia was amazing, really.

Q: At the time of your move, did you still have many friends left in Russia?

A: Yes, of course — I think most of them. But even so, when we decided to move... Well, at first we went for just six months, and it felt like it was our one and only chance in life. Because we're from Rostov — not from Moscow, where people have more opportunities, direct flights... For us, we had to first travel to Moscow and spend just as much on tickets to get there as for the flight itself. That made things much harder.

I even sold the car my dad had given me (an old one), and with that money, we managed to fund the trip. We were trying to save up as much as possible, because we thought: what if we don't get accepted into the full program?

That's when the actual emigration happened. I even got a job beforehand — at a cool company I never thought I'd find in Rostov. So if we hadn't received the scholarship (they were late giving the answer in August), I think I would've been disappointed, but not destroyed. Still, for me — and for Maisiy, who was the main driver and motivator in all of this — it was serious.

My birthday is in July, and I remember that every third congratulation from totally different people ended with: "Well done — get out while you can." Different people, different ages, financial situations — many said, "Good job, you're doing the right thing." That really stuck with me.

Q: And what about now — do you still keep in touch with many of them? Or have some friendships faded?

A: Well, just less so in general... I mean, with age, you naturally talk to fewer people. But overall, I think a pretty big circle hasn't changed much.

Q: I mentioned the travel thing earlier in the context of... You had friends who said that Moscow isn't part of Russia. Do you agree with that?

A: Yeah — Moscow is more like a separate country, because all the money flows there, and it's very obvious. Moscow is a megacity that, in terms of living standards, can probably be compared to some advanced countries... by cost of living, too.

And yeah, I was never really into Moscow. The only time I liked it was when we visited a friend we'd met — he's from Moscow, probably from an intellectual family. I think that trip was when we were applying for visas — and he showed us a part of the city that was really cool.

Then on our last trip — it was in October, on Apple Spas (an Orthodox holiday) — I really felt how much time gets wasted there. Maybe it's age, maybe it's money, or having lived outside for two years, but it hit me: how much time is spent on the road, how ridiculously heavy the metro doors are...

It was physically hard for me to open them, and I started thinking — what about elderly people? So even though it's supposed to be a modern “non-Russia,” so to speak — some things are still... well, yeah. I think just a few days there... Even now, you can see people who've emigrated from there — and they feel that everything abroad is unfamiliar, strange. No services like they had, things are missing. They feel it — even though you'd think they should be happy to have left and be trying to assimilate. But people are people — they still compare everything to what they know. And the differences are real.

Q: When you were here... First of all, when you went to Hungary — why did you choose Hungary for the exchange? And this question is for you specifically, not for everyone.

A: Well, it all started around the fourth year of university. Moisey and I were studying different majors, but we were already in a relationship. Some students from a parallel group went on exchange to the Czech Republic. I remember thinking: wow, it's actually possible! Before that, it all seemed like just a dream. I had always wanted to go on a language course to Ireland, for example, but it felt unattainable — just a fantasy.

And then those guys went, and it inspired us. Moisey, Lena, and I decided to try applying together — first to the Czech Republic. We submitted the documents, everything seemed okay. But then our wonderful university staff missed the deadline for signing the agreements. Because of that, the free education turned into paid — like 500 or 1,000 euros per semester, I don't remember exactly.

But we still applied — just without the scholarship. And then we were told there was a new destination — Hungary. They had a scholarship. We were like, well, let's try! Gathered another document package and applied there too.

We applied to both — Czech Republic and Hungary. And in the end, we were accepted to both. But the Czech Republic had financial difficulties, while Hungary covered everything with the scholarship. That seemed like the best option.

We chose universities closer to Budapest — Dunaújváros, Gödöllő. Miskolc and Debrecen were too far. So we prioritized being near the capital. We were accepted right away, with no extra conditions. I remember how Moisey said, “I don't know... Hungary?” Then he was like, “Well yeah, let's go — they're paying us a scholarship and we don't have to pay for tuition!” It was just an opportunity for a better life.

Because the guys in the Czech Republic — they were sleeping in their cars to save money. No scholarship. And we — we had stability. That was really important. The financial factor was the deciding one. In a way — it all happened by chance.

Q: What did you know about Hungary before coming here?

A: I remember we were taking the bus from Moscow, and I started reading Hungarian history on the way. Honestly — I knew basically nothing. My dad said something about “pay the gypsies,” and I was like, “What?..” So yeah — zero knowledge.

Q: What were your first impressions here?

A: Amazing! It was my first trip abroad — I hadn't even been to Turkey before. Even Gödöllő, which has only about 30,000 people, felt like something big. I was into pole fitness, so the first thing I did was google a studio — and I found one! Even in a small town there were studios. Everything was tidy, had a European feel.

A lot of things struck me. Everything seemed beautiful — the rooftops were like in cartoons. Very warm feelings. Your first foreign country always leaves a deep impression.

Q: When you first arrived, was it hard to make friends?

A: Through the pole studio — I messaged them, and they replied in Russian! I was shocked. There was a girl named Vera — she had moved here about 15 years ago through a similar program. Later, she met Attila here, had a child. She speaks Hungarian, got her citizenship before the war. We became friends.

She lived in the same town as us — because we only went to Budapest by train, and we were living far away. So local connections started there.

Honestly, it was a great experience — the international community, people from all over the world. There were no problems communicating. Some people we met during the first exchange, others later on.

It was a bit harder with Europeans — they seem more distant. With us, everything's more homey, family-like. They're different.

But we still made friends with a few — even with some girls from Gödöllő. And we found common ground on political topics too. For example, with Ayla, we went to a protest in April when Navalny was imprisoned. We also met others there.

So overall — no, I didn't have trouble making friends. Although... sometimes there was a feeling of lacking deeper human connection.

Q: So if I understand correctly — you first moved in September 2017 for six months, and then in September 2018, you entered the full program? So the final move was in 2018?

A: Yes, that's right.

Q: Okay. And when you returned to Russia, how did it feel?

A (*smiling*): I keep saying "we," right?
Well, that's because it really was a shared experience.

I should mention my English level. When we came for those first six months, my grammar was fine, but my spoken English was awful. Even though I'd taken classes.

Lena had a great teacher at her school — she's from a village, but her English is strong. Moisey — he just doesn't care, makes mistakes and keeps talking. But me... I'd be trying to construct

the perfect sentence in my head — and by the time I was ready, the topic had already changed. That frustrated me. I even cried sometimes. I felt like an outsider, lacked confidence.

When we came back for the full program, I switched to a different major. I honestly didn't want to study anymore — my tech background had been hard to finish. I had zero motivation.

But eventually we decided — okay, I'll pick something basic. I chose Business Administration and Management — and it worked out.

Q: You mentioned you were studying alone by that point. How was your communication with others? I take it your language improved?

A: Yes, I was studying on my own, so I had to interact independently. And yes, in Hungary, my language really improved.

Q: Earlier we touched on the topic of returning to Russia. What were your feelings when you went back?

A: Oh right, yes! After that first trip, I really started noticing how I used all these little words I'd gotten used to abroad. It felt... interesting, strange, nostalgic, probably.

When you're here (in Hungary), looking at social media about what's happening in Russia, you think, "Oh wow, looks fun." You kind of miss it. But when you go back — it's a different story.

Last time I went, in October, I was just shocked. In the courtyard: three dumpsters — but trash was piled in a huge radius around them. Everything was filthy. One garbage company — "Clean City" — has a monopoly. And nothing works.

It was awful, really. Things like that become extremely noticeable.

Q: So why did you decide to go to Hungary a second time?

A: At first, I didn't want to. But Moisey had the army looming over him — he needed to leave. And I also needed to figure something out — to have at least some income, some kind of plan.

I thought: well, I could try applying to another study program, improve my English, maybe attend a different university. Those were my thoughts — like, I've got nothing to lose, maybe I'll gain something.

But honestly, first and foremost, we went because of Moisey — so he wouldn't end up in the army.

Q: Still, why Hungary again?

A: Because we already knew the program. We knew how to submit the documents, how everything works. And also — neither of us had IELTS, just a certificate from our university stating that our English level was B2. Other programs required language test scores.

We were also short on time. But Hungary accepted that certificate — it was enough. Financially too: everything was covered. So it was the most realistic and convenient option.

Q: What were your feelings the second time around?

A: Totally different. The first time — everything was new. I even wrote an essay about it: “What is this? What will it be like?” We were going for six months, maybe a year.

The second time — it was serious. We knew it was long-term. We’d need to find housing, jobs, figure things out.

It was a conscious step. We weren’t thinking: go, study, and return. We were thinking: how do we settle here, how do we continue?

Q: When you say “continue,” do you mean specifically staying in Hungary — or abroad in general?

A: Just in general — not necessarily in Hungary. Just outside Russia.

Q: So it would be accurate to say that this was a full-fledged emigration, through education?

A: Yes, it was one of the possible paths. Going back to Russia was no longer on the table. The situation was already deep into the political agenda — everything that was going on.

As long as the Putin regime was in power — I had no desire to return. When he leaves, and the country changes — maybe.

Even before the war, I had a feeling the president was just... abandoning the country and its people. Things were getting worse and worse. The war — that was it. A breaking point.

Though before the war, I did have this idea: to gain experience, skills, and then return to Russia to help change things when the time was right. But now — there’s no such opportunity.

At that time... I don’t even remember how old I was — maybe around 30.

Q: When you arrived the second time — was it difficult to settle in?

A: We lived in a dorm for three years. Then we moved to another building, where we had our own kitchen — and that made everything much better. Because at first, the kitchen was shared

— and that was tough, of course. People from all different countries, with different habits, and not everyone was responsible.

So it got better, but overall, I can't say it was especially hard to settle in.

Q: So from the start, you knew the dorm was a temporary solution? That eventually you'd move out and rent an apartment?

A: Yes, of course. That sense of impermanence was very present. Especially because of the dog. You weren't allowed to have a dog in the dorm, and that was important to me. So yes — everything emphasized that this was temporary.

Q: What kind of difficulties did you face while trying to get settled?

A: Honestly, I don't know. Maybe you can clarify what you mean exactly? Because I'd say there are a few key factors.

First — the feeling of migration itself. You feel like you're trying to “break through” here.

Second — the economic side. You need to be financially stable.

Third — social connections. When you move to another country, you need at least some basic foundation — economic, linguistic, and human.

Q: Was it hard to build social connections?

A: No, because at first we lived in an international dorm. Everyone there was “in the same boat.” And the university really supported us — the international office helped all the time, and information was always available.

But now it's totally different. We moved to Budapest last summer. And in our building, it's mostly elderly people.

Language-wise — it's hard. I tried learning Hungarian, even enrolled in courses, but then the pandemic hit and all motivation disappeared. Hungarian is very hard. I love language learning, but I didn't have the time or the consistency.

Of course, I understand that I should at least know the basics. But it's a big investment.

And everything changed after one incident in April of last year. We were stopped and fined — 100,000 forints each. It happened at a protest.

Yes, in Europe there were restrictions too — COVID and all — but there, if there's a protest, the police just monitor to make sure it's peaceful. But here — they called the police and handed out fines immediately. That made me realize that Hungary is like a little Russia inside Europe.

You feel it — the frowns on the streets, a certain mentality. And at the same time — it's still safe, there are opportunities, you can gain new experiences. But not everything is easy.

Q: How long have you lived in Hungary at this point?

A: Four years.

Q: Have you made any Hungarian friends during that time?

A: Yes, of course.

But I can't say there are a lot of them. I have acquaintances, a few friends. Some are Moisey's colleagues. One guy we met on a bike ride. Then there's Kolya's friend — we became friends through our dogs, walking our pets.

They all speak English. Otherwise, I wouldn't be able to talk to them.

Q: Does that motivate you to learn Hungarian?

A: Yes. But... the motivation isn't always there.

Q: What's your opinion about Hungarian politics?

A: Even before the war, it was already becoming a factor for me. For example, if Orbán and his party, Fidesz, won again — it became clear it would just be more of the same stability, which I personally don't support.

I'm really bothered by copy-paste laws — like those against LGBT people, or against women. For example, the law requiring women to listen to the fetal heartbeat three times before an abortion — that's completely against my values. I really dislike all of that.

A Russian passport now — it's not a privilege, it's a burden.

But I haven't experienced discrimination. Quite the opposite — Hungarians often show understanding. Because they live with Orbán themselves — and they understand that they aren't personally responsible for his decisions. They treat you the same way: you're not responsible for Putin.

That's nice. Hungary turned out to be a convenient and, in some sense, safe place.

Q: Were you surprised by the election results?

A: Yes, very. I thought people in Europe were already tired of Orbán, of fascist rhetoric. I was almost sure he wouldn't get reelected.

But unfortunately, he did. Even smart people know how to play the right cards. The opposition, just like in Russia, is too fragmented. They can't unite against a common enemy. And when the enemy is united but the opposition is weak — the enemy wins.

Q: Would you say you're living economically better in Hungary than you were in Russia?

A: Yes. Because I got a job — while still in Europe.

Back when I lived in Russia, I had low self-esteem. I was afraid to ask for more money. I worked in IT but couldn't even name a high salary for myself.

Here — I found a remote job, working for an American employer. When the dollar matched the euro and the forint dropped — it became even more comfortable.

Of course, not everything's smooth. At the end of the month, I might have to hold back a little if I didn't budget well. But overall — I have stability. I can buy things I like just because I like them.

Before — everything had to be planned out, I lived in constant frugality. Now — there's freedom. Though I think it's also tied to age and experience. If things had worked out the same way in Russia — who knows, maybe I wouldn't have left.

Q: So it's more connected to your professional development than the country itself?

A: Yes, I think so. Everything kind of aligned: I left, found remote work, moved up, gained confidence.

Working at that company in Russia gave me experience — and that helped me find a remote job. If not for that experience, maybe it wouldn't have worked out here either.

In Russia, I probably wouldn't have even started looking for remote work.

Q: Do you think Russians and Hungarians are similar?

A: Yes. There's a certain similarity — like a kind of passivity, apathy. Like: “What can we change, really?”

In Ukrainians, I see more optimism, more openness to life. Even the refugees I've met — they'd say things like, "Come visit us when we rebuild." Their eyes shine. With us — not so much.

Q: You already touched on this a bit, but just to clarify: do you speak Hungarian?

A: Well... I'd say I think about learning it, but my planning horizon is very short right now. And if it turns out I need to move elsewhere, Hungarian won't help much. It's not like a Scandinavian language, not global.

I have a friend, for example — she's from Russia, used to live in Pápa, and then moved with her husband to Iceland. The quality of life there is better, there's equality, and no restrictions on abortion. Yes, the weather is tough, but otherwise — it's calmer.

And here... the general climate feels tense. And I'm not sure if I want to stay.

Still, I've tried learning Hungarian at a basic level, at least enough for conversation. But it's scary — it's a phonetic language, and you can easily mispronounce something and accidentally say "ass" instead of a normal word.

It takes effort — time, motivation, financial investment. And I'm not fully certain I'll be here long-term. That's what holds me back.

Q: Do you participate in Hungarian civic life?

A: It's hard to call it "active" participation...

But for example, I've gone to Pride for two years in a row. This year I couldn't — I got sick. But just the fact of going was important to me, because something like that simply doesn't exist in Russia.

One time my friend Kolya invited me to a march protesting the law that forces women to listen to the fetal heartbeat three times before an abortion. I went.

If it weren't for the war — maybe I would've even volunteered as an election observer. Some people still do that now, but I no longer have the energy for it.

Q: Why is it important for you to participate?

A: First — it's good to be among people who care. That brings people together.

Second — the more people like that, the more a real social demand starts to form. It works. Slowly, but it does.

Q: Have you picked up any Hungarian habits while living here?

A: Oh yes! I fell in love with eating pickles year-round. Especially the sauerkraut from Lidl — it's amazing, spicy.

In Russia, it's like: winter comes — you pull the jars out of the cellar. But here — anytime, summer or winter. At first it seemed weird, but now it's totally normal.

But probably the biggest change — is environmental awareness. I started getting into politics and ecology even in Russia, but once I came to Hungary, it got more intense.

Sorting waste, using proper bins — I really got into it. At first, my friends were even a bit scared of how radical I became. Now I've balanced out. But the habit of separating trash has stayed.

And I realized: without government support, it's pointless. People who are just trying to survive don't think about ecology. Everything's connected — ecology, politics, social policy.

Q: Do you know Hungarian holidays? Do you participate in any?

A: Yes, of course. The first one I experienced was in October — I thought it was something about the Soviet Union, but it turned out to be the 1956 Revolution.

They have two revolutions, and for them it's a big part of national identity. There's even a monument showing Germany “attacking” Hungary — Hungary is represented as an angel. Although in reality, Hungary also participated in the war. So yes — there's a tendency to shift the blame.

I know the Catholic holidays, but we don't celebrate them. Overall, with holidays — I still don't feel connected to the local culture. And our own holidays — like New Year's, March 8th — they're not the same as before.

March 8th — here it's seen totally differently. Thanks to the move, I realized that this day isn't just “women's day” — it's about rights, about respect. Though in Hungary it's not really celebrated either — the society is masculine. But my view of it has changed.

Q: Do you read Hungarian news?

A: Right now — no. My attention is fully on Russian events.

I care. I feel like I'm a kind of information source for my friends. They don't have time to keep up with everything, but I already have this curated “bubble” and filters. I read and share.

It's about justice. About the hope that there are still good, intelligent people in the country who can change something.

Q: I think I missed an important question. When you mentioned you communicate with Hungarians — who do you interact with here?

A: Mostly Russian speakers.

I go to pole classes — there are Hungarian women there. Then there's my friend Kolya — she lived in Canada, now she's in Hungary. Through her, I've met people too.

Overall, it all forms around shared interests. I used to go to knitting meetups — there were people from Ireland, Hungary, Russia. At swimming — I met a girl from Belarus. I also talk with Ukrainians.

But overall — Russian speakers dominate. And it makes sense: we share a common emotional state, common feelings. Conversations inevitably return to the war, to politics. That connects people too.

Q: And finally: do you think Hungary is a permanent home for you, or a transit country?

A: For now — it's an island of calm.

We have a great apartment, a wonderful landlord. He treats us like human beings. He let us have a dog — that was important to us. We had never rented before, and I was nervous. But it all worked out great.

Budapest is an amazing city for dogs. So many places, great infrastructure.

But... I can't say it's "forever." There's no clarity about what's next.

The only thing I know for sure — if Putin steps down or faces a tribunal, if there are real elections in Russia, freedom, democratic transition — then yes, I'd want to return.

Right now — that's impossible. But I believe. As Yekaterina Shulman says: "Write your projects and keep them in a drawer. The time will come when they'll be needed."

Russia will be in ruins — horrible, massive ruins — but... someone will have to rebuild it. And I'd like to be part of that.

Q: Thank you so much. That's a great place to end.

CASE 10

Case 10. Memo

The Person 10 is a 26-year-old woman born in Moscow, currently living in Hungary for the past four years. She is in her third year of a literature and linguistics program at Pázmány Péter Catholic University and works remotely teaching English to children, doing translations, and writing commissioned texts. She previously earned a degree in television journalism from Moscow State University, entering the faculty at the urging of her parents, who saw the diploma as prestigious. Initially motivated by a romanticized notion of truth-telling journalism, she quickly became disillusioned, realizing there was little space for honest reporting in Russia. Her thesis—a short film depicting the self-acceptance journey of two gay men—provoked controversy with her homophobic dean but earned her the highest grade for its production quality, reinforcing her self-image as independent-minded and willing to challenge norms.

Her family background is ethnically mixed, with Armenian roots on her father's side and Georgian roots on her mother's, though her parents and grandparents had long been settled in Moscow. She identifies herself pragmatically as Russian in a passport sense but does not feel tied to any nationality. While her upbringing reflected traditional expectations—respect for elders, prioritizing family—specific Armenian or Georgian customs had largely faded. Politically, she entered university as a naïve supporter of Alexei Navalny, later broadening her perspective to recognize other opposition figures and becoming more critical of Navalny's nationalist leanings. She remains firmly opposition-minded.

She describes Moscow as a developed but insular city, distinct from the rest of Russia due to concentrated government investment, but also characterized by closed social behavior, poor preservation of architectural heritage, and a lack of communal assistance. Her social circle in Moscow was mostly Russian-born peers, and although she enjoyed aspects of living there, she often felt frustrated without knowing how to change things.

Her move to Hungary in 2018 was prompted by her then-boyfriend, who had visited and liked the country. They initially enrolled in an English course as a practical way to obtain a student visa, without plans to stay permanently, but extended their studies and decided to remain. She chose a bachelor's program in linguistics and literature over a master's to prolong her stay, admitting that the visa is more a legal tool for residence than a step toward an academic career.

She finds the literature component enjoyable, particularly American literature, but struggles with linguistics.

She has attempted to learn Hungarian through a university course and self-study apps but remains at a basic level, citing the language's difficulty and uncertainty about long-term residence as reasons for not investing more effort. Despite the language barrier, she has built a wide social network of Hungarian friends who share her political views and values. Most speak English, and she met them through mutual acquaintances. Her integration into Hungarian society includes participation in Pride events and volunteering for Ukrainian refugees, although she does not engage deeply in local politics. She has learned about Hungarian history and culture both independently and through coursework.

She has not encountered significant nationalism in Hungary, aside from occasional jokes about the Soviet period, and notes that Hungarians generally distinguish between Russian citizens and the Russian government. She considers Hungary's mentality closer to Russia's than to that of other EU countries, citing political similarities. She appreciates the slower pace of life in Hungary, lower housing costs, and a more comfortable rhythm compared to Moscow, though she acknowledges Budapest is only moderately less expensive overall.

The war in Ukraine was a shock—she learned about it from her sister's urgent messages and canceled travel plans. She opposes the war, considers it an unjustified aggression by Russia, and rejects conspiracy theories about its origins. She participated in anti-war protests despite the risk of arrest, driven by shame and helplessness, and reports that roughly 80% of her friends share her stance, while 20% hold different views. She maintains close relationships with Ukrainian friends, though one has severed ties due to the war.

Her opposition to returning to Russia has solidified. She believes Europe offers more opportunities and that Russia faces a future behind an "iron curtain." She would only return permanently if compelled by a family emergency. Looking ahead, she is uncertain whether she will complete her degree in Hungary, noting she already holds one diploma and may prioritize employment over further study. She has no fixed plans for permanent settlement but expresses interest in exploring Scandinavia, valuing political stability, living standards, and social equality. For now, Hungary remains a practical base, but not necessarily her final destination.

Case 10. Interview

Q: Tell me how old you are and what you do?

A: I'm 26 years old, I study literature and linguistics at university, and I also work remotely teaching children English online, doing translations, and writing texts to order.

Q: Where were you born?

A: I was born in Moscow.

Q: What education did you get in Moscow?

A: I studied at Moscow State University, Faculty of Television Journalism. We had both regular journalism and television. We learned editing, filming, etc.

Q: Tell me a little about your family.

A: Part of my family is from Armenia, another part from Georgia, but I think all my grandparents moved to Moscow, so my parents were born there. And so was I.

Q: How do you identify yourself? Are you Russian or do you not tie yourself to any nationality?

A: Most likely, I don't tie myself. My passport is Russian, so I'm Russian. Traditionally, by my father's line, I'm Armenian, but I've never been to Armenia and don't know the language.

Q: Do you keep traditions in your family?

A: The traditions are more in upbringing. There's a strong emphasis on respecting elders, not contradicting them, that a woman must start a family, and care only for her family in this life. But specifically Armenian or Georgian traditions – not really. My grandparents already moved away from that.

Q: Do you think Moscow is a city that represents all of Russia, or is it separate?

A: Separate. Even government money mostly goes to Moscow, a smaller part to St. Petersburg, and the rest to all of Russia. Moscow and St. Petersburg are more developed than most smaller towns.

Q: How would you describe Moscow? Is it similar to something European or not?

A: In some ways, it's better than Europe, and in some ways not. For example, our service is better. But Moscow is worse because people are more closed off, no one usually helps each other. The same goes for architecture – in Russia, architectural heritage isn't particularly valued, it's demolished and replaced with concrete panel buildings. That's sad.

Q: Do you have a lot of friends in Moscow?

A: Not as many now. I've been living in Hungary for four years, so my social circle has changed. But when I come to Moscow, I still meet up with all my old friends from school, university, and work.

Q: And your friends – are they Russians or newcomers?

A: Russians. Mostly from Moscow.

Q: Did you enjoy living in Moscow overall?

A: Yes and no, because back then I never thought I could move somewhere else. So I didn't get upset. But many things in Moscow annoyed me, I just didn't know what to do about them. I simply lived with it.

Q: Why did you choose to study journalism? How did you choose your university?

A: I was 16, I didn't know what I wanted to do in life. My parents dreamed of me studying at Moscow State University because that diploma opens all doors. At some point, they learned a new faculty was opening there. So they had a new dream – their daughter as a television journalist. At that age, I had no real understanding of what I would do, so the faculty sounded fun. I also thought I would become a journalist, write the blunt truth in newspapers, etc. So I agreed.

Q: Did you enjoy studying there?

A: I stopped liking it after six months in my first year, because I was a romantic 17-year-old who realized there's no honest journalism in our country. No one would let me write what I wanted. That upset me. I decided to focus more on creating something. They positioned our faculty as "television – the future," but we mostly studied Soviet television.

Q: What was your thesis topic?

A: We could either write a theoretical paper or make a film. I chose the latter. Our dean is homophobic, so I made a short film about two gay guys who find themselves and come to terms with it. The thesis was met with some scandal. My supervisor didn't come to the defence because he was afraid of crossing the dean. I did everything myself. The dean asked, "What is this provocation, why was it made?" I defended my position and the film as a creation. Eventually, the rest of the committee stopped the scandal and decided to grade not on content but on production. I got the highest grade. I felt like a rebellious teenager.

Q: When you graduated, you had some idea of Russia. What was your political stance

A: When I entered, I was very naive, a couch oppositionist. Navalny was my hero. Everything I read on Lenta.ru was the truth to me. There was Putin, there was Navalny. That was it – black and white. By graduation, I realized Navalny wasn't such a hero and that Russia had many other opposition figures and parties. I started reading more other sources, including foreign ones. I'm still quite opposition-minded.

Q: Why did your opinion of Navalny change?

A: I still like him as a person, because his situation is absurd. I feel sorry for him. But I learned he had occasional nationalist ideas, not very openly expressed, but I didn't like that. Russia is a multinational country, and I wouldn't want someone like that as president.

Q: Do you mean you're aware of many ethnic groups and peoples, or specifically migrants?

A: I mean everyone. Russia is huge and has many nationalities. You don't have to go far – Moscow is the center of everything, easier to find work there, and all nationalities from Russia are gathered there.

Q: When did you first start working?

A: I was 19–20, in my second year. I worked at Rocketbank. I answered calls, emails, and provided consultations.

Q: Did you vote when you turned 18?

A: Yes, but I don't remember what elections they were. At that time, I didn't know small politicians at all. Later, in Hungary, I voted in constitutional amendments and presidential elections.

Q: When you graduated, did your values align with those Russia promoted?

A: I don't even know how to answer. During university and all the political events, I was deeply immersed in my studies because my profession required it. Over time, I realized I would never work in journalism because I thought, and still think, most of it is corrupt people paid to promote certain things. And by the end of university, the situation in Russia was getting worse.

Q: Did you dream of moving abroad?

A: Yes. But I never thought it could happen. I lacked perseverance and didn't know where or how to move.

Q: When did the thought solidify and you took action?

A: I was a bit lucky because my ex-boyfriend wanted to move specifically to Hungary. He suggested I come with him, and I just went. He took care of everything – finding a university, housing, etc.

Q: Why Hungary?

A: He had visited as a tourist before moving. He liked everything and dreamed of living here. We didn't plan to stay forever – just to come first. I didn't plan to stay here forever either. The first year we took an English course, planning to study for six months and go back. We finished the first year, then the second. We liked it a lot. We looked for a bachelor's program, not a master's, to stay longer.

Q: Where did you end up studying?

A: At Pázmány Péter Catholic University, in my third year now. I study linguistics and literature.

Q: Do you enjoy what you do here?

A: The literature part – yes, because it's an immersion in American literature. The linguistics part scares me, because it's not interesting to me and it's hard.

Q: Do I understand correctly that the student visa is just a legal document to stay?

A: Yes.

Q: Why didn't you get another type of visa?

A: I don't know, my boyfriend just decided to study here. We both decided a work visa was harder to get than a student visa.

Q: When did you move to Hungary?

A: It'll be four years in August – 2018.

Q: Did you learn Hungarian?

A: I tried several times – a half-year course at the university and Duolingo. But I didn't learn it. I know basic phrases and understand more than I can say. But I can't speak it. The language seems very difficult. If I stay here forever, I'll learn it. If not, I won't – it would be pointless.

Q: Do you have many Hungarian friends?

A: Yes, a lot.

Q: What are their views on life?

A: All my friends here share my political views, values, and worldview. I only make friends like that, so they are very open-minded, tolerant, and understanding. They all speak English.

Q: How did you meet them?

A: Word of mouth.

Q: In four years, have you taken part in Hungary's social or political life?

A: Not much. I went to Pride in summer and now I help Ukrainian refugees as a volunteer.

Q: Do you take part in Hungarian holidays?

A: For four years, I've gone with friends to watch fireworks, get together, etc., but nothing like a big celebration.

Q: Do you know Hungary's history? Did you study it yourself?

A: Yes. Some by myself, some at university. My English course was about Hungarian culture, general information about the country. Plus, I took some classes in Hungarian literature, cinema, history, and theater.

Q: Have you encountered nationalism here?

A: No, never. Not in a harsh form. As a joke, at university, they sometimes mentioned Soviet times to me.

Q: What does it mean to be Russian?

A: Right now – it's shameful. I have mixed feelings, because Russia is such a huge and beautiful country, with talented people, etc. In a way, I'd like my European friends to visit me, but now, because of the political situation, I only get sympathetic looks when I say I'm from Russia. I've never been proud or ashamed of being Russian. My country doesn't represent me, so it doesn't matter to me.

Q: What are your plans?

A: I don't have a clear plan yet. I don't know if I'll finish my university here, because I already have one diploma. I needed a visa to live here and do my things. If I find a job, I'll decide then. I don't know how life will turn out.

Q: How has your identity changed after moving to Hungary?

A: If we talk about COVID, I had no problem wearing a mask, because compared to Russia, Hungary was very strict. People took it seriously – in stores, the metro, etc., everyone wore masks. If someone had it pulled down, they were from Russia. Even when I went back home, I wore a mask in stores, transport, indoors – which made my friends giggle. I also noticed I'm uncomfortable taking the metro in Moscow – it's long, crowded, unlike Hungary. In four years, I've gotten used to Hungary's climate, so in Russia, I now feel cold in weather that used to be fine.

Q: Can you say you live better in Hungary than in Russia?

A: In some ways – yes. In Hungary, it's financially easier to rent an apartment, and the slower pace of life suits me perfectly. I've unlearned constantly running around without thinking about myself or my pace. I'm much more comfortable here. And my friends here are closer to me.

Q: Do you benefit economically compared to Moscow?

A: I think I do because of rent. In Moscow, I'd pay three times more than I pay now. Also, I work remotely from Hungary, so I'd earn the same in Russia. But expenses would be very different. Moscow is a bit more expensive than Budapest – in stores, cafes, and bars.

Q: Do you consider it a special operation?

A: I consider it a war. Russia is wrong.

Q: What were your first feelings when you found out?

A: I woke up calmly in the morning and saw 500 messages in messengers, which really surprised me. I started reading my sister's messages – we were supposed to fly to Crimea the next day to see our father. She sent about 15 messages about the alarming situation, maybe it's better not to risk it, etc. I thought, "What situation? What are we talking about?" Her next message said the war had started, our flight was canceled. Right after that, I started reading the news. I spent about four hours reading, unable to process it.

Q: Which side did you take?

A: I'm against this war. I think Russia is in the wrong here. This offensive is absolutely meaningless.

Q: What do your friends think?

A: About 80% agree with me. We talk about it because it makes it easier. But 20% have a different opinion.

Q: Who do you think is to blame for this war?

A: The person sitting in a bunker and smiling at all the conferences. I'm not a politician to make such judgments, but our country started this war, so we're the only ones to blame. There are many theories – that the US planned it, Ukraine planned it, COVID-related conspiracies, etc. But that's not worth believing. This war has no purpose.

Q: Do you have friends from Ukraine? What's your relationship with them now?

A: I have four close friends. One is my sister's boyfriend, two girls now live in Hungary, and one in Kyiv was a close friend but said she would no longer talk to anyone from Russia, that she hates us all, etc. With the rest, we have great relations and support each other.

Q: Is Russophobia growing or are we exaggerating it?

A: Even if we exaggerate, we can't do that without reason. There are still grounds for it. I'm glad many people don't equate Putin with Russians. Putin is not all of Russia.

Q: Did you attend anti-war protests?

A: Yes, though there were brutal arrests. I was lucky – I went out, walked, and returned safely.

Q: When you went out, did you understand you were risking your freedom?

A: Yes, completely. But in those days, I was consumed by shame and helplessness. So I went, just went. I wanted at least to calm myself by knowing I did something.

Q: Has your desire to live abroad changed after this?

A: It's only strengthened. I never want to return to Russia. Even if we ignore the war, my relatives themselves said it's worth thinking about. Europe has more opportunities and a future. Russia is going behind an iron curtain – there's no future there.

Q: Do you think economic sanctions have affected ordinary people?

A: Yes, very much. And not only Russians – the whole of Europe too.

Q: If you could choose any country in Europe to stay permanently, which would it be?

A: That's a hard question. You can't just blindly move, so you have to read everything about the country first – politics, salaries, living standards. I can't give a clear answer right now. I'd like to go to Scandinavia.

Q: Do you think Hungary is a typical EU country?

A: Not really. In mentality, it's closer to Russia than other countries. Almost the same politics, way of thinking, etc.

Q: On what grounds would you return to Russia?

A: Only if something happened to my family, God forbid. Otherwise, if nothing happens, I never want to return permanently.

CASE 11

Case 11. Memo

Born in Rostov-on-Don, the respondent holds a specialist degree in linguistics and journalism, with English and German as her primary languages. Her migration trajectory was neither linear nor initially self-motivated. At eighteen, despite her attachment to Rostov, she was sent by her mother to study in the Czech Republic, a relocation she resisted and later described as two unhappy years in Prague. Upon returning to Rostov in 2013, she enjoyed three years of social and personal satisfaction before the city began to feel limiting—socially repetitive, professionally stagnant, and lacking in opportunities. In an attempt to expand her prospects, she enrolled in a PhD program, but during her second year was offered a student exchange in Hungary. After six months in Budapest, she decided to remain, extending her studies while actively seeking work, eventually securing a job and a work visa. This decision marked the end of her doctoral studies in Russia.

She reports no political engagement or clear stance on Russian politics, describing herself as indifferent and uninvolved. Her settlement in Budapest was socially easy, she quickly built a network of friends, including a Hungarian best friend from her first year, but professionally challenging, with visa issues posing the most significant barrier. Hungarian language acquisition has not been part of her integration process; she operates comfortably in English and views functional fluency as unnecessary for her current life, though she acknowledges it could create new opportunities. She does not celebrate Hungarian national holidays except in informal, social contexts, and admits to limited retention of historical knowledge about Budapest, despite her interest in visiting notable sites.

Her employment trajectory illustrates both the barriers and agency involved in migrant economic integration. After months of unsuccessful job applications in Hungary due to her lack of international corporate experience and employers' reluctance to sponsor visas, she accepted an internship through AIESEC in Istanbul. The position, selling elevators to the Russian market, felt tokenistic, and her dissatisfaction with both the job and the city led her to refocus on returning to Budapest. With the assistance of a Russian acquaintance, she prepared extensively for an interview, ultimately securing a position in which she has remained for two years.

Her preference for Budapest is rooted in an affinity for the city's atmosphere, interpersonal environment, and lifestyle, despite recognizing comparatively low salaries. She expresses a willingness to relocate within Europe for economic improvement, identifying the Netherlands, particularly Amsterdam, as her ideal alternative, but rejects the idea of returning to the Czech Republic and is ambivalent about other countries such as Denmark. She has not encountered overt anti-Russian nationalism in Hungary, though she notes that housing discrimination in favor of Hungarian nationals is common. Cultural comparison leads her to conclude that Hungarians and Russians have fundamentally different mentalities, with Turks aligning more closely to Russian patterns in her view.

While she currently has no desire to return to Russia, upcoming personal circumstances—her marriage and her fiancé's business plans—will necessitate relocation to Turkey. If forced to choose between permanent residence in Turkey or Russia, she would opt for Russia, though not Moscow. Her case reflects a pragmatic and adaptive approach to migration, shaped less by ideological or political motivations than by personal comfort, social ties, and labor market realities.

Case 11. Interview

Q: Where were you born?

A: I was born in Rostov-on-Don.

Q: What is your education?

A: In Russia, I have a specialist degree. Linguistic education, Faculty of Journalism (English, German).

Q: Did you enjoy living in Russia?

A: Yes, it was great.

Q: Why did you decide to move?

A: When I was 18, my mother sent me to study in the Czech Republic. I liked living in Rostov and didn't want to move anywhere. But since I behaved terribly, my mother kicked me out. I resisted a lot, cried, but had to go. I spent two miserable years in Prague; I didn't like it there. In the end, I found a way to return to Rostov (came back in 2013). I lived happily there for three years, had my fun. But then it started to feel too small, uninteresting – same places, same people, no decent job. In desperation, I entered a PhD program in Rostov. Studied for a year, and in the second year I was offered an exchange program in Hungary. I studied there for six months,

lived in a dormitory. Then I decided I liked it here and wanted to stay. I arranged to stay for the second semester. While studying, I looked for a job and explored the situation. I found a job, got a work visa. I dropped my PhD program in Rostov.

Q: What is your attitude toward politics in Russia?

A: None at all. I don't understand anything about it.

Q: Was it difficult for you when you moved to Budapest?

A: As for friends, no – I immediately made new acquaintances, mostly foreigners. My best friend is Hungarian, from my first year of study. Settling in wasn't hard either, especially since I had been here before. The hardest part was finding a job. The biggest obstacle was the visa. Otherwise, it was easy.

Q: Did you learn Hungarian?

A: No. I had no motivation, no boyfriend, and at work I communicate in English. I know basic phrases for the supermarket, I know all the product names. But to have a constructive conversation – no. I don't feel disadvantaged without knowing Hungarian. It doesn't prevent me from earning money or from having friends. But if I knew Hungarian, new doors and opportunities would open. If there were free offline courses from the Hungarian parliament, I'd go study it.

Q: When you started living in Hungary, did you begin celebrating Hungarian holidays? Did you adopt their celebrations?

A: Catholic Christmas – no. March 15 – no. If the holidays involve drinking and eating, then I'd celebrate. But I'm ready to celebrate anything at all. I don't even celebrate my own Christmas.

Q: Have you learned the history of Budapest during your time living here?

A: Interesting question. I have a bad memory. If I ever read or learned something, I've forgotten it all. I probably know something. Living here, I've wanted to visit most of the places, which is what I do.

Q: Why did you decide to move? I know you had such a period.

A: Yes, I couldn't find a job. For 4–5 months I couldn't. I had no experience in an international company. Employers don't look at your résumé or education; they look at work experience. Many called me, but no one wanted to arrange a visa or work permit. So I looked for a job anywhere, just to find one. Officially, no one hired me. I found the AIESEC organization, which

deals with internships. I didn't want to go to Asia; I could try Turkey. I was hired in Istanbul to sell elevators to the Russian market. But I had the feeling I was hired there just for show. And Istanbul wasn't for me – not only because I didn't like the job, but because living there was impossible. I immediately started looking for a job again in Budapest. A fellow countrywoman helped me, recommended me to a company. I had never prepared for an interview so much in my life. I searched for information everywhere I could, laid out notes everywhere, practiced audio interviews. They asked exactly what was written in my notes. So they had no choice. Everything worked out great, and I've been working there for two years now.

Q: Why did you want to return specifically to Hungary?

A: I don't know, I just love Budapest. I feel comfortable here. I love the city itself, the communication, the atmosphere – everything in general. And I have many friends here. The only downside is the salaries.

Q: If you had the opportunity to move to another European country with higher salaries, would you agree?

A: I'd gladly agree to move to the Netherlands. I really liked it there. It's very rare for me to like a country as a place to live. I recently went to Denmark, came back, and realized I definitely wouldn't live there. Somehow I didn't like it. I would never move to the Czech Republic again – it's boring and depressing. I would live in Amsterdam – I've been there three times, but I'd love to go a fourth and fifth time.

Q: Have you encountered nationalism in Hungary?

A: Specifically Russian-targeted nationalism – no. It often happens that when looking for an apartment, many landlords want Hungarians rather than foreigners. Perhaps because of the language barrier. In the Czech Republic, there's constant nationalism, for example.

Q: Would you say Hungarians are culturally similar to Russians?

A: No, I wouldn't. The mentality is completely different in all areas. Turks are similar to Russians, but Hungarians – no.

Q: Would you like to return to live in Russia?

A: I really like it here; I don't want to leave. But I'll have to move to Turkey because I'm getting married in September. If my husband's business goes well, we'll have to move to Istanbul. But if I had to choose between Russia and Turkey, I'd choose Russia – but not Moscow.

CASE 12: STUDENT

Case 12. Memo

Person 12, a 21-year-old from Yekaterinburg, Russia, migrated directly after finishing gymnasium to pursue undergraduate studies at Corvinus University's Faculty of Media Communications in Budapest. His stated motivation for migration was rooted in personal development rather than political or economic dissatisfaction: he sought to improve his English, expand his life experience, and challenge himself by leaving his comfort zone. He characterizes his decision to study abroad as an intentional act of self-discovery, believing that regardless of his birthplace, he would have pursued education in another country. While he affirms a strong personal attachment to Russia, appreciating its history and culture, his sense of "being Russian" blends elements of courage, resilience, outspokenness, and ambition, with little distinction in his mind between ethnicity and culture.

Arriving in Hungary in 2018, Person's 12 settlement process was marked by considerable initial difficulty, as he lacked life experience in practical matters such as housing, work, and social integration. Language barriers were mitigated by his focus on building relationships with English-speaking Hungarians, foreigners, and Russians, and he has never experienced discrimination on the basis of nationality. He does not deliberately study Hungarian, considering it unnecessary for his current professional and social life. His professional trajectory centers on video production, where he works freelance while managing academic commitments and preparing for postgraduate study. Person 12 reports profound personal transformation since migration, attributing changes in daily habits, openness in communication, and broader worldviews partly to Hungarian cultural influences, especially in breaking taboos present in Russian social discourse.

His knowledge of Hungarian history is informal, drawn from reading and observation rather than structured study, and his impressions of national celebrations reveal a critical, comparative lens. While committed to leaving Hungary after graduation to pursue a master's degree in a Western or Anglophone country, contingent on scholarship availability, he maintains a pragmatic approach to future relocation, recognizing the economic dependence of creative work on urban scale and opportunity. Though increasingly politically engaged through exposure to like-minded Russians abroad, Person 12 frames his visits to Russia in personal and familial

terms, intending to maintain ties without seeking permanent return unless other plans fail. His case reflects a youth-driven, self-initiated migration motivated by educational and experiential growth, with an adaptable identity that balances national belonging with global mobility.

Case 12. Interview

Q: What's your name and where are you from?

A: Person 12, 21 years old. I'm from Yekaterinburg, Russia. I study at Corvinus University, Faculty of Media Communications. I'm graduating this summer. Next is a master's degree, but not in this country. I work in video production — filming and editing. I'm a computer guy—cameraman.

Q: Were you born and raised in Yekaterinburg?

A: Yes.

Q: Did you finish any institutions there?

A: In Yekaterinburg, I only finished gymnasium, then immediately flew here.

Q: Did you generally enjoy living in Russia?

A: Yes, I love going back there.

Q: Was there any initial reason for migration?

A: Yes, my goal is still migration. There are many more work opportunities. I really enjoy exploring new places — it's boring to stay in one city. I need a change of city, a big space to explore and to develop.

Q: From the perspective of politics and economics, did everything in Russia suit you?

A: I was 18, I didn't know anything about that yet.

Q: So you migrated just out of curiosity?

A: No. I first moved because I wanted to improve my English. I wanted to get far away from my comfort zone. I think no matter where I was born, I would have gone to another country to study. Because I wanted to put myself in a difficult position, to learn about life, away from the people who help me. I like talking to foreigners, getting new life experience.

Q: Did you want to be, in some sense, a foreigner?

A: No, I'm Russian. I never wanted to become a foreigner. I love Russia. It has a very interesting history. It's interesting to study.

Q: How would you identify yourself as Russian? What does it mean to be Russian?

A: There are many aspects. Courage, boldness. Being Russian means telling the truth, standing up for yourself, being ready for anything, being smart and advanced. Being a Russian tourist means being rowdy. Doing what you want (ignoring others — that's very Russian). Striving for a job, getting into university. Being loud, proving your point.

Q: Is "Russian" an ethnicity or a culture?

A: For me, ethnicity and culture are the same thing. I don't see a difference. There's a lot of overlap.

Q: You mentioned Tokyo. Was that your internship from Budapest?

A: Yes, I went there on exchange in 2020.

Q: Why did you choose Budapest, Hungary for your move?

A: Honestly, I didn't think much. I just wanted to run away somewhere far. To find myself. It was a process of self-discovery. To talk to people. I wanted to go to the Czech Republic because there are many direct flights. Then I realized I didn't want to learn Czech because it's too narrow. I wanted to be more mobile. And Hungary is one of the cheapest countries where you can live in English, but at the same time there's not much Soviet legacy. It's not Eastern Europe in the same way. But there's a difference between Hungary and Estonia.

Q: Would you say Hungary is a typical EU country?

A: The EU is a group of countries. I don't know what "typical country" means. They're all different — climate, people, history, and so on.

Q: Do you pay for your education or are you on a scholarship?

A: I paid for my education, yes.

Q: When did you move here?

A: In September 2018. I spent half a year in Russia because of COVID, half a year in Tokyo. About three years total.

Q: How was your move and settling in? Was it difficult?

A: Yes, it was terribly hard. I had very little life experience. There wasn't a single sphere of life where things were set up — from cooking to making friends. It was hard to find housing and work. Now it's all settled.

Q: Did you have difficulties with the Hungarian language?

A: I'd say I have an aptitude for languages. I never studied Hungarian deliberately, never wanted to know it, never aimed to learn it. Hungarians don't speak much English, so my father and I thought it would be a big problem. I talk to Hungarians who know English, or to foreigners, or Russians.

Q: Have you experienced Hungarians treating you badly because you're Russian?

A: No, that's a misconception Russians have. They think everyone attacks them, that everyone is against us. No one cares. I've never encountered nationalism or racism toward my nationality.

Q: Do you have many Hungarians in your circle now?

A: I don't know, I don't divide people by nationality. What matters to me is what they live for, what they do. It's not a criterion to judge people.

Q: Where do you work?

A: In video production, but I'm freelancing now. I wanted to sign a six-month contract with an agency, but I have too much going on — thesis, diploma, applying to master's programs, finding a university. Total overload. I wanted to switch to stability, salary, fixed hours, but for now I'm only freelancing.

Q: Are there things that changed you after moving to Hungary?

A: Yes, of course. I was a completely different person. My daily routine, my eating habits. Easier to say there's no area of life that didn't change. I'm definitely not the same person. It's progress.

Q: Is that your natural path of development or is it Hungarian culture?

A: Partly Hungarian culture. In Russia, many topics are taboo. You can't talk openly about everything. You can't even talk about sex. It's a sort of unresolved issue. In Hungary, people talk about it more openly, though they have their own quirks too.

Q: Have you delved into Hungarian history during this time?

A: I think yes, but I didn't study it deliberately. I read some things — about Austria-Hungary, the USSR, Independence Day parades. It actually reminded me of Nazi Germany, to be honest. They blocked bridges, threw flares, a man on stage shouted very loudly.

Q: You said you want to go for a master's degree in another country. Which one and why?

A: I can't discuss that yet because it's future plans. There are many of them, varied. I'll go wherever I get a scholarship so I can study without paying. Some capital city with reputable universities.

Q: Western European countries?

A: Yes, plus the UK, Oceania, Canada, and the USA.

Q: If you were offered something in Hungary to stay, what would it be?

A: An apartment in the city center, five minutes from the metro, without roommates, for 4 million rubles.

Q: Do you think with your creative work you'll earn well anywhere?

A: It depends. Everything depends on the country. The bigger the city, the more opportunities. But in any big city, I'd manage.

Q: Do you follow politics now?

A: Yes, I'm a very political person. I started reading more things, both about Russia and here. Probably a big influence was meeting people from Russia who also started taking interest in this. I keep track of what's happening, but because of the current difficult period in my life, I try to pay less attention.

Q: Are you planning to return to Russia?

A: I haven't returned with the mindset "I'm staying here to live and work" for a long time. I go back because I miss people — friends, parents, my brother. I go to visit them, to give my brother memories. I don't want him to remember me as the guy who left and stayed abroad forever. I come and do things he'll remember. Or I miss snow, nature, the food. But no, I'll return to Russia only if nothing in life works out.

CASE 13

Case 13. Memo

This case concerns a migrant from Omsk, Siberia, who left Russia immediately after secondary school to pursue higher education in Hungary. Initially trained at a linguistic gymnasium, she moved to Budapest to enroll in a bachelor's program at the International Business School, later continuing with a master's degree. The migration decision was strongly influenced by her parents, who foresaw political deterioration in Russia and encouraged her to establish herself abroad. Her own dissatisfaction with the Russian collective mentality, workplace culture, and political stagnation — coupled with the stark contrast she observed between her provincial hometown and Western Europe, reinforced her openness to relocation.

Her integration process in Hungary was socially smooth, facilitated by dormitory life among Russian-speaking peers, particularly Ukrainians, with whom she maintains close friendships. Everyday adaptation challenges were limited to learning independent living skills. Hungarian language acquisition has been minimal, though she completed a one-year course motivated by the prospect of permanent residency or citizenship and her relationship with a Hungarian partner. While she participates in cultural exchange, celebrating both Catholic and Orthodox holidays — her social circle remains predominantly post-Soviet. She has not engaged in Hungarian political or civic life but continues to vote in Russian elections abroad, despite skepticism about their fairness, reflecting her belief in civic participation.

Professionally, her post-graduation trajectory was disrupted by visa complications caused by a small employer's administrative errors, resulting in a near-deportation episode. She resolved her status through employment with ExxonMobil in 2019, where she remains. Her retention in Hungary is linked to personal relationships, an established social network, and familiarity with local life. While she perceives Hungary's economy as stronger than Russia's, she is critical of its political leadership's longevity and anti-immigration stance.

The interviewee retains a complex Russian identity, associating it with both resilience and adaptability, but also with distrust and individualism. She expresses a firm decision never to return to live in Russia, citing both personal detachment and condemnation of recent political actions, particularly the war in Ukraine, which she views as catastrophic for both Ukraine and Russia. Her future plans center on long-term settlement in Hungary, marriage, property

ownership, and eventual transition from corporate to more independent work. The case illustrates a form of educational migration evolving into permanent settlement, shaped by early family influence, professional stabilization, and selective integration within a transnational Russian-speaking network.

Case 13. Interview

Q: Tell me your name, where you're from, and what you were doing in Russia.

A: I'm from Omsk, Siberia. I studied at Linguistic Gymnasium No. 115. Right after graduating from high school (11th grade), I came to Hungary to study for a bachelor's degree. Then I went on to do my master's here, and now, naturally, I work here.

Q: When you lived in Russia, did you like living there?

A: No.

Q: Why not?

A: I'm honestly not very close to the Russian mentality in general. I have Russian friends, and I like individual Russian people, but as a society overall, I'm not very fond of our approach to work, to people, and to respecting personal needs, even in the workplace. And at that time, the political situation was already turning unfavorable — one person had been in power for far too long. Even though I didn't fully understand everything yet, my parents were already saying something bad would happen in the future, so they encouraged me to leave and establish myself elsewhere. Personally, I also found it difficult to connect with people there, and for some reason it was easier for me here.

Q: And your family — are you all from Russia, or do you have a different ethnic background?

A: We're all from Russia. We suspect we might have some Jewish ancestry, but it's unproven. For several generations we've lived and grown up in Russia.

Q: When you lived in Russia, did you understand the political and economic situation yourself?

A: Probably not as deeply as I would now, but in general terms, I understood that living in Russia was worse than in Europe. Our family traveled to Europe twice a year, and I could see the difference — especially since I wasn't from Moscow, but from a small city, so the contrast was obvious. I visited Moscow rarely, so I compared my small Siberian city to what I saw in Europe, and Europe seemed far ahead. Maybe if I had lived in Moscow, the contrast wouldn't

have been so striking, but from the provinces, it was very noticeable. At that age, I realized that having one unchanging leader was bad.

Q: Did you have many friends at the time?

A: No.

Q: So when you left, you didn't have strong ties left behind?

A: No, apart from family and maybe two or three friends.

Q: Do you think Russia is doing well economically?

A: No. The minimum wage is so low it's not enough even for basics. For example, in Omsk some people earn 8,000 rubles a month. If I get sick and go to a pharmacy, I might spend 3,000 rubles at once. I don't understand how you can live, buy food, pay for housing on such wages. In my city, wages are extremely low, there are no jobs because most enterprises are owned by Moscow-based companies, and no new enterprises open. The youth leave, the city declines. I think this tendency applies to most Russian cities except Moscow and maybe St. Petersburg.

Q: So you always had the idea of moving abroad?

A: I don't know if I always had it. I was a homebody, very family-oriented, so until 11th grade I never seriously thought of leaving. At the end of school, when it was time to choose a university, my father told me I wouldn't be staying there. I cried a little, but basically he pushed me to go.

Q: Why Hungary?

A: Our family has property in the Czech Republic, and we wanted something within driving or train distance. I don't like Prague, so we looked at nearby places. Hungary had a lower cost of living compared to other European cities, and a family friend's daughter was studying here and loved it. We visited, liked the city, and decided to come.

Q: How did you apply?

A: I applied myself to a private university — International Business School. In spring I took the entrance exam in English; that was the only requirement.

Q: Was it expensive?

A: At the time it was €6,600 a year.

Q: How does that compare to Russia?

A: About the same for paid programs, though in Russia you can also get into a free state-funded place.

Q: What does “being Russian” mean to you?

A: Positively — extraordinary endurance, adaptability to any life conditions, and mutual help. Negatively — carelessness, the “it’ll be fine” attitude, and general distrust of others, often expecting a trick or scam. This distrust can make people miss out on opportunities. I think we are more individualistic — each for themselves.

Q: Do your parents live in the Czech Republic now?

A: No, they live in Omsk. The house in the Czech Republic is just a vacation place; they have no residence status there.

Q: Was it difficult for you at first in Hungary?

A: No. Everyday life was a challenge because I wasn’t used to living independently — I couldn’t cook or do laundry well. But socially it was easy, especially living in a dorm with other Russian speakers. I quickly made friends, especially with Ukrainians, and we’re still friends today.

Q: Do you know Hungarian?

A: Very little. I get by with English and gestures, except in government offices and banks.

Q: Are Russia and Hungary similar?

A: I noticed both Russians and Hungarians often express dissatisfaction with life. But a big difference is that, in my experience, Hungarians are lazier and don’t push themselves at work the way Russians often do.

Q: Have you studied Hungarian history?

A: No, I’ve never been interested in history, Russian or Hungarian. Over nine years here, I’ve picked up bits from my boyfriend, colleagues, and general life, but I haven’t studied it on purpose.

Q: Have you studied Hungarian language?

A: I took a one-year course because my boyfriend's family doesn't speak English, and I also hope to get permanent residency or citizenship one day, which requires the language.

Q: Do you take part in Hungary's political or public life?

A: No. I haven't been to rallies and don't follow local activism — I don't believe protests change much.

Q: Do you participate in Russian political life here?

A: Yes, I vote at the Russian embassy because I believe if you don't care about politics, politics will care about you. I don't believe in fair Russian elections, but I still vote.

Q: Do you know Hungarian holidays?

A: Yes, in general.

Q: Do you celebrate them?

A: Mostly Catholic Christmas and Easter because of my Hungarian boyfriend. We celebrate twice — Catholic and Orthodox dates. Sometimes I go to August 20 fireworks, but main celebrations are Christmas and Easter.

Q: Do you still celebrate Russian holidays?

A: Yes, New Year, Easter, and March 8.

Q: Do you read Russian news?

A: Yes, because my family lives there.

Q: Do you follow Hungarian news?

A: A little, via one English-language news channel and word of mouth.

Q: Have you picked up any new habits here?

A: I've gotten used to things like blowing my nose loudly in public, which I found shocking at first. I've also shifted from overworking to only doing what's required in an 8-hour workday unless there's an urgent need.

Q: Have you faced nationalism toward Russians?

A: No, never. I've only heard of older people remembering 1956 reacting negatively to hearing Russian.

Q: Do you see Hungary as part of the EU?

A: Yes, but it's very different from countries like Germany, France, or Austria — mostly in quality of life and currency.

Q: What do you think about Hungarian politics?

A: The prime minister has been in power too long. I also think anti-immigration policies have grown, making residency and citizenship harder to get.

Q: Is Hungary's economy better than Russia's?

A: I think so, though partly due to its small size. Russia has huge resources but produces very little from start to finish.

Q: Why did you stay here after your studies?

A: I had a deportation issue due to mistakes in my work visa application by a small company. I spent nearly a year traveling back and forth on tourist visas before getting a proper work visa through ExxonMobil, where I've worked since 2019. I stayed because I was already comfortable here — friends, familiarity, and life established.

Q: Is it hard for Russians to migrate here?

A: If you study here first, it's easy to find a job. Coming straight from Russia to find work is harder, but not impossible.

Q: Who is your social circle now?

A: My closest friends are from university — all Russian speakers. Others are from Kazakhstan and Ukraine. We share cultural background, humor, and references.

Q: What are your future plans?

A: To stay here with my boyfriend, get married, buy an apartment, and have children. I hope to switch from office work to something more independent. Moving to another country isn't out of the question.

Q: Under what conditions would you return to Russia?

A: None — I never wanted to return. I feel like a different person there, and recent events only reinforce that.

Q: Have you maintained friendships with Ukrainians since the war began?

A: Yes. I had two Ukrainian friends; one moved to the US and we drifted apart, but the other I've been close to for nine years, and we're still friends.

Q: How do you view Russia's actions?

A: Extremely negatively. In a week, they destroyed two countries — Ukraine physically and Russia economically.

CASE 14

Case 14. Memo

This case concerns a migrant born in Leningrad (now St. Petersburg) in 1972, into a family of scientific and technical workers who emphasized education. Already from childhood, she studied French and English in depth, and by her late teens worked part-time as a translator. She entered university in economics in 1989, a time of political and economic upheaval. Disillusioned with the poor quality of Russian higher education in the early 1990s, she sought opportunities abroad. A formative experience was her participation in a London School of Economics summer program, which exposed her to Western standards of economics. In 1996 she successfully obtained a scholarship to study economics at the Central European University (CEU), which at that time had campuses in Prague, Budapest, and Warsaw. She arrived in Hungary in 1997, completing her degree with dual diplomas.

Her initial plan was to return to Russia, but personal circumstances redirected her path. Her husband, also Russian, was admitted to a PhD program, and she followed him to Germany, where she herself entered doctoral studies in environmental economics at Heidelberg University in 1999. Combining her earlier interest in ecology with her training in economics, she specialized in the economics of climate change. After completing her dissertation, she moved back to Hungary, where she built a long professional career at the Regional Environmental Center, an international organization, working there from 2001 to 2017. Later she transitioned into independent consultancy.

Although she initially lived in a Russian-English professional bubble, her lack of Hungarian limited opportunities once she began freelancing. This led her to study the language more seriously, reaching B1 in writing but still struggling with spoken comprehension. Her integration into Hungarian society is described metaphorically as “diffusion”: while she has absorbed parts of Hungarian culture and built networks, she feels she has not fully merged. Her social circle today consists mostly of international colleagues, mixed-background acquaintances, and some Hungarian contacts, though she deliberately avoids the larger Russian-speaking community in Budapest, which she sees as ethically incompatible.

She observed Hungary’s transformation over time: when she arrived in 1997, the country was optimistic, reform-driven, and attractive for investment. Today she perceives it as more closed,

with growing nationalist rhetoric and stricter immigration policies. Although she has encountered occasional street-level xenophobia, she notes that within her professional and academic circles she has always been respected. She considers herself middle class in Hungary and believes her economic position would likely have been slightly better in Russia prior to the recent war.

Culturally, she identifies with the Soviet intelligentsia tradition, rooted in Russian cultural capital but also shaped by her Jewish and Finnish heritage. She rejects the use of state symbols, having grown up with enforced Soviet insignia. While she does not celebrate Hungarian national holidays, she enjoys social rituals such as Easter breakfasts. Her habits and lifestyle have been influenced more broadly by Western Europe, particularly environmental consciousness and resource conservation.

Politically, she maintains liberal-left views, believing in a state that regulates markets and supports long-term investments in human capital while protecting rights and freedoms. She actively participates in volunteer work, from helping Syrian refugees in 2015 to current scientific and humanitarian support, and contributes professionally through climate change research and taxation. She follows both Russian and Hungarian politics critically, seeing Russia as trapped in authoritarianism and Hungary as increasingly nationalistic.

Regarding Russia's war against Ukraine, she unequivocally condemns it as both a humanitarian catastrophe and a historical regression. She frames it as an unjust annexation effort and expresses hope for Ukraine's victory, seeing it as a chance for national consolidation in Ukraine and an opportunity for Russia to enter a period of reckoning and reform. She stresses that instead of wars, states should invest in education, technology, and economic progress.

Her trajectory illustrates the pathway of a highly educated, post-Soviet professional migrant, whose move abroad was initially education-driven but who remained through a combination of personal ties, professional opportunities, and a strong identification with European values. Her case shows selective but lasting integration into Hungarian society and a clear, sustained distancing from contemporary Russia.

Case 14. Interview

Q: People generally prefer to remain anonymous because it gives them a certain opportunity to speak out and to do so safely. So, let's begin. By the way, the interview is semi-structured, which means some questions will be invented during the interview — based on what you say,

I will try to formulate them correctly, as this allows for a degree of improvisation. Also, I am not allowed to express my own position, so I will often say “interesting.” “Interesting, interesting” — it’s just to keep the conversation going. So, let’s start with the first question. Great. Please tell me about yourself — where were you born, in which city?

A: I was born in a city that has since changed its name. I was born in Leningrad, now it’s Saint Petersburg. If it matters, it was February 1972. I’m already 50 years old.

Q: Wow, that’s great.

A: I was born there, I grew up there, in a family of scientific and technical workers — people who tried to give their children the best possible education. My parents were always determined to give both me and my sister as good an education as possible. So, I studied at a school with advanced French, and I also studied English in depth. I often had a private tutor in English. Well, starting from the age of 13, I had regular lessons two days a week...

Q: Okay.

A: ...and from the age of 19, I was working part-time as a translator. I entered university in 1989, majoring in economics, but back then it wasn’t really like a proper university experience.

Q: In St. Petersburg itself?

A: Yes, and in 1993 the city’s name was officially changed. Well, you can probably imagine what it was like back then — in our case, we really only had actual teaching for the first two years. Then everyone scattered — both students and professors — to make money. We all had to earn a living. And for the entire course, we had only one textbook, copied and passed around. The professors were just a couple of chapters ahead of us in that textbook. They received it only slightly earlier than we did.

Q: I see.

A: At some point, I got lucky and enrolled in a summer school that was organized by the London School of Economics (LSE) — at that time, in Russia, it was a unique opportunity. I realized then what real Western economics was. I understood that my Russian economics textbook could never give me that. Of course, they were trying to feed us some Westernized material, trying to teach something new, but it was very constrained. So I decided to apply for a master’s program abroad — more precisely, to the Central European University (CEU). I applied for a scholarship. The first year, nothing worked out, but the second year, I succeeded.

I studied economics at CEU — at that time, one of those lucky years when the program had a great setup. My first year was at a Czech university, where they gave us a basic grounding in economics — some macroeconomics, some microeconomics. The second year was in Hungary. Actually, I had already been living outside Russia since 1991. And in September 1997, I first arrived in Hungary. That was my second year in the CEU master's program.

But CEU wasn't really a Hungarian university, even though it had Hungarian accreditation for higher education. It was an American university accredited by the Middle States Association — in short, accredited in the United States. It never had a campus in America; it always had multiple campuses in Europe. When I was studying, there was one in Prague (the main campus), one in Hungary, and one in Warsaw. Economics students spent the first year in Prague, and environmental studies students were sent to Manchester for one of their modules.

So, in Hungary, I spent the 1997–1998 academic year. I graduated here, defended my master's thesis here, and in the end, I received both a Russian diploma and a Western diploma.

Q: Okay. You said you were lucky to get into the London School of Economics. Why do you think it was luck? Was it really just luck, or was it purposeful work with a bit of luck that got you in?

A: Well, first of all, it was a summer school — three months, and it was in St. Petersburg. So yes, I think it was luck because I happened to be there at the right time. A friend of mine told me, “Masha, let's go, they're doing interviews for the summer school,” and I said, “Why not, let's go.” We went, I passed the interview — and that was it.

Q: Okay. Got it. And second question: how old were you when you studied here in Hungary?

A: I think I was 26 at the time.

Q: Okay, got it. So you have two kinds of experience — one in Russia and one abroad. Tell me, when you lived in Russia, did you understand anything about the country's economic and political situation and its prospects?

A: Of course. I don't want to keep repeating “Oh, you're too young to remember that time,” but it really was a great time. It was a time of great hope, a time of Russia's biggest opening to the outside world. Among young people, it was considered good form to understand what was going on in economics and politics. It was right after perestroika, when the communist system was starting to crumble, and finally many materials became available, and it became possible

to speak openly about many things. At that time, saying “I’m not interested in politics” was almost impossible — especially for a student or anyone active in society.

Q: If it was a great time with many opportunities, why did you still decide to move abroad?

A: I wanted to get a proper education. I understood that at that moment there was almost no such thing in Russia. Also, I knew that my political views were moderately left-wing.

Q: Could you explain what you mean by that?

A: I’m a liberal, but not a libertarian — meaning I still believe the state should perform certain corrective and redistributive functions. It’s not about total control, of course, but the state must maintain some functions and fulfill certain societal responsibilities. At the same time, we must respect the rights of all groups in our society — no dictatorship of the majority, no dictatorship of the norm. And yes, of course, the state must regulate, because it’s obvious that many markets without state regulation would simply become inefficient on the one hand. On the other hand, when it comes to the development of human capital, natural resources, and long-term investments in science and infrastructure — without the state, it just won’t happen. But I still believe the state should let business run the economy, while providing minimal social support and implementing some long-term programs, setting the framework so that business does not pollute too much or harm people excessively — in other words, small but firm safeguards.

Q: At that time, were your expectations and hopes more realistic than now, or do they still have the same strength as before?

A: Back then, those were expectations. Now, with hindsight, I can compare them to what actually happened. My current expectations have not yet been tested by reality, so it’s hard to say for sure.

Q: Do you still believe that this model is possible for Russia?

A: Yes, of course, I still believe it’s possible. I think it’s perhaps not the only path, but one of the main ones. You — the younger generation — will shape Russia’s future, but I think this model, closer to the Swedish style of socialism, where the state acts as, in the words of Ekaterina Mikhailovna Shulman, an “iron nanny,” is the right one. Hopefully, not an *ironnanny*, but still — I feel that even young people still place a lot of hope in the state. I also really hope we will get over our “childhood illness” as a society and finally turn toward the world in a peaceful way.

Q: You mentioned that your plan was to return to Russia after your studies. Why didn't that happen?

A: Because my husband was admitted to a doctoral program. At first, I stayed with him, but of course, I also needed to do something myself, so I entered a PhD program as well — though not here, but in Germany.

Q: I see. So, you stayed with your husband, but ended up in Germany?

A: Yes.

Q: May I ask — what was your husband's nationality?

A: He was also Russian, also from Saint Petersburg.

Q: And did you go through this path together or not?

A: Well... in the end, I have to admit that I stayed here, found a job here, and defended my dissertation — but we divorced 10 years ago.

Q: I see. Well, divorce is meant to help people avoid tormenting each other when things are no longer working. So, you enrolled in a PhD program in Germany. What was the program and what year was that?

A: That was 1999. The program was in environmental economics at Heidelberg University.

Q: Did you choose the PhD because you were accepted, or did you want to try something new, or was there another reason?

A: I had always been interested in ecology. Before perestroika, I was going to enter the Faculty of Environmental Geography at the university. Perestroika changed my plans, and I ended up in economics. But my interest in ecology remained strong. In fact, I had won a prize in the city ecology olympiad in Leningrad, and with that prize I could have entered without exams — but still, I went into economics. So, I eventually returned to ecology through economics. I began studying the economics of the environment, then the economics of climate, and ultimately became a specialist in the economics of climate change.

Q: Interesting. What job did you find in Hungary after returning from Germany?

A: In 2001. I had tried to combine work with my doctoral studies, but it didn't work out — there just wasn't enough time or energy. I eventually found a job at the Regional Environmental Center, an international organization. I started there in 2001 and worked for 17 years.

Q: And do you speak Hungarian?

A: Well, when I left the Center and decided to try a career as an independent consultant, I realized that in Hungary you can't do much without the language. Until then, I had lived in a sort of English-Russian bubble. My work was in English, my social life was mostly in English and Russian. So I began to seriously study Hungarian. Now my level is somewhere around B1 in writing, but my listening comprehension is still at A1. I have trouble understanding spoken Hungarian. I can write, but phone conversations are hard unless the person speaks very slowly.

Q: You also lived in Hungary in 1997–1998. I assume Hungary was different then. What changes have you observed?

A: When I first came, Hungary was very dynamic. The government was doing everything to transition the economy from a planned to a market system. They carried out privatization in a smart way — first small, then medium, then large enterprises. Corruption scandals were small — a few million dollars at most, which by Russian standards was nothing. The currency was pegged to a stable rate, and a third of all investment into Eastern Europe was going into Hungary. Hungary was very open and optimistic, working toward an association agreement with the EU and harmonizing its laws and institutions to EU standards. I even worked on part of that treaty, particularly the environmental chapter. In climate-related commitments, Hungary fully met its obligations.

But at some point, things went wrong. Investment slowed, and Hungary became more closed. Back then, there was no rhetoric about a “special path” or “foreigners being bad.” In fact, a foreigner who could say even two words in Hungarian was welcomed enthusiastically. Now, hearing a Slavic accent sometimes triggers prejudice — partly because many Ukrainians work in hard factory jobs that Hungarians don't want.

Q: Since you grew up in the Soviet Union, did you have a sense of Russian identity, or did you identify differently?

A: I always identified as part of the Soviet intelligentsia. It wasn't about nationality; it was a social identity. My roots were in Russian culture and history, but I also had Jewish and Finnish heritage. It was about cultural values — believing that a person should constantly learn new things, in social sciences, literature, history, and culture in general. That was my background and worldview.

Q: And now, when you speak to Hungarians, do you say you are from the USSR or from Russia when people ask where you are from?

A: It depends a lot on the social stratum you're talking to. In general, yes — let's say the petty-bourgeois urban crowd, even before the war, as of four weeks ago, often reacted with "ah, they've come here" in a negative tone. If you speak to university professors or educated people, they usually treat me with great interest and respect. I have never felt like a pariah among them. The language of educated people in Europe is basically the same — we all speak English well, we all understand each other, and we can communicate easily.

Q: Was it difficult for you at the beginning, when you first moved to Hungary?

A: No, not really. Especially because when I moved to Hungary, I didn't come straight from Russia — I came after living in England. Moving to England was harder because it was a completely different culture. Coming here felt a bit like coming home. Things here were much more familiar than in England. There were certain common cultural elements — a post-Soviet feel. For example, trams and "Ikarus" buses on the streets, metro cars from a mechanical plant — all very familiar at the time. Now everything has changed, but back then it was easy to recognize those things. Of course, the language was different, but you'd look at a row of typical apartment blocks and feel "almost home."

Q: Since you have lived in Hungary for a long time, do you think you have integrated into Hungarian society?

A: Yes. Well... Do you remember in physics class when they showed diffusion with water and copper sulfate?

Q: I think so, but remind me.

A: You pour half a glass of water and half a glass of copper sulfate solution. At first, there's a clear, distinct boundary between the two liquids. But after two weeks, the boundary is blurred. After four weeks, they are completely mixed, because the particles are moving constantly, and they mix over time even without stirring. This is exactly how diffusion works — and it's the same with cultural integration. For me, Hungary and I are like water and copper sulfate. The boundary is blurred, but I haven't completely fused — the culture has fused with me a bit, but I haven't fully merged into it either. I know the main aspects of Hungarian society, but I am afraid I still lack some deep cultural connections with Hungarians.

Q: How well do you know Hungarian history? Have you studied it?

A: Yes, I have studied Hungarian history. I can't give you a detailed account of, say, Kálmán's judicial reforms, and I don't remember who his teacher was in a certain year — though he was quite a famous Hungarian ruler, I remember that. But I can tell you about the reign of King Matthias — how he was elected, the story of the corvine and the ring, whose son he was — fairly detailed things. I also know roughly about the role of Hungary in the Austro-Hungarian Empire, the wars, the Turks. I have a general grasp of the key turning points in Hungarian history.

Q: Do you celebrate Hungarian national holidays?

A: I sleep in.

Q: Only sleep in? Do you observe any of the traditions, for example, on March 15th when people wear that... what's it called?

A: The rosette. Honestly, I'm tired of being forced to wear state symbols. First, it was the red star, then the pioneer scarf without which you couldn't enter school, then the badge, and heaven forbid you replaced it with a different one. So I'm not a fan of pinning any state symbol to myself.

Q: So, are there any holidays that you actively celebrate with Hungarians, or are you somewhat distanced from that?

A: I enjoy celebrating Easter — not for its religious symbolism, but because I get invited to wonderful breakfasts.

Q: Do you take part in public or political life in Hungary, including elections and similar events?

A: Well, I can't vote here. So I mostly just observe the pre-election spectacle. But I do take part in volunteer work when needed.

Q: For example?

A: For example, now... when it's necessary to meet scientists arriving from abroad.

Q: Are there any other volunteer activities you've been involved in?

A: Yes, of course. In 2015, when there was the war in Syria — you probably remember that — I also volunteered here at that time. And I also help animal shelters a little.

Q: Do you read Hungarian literature or sources in Hungarian — journals, books, things like that?

A: That's a good question, and actually a compliment in Russian. Unfortunately, my Hungarian isn't good enough to read literature as literature. If I want to enjoy reading, I read it in Russian. When I read Hungarian texts, they're usually work-related or technical — things that are clear and unambiguous.

Q: Have you adopted any Hungarian habits?

A: I would say more Western European habits than specifically Hungarian ones. For example, I started sorting garbage long before it became common here. When I lived in England and Germany, we were already taught to sort waste. Also, I have a careful attitude toward water and electricity. For example, compared to my sister in Russia, I can't stand leaving the tap running — it wastes both water and money. In Russia, it's much more common for people to leave the tap running while chatting.

Q: Do you think Hungary is a typical EU country, or is it more unique?

A: There's no such thing as a "typical" EU country. Each one has its own culture. Even in Germany, the North and South differ. But yes, Hungary is definitely unique — it has a long history of fighting for its identity, which sometimes spills over into arrogance toward others, as it did during the Austro-Hungarian Empire. This sense of uniqueness helped hold the country together but also led to some very bitter defeats — for example, when it allied with Hitler in hopes of restoring "Greater Hungary." That ended very badly and was followed by Hungary's inclusion in the Soviet bloc.

Q: How would you assess your economic position in Hungary?

A: I think I'm middle class.

Q: And if you were in Russia now, would your economic position be better or about the same?

A: Probably a little better in Russia — at least as of four weeks ago. Not much, but a bit.

Q: Have you encountered nationalism here?

A: Yes, but mostly from young hotheads on the street — not from people I consider my social group. Once, when I was speaking Russian on my mobile, someone yelled "orosz haza" at me. Another time, a security guard at KFC wouldn't let me in ten minutes before closing because he realized I was Russian. Those things are unpleasant, but idiots exist everywhere. I'm

fortunate to have a European appearance, so I don't stand out — my Chinese friends have it much harder.

Q: Who is in your social circle here?

A: Closest to me is an ethnic Hungarian woman from Kharkiv — her father's Hungarian, her mother's Ukrainian. I know quite a few people from mixed Russian-Hungarian families. I used to have a large expat circle, but that's mostly dispersed. I do have a few Russian acquaintances, but I avoid the main Russian-speaking crowd in Budapest — the moral and ethical climate of that group doesn't suit me. I prefer to keep my distance.

Q: So you don't have many close Hungarian friends?

A: Not close friends, but I do have several good Hungarian acquaintances — mostly English-speaking or Russian-speaking.

Q: Have you ever wanted to return to Russia or move to another country?

A: Not really to Russia — the country I left no longer exists, just like I can't go back to being 20 years old. That would be re-migration. But I have thought about moving elsewhere. When I was on a work trip to Argentina, I was enchanted by the country and considered working there for a while. Within the EU, I've thought about moving to a more economically advantageous or politically different country, especially when Hungarian nationalism gets to me. Scandinavia appeals to me — especially Finland and Norway — because I grew up near the Finnish border and love that landscape of sea, pines, and granite.

Q: What do you think your contribution has been to Hungarian society?

A: Today, for example, I went to clean up garbage — people were exhausted after a long journey, but the mess still had to be cleaned and there weren't enough staff. Professionally, I work on climate change, which is a contribution to every country since the climate is shared. I also pay taxes regularly as a self-employed entrepreneur — that's an important contribution too.

Q: Finally, regarding the recent events between Russia and Ukraine — how do you view this situation, and what do you call it?

A: I strongly condemn it. I don't believe the official justifications. In history, there are causes and pretexts for war — the causes here include securing a land route to Crimea. Annexing part of a neighbor's territory in the 21st century is pure archaism. Instead of wars, countries should

focus on economic growth, education, and technological progress. From a humanitarian perspective, it's a catastrophe and a crime. I sincerely wish for Ukraine's victory — it would be a shared victory, prompting Russia to reconsider itself. Ukraine is now being forged as a nation, something it may have lacked before. As for Russia, it will need to go through a period of shame and recovery before it can move forward.

CASE 15

Case 15. Memo

This migrant profile presents the trajectory of a Muscovite born in the USSR, who came to Hungary in 1993 through a state-run student exchange. At the time, she was a young economics student in Moscow and chose Hungary over the United States, partly out of fear of farm work and the unfamiliarity of life in America. Arriving with only five dollars, minimal clothing, and one pair of shoes, she experienced Hungary as a profound contrast to Russia: in Moscow shortages of goods persisted, while in Hungary the problem was not supply but purchasing power.

Her early life in Hungary was difficult, moving from her own apartment in Moscow into a dormitory filled with heavy drinking was a shock. However, she studied Hungarian intensively for three months, and soon all instruction was conducted in Hungarian. This enabled her to form connections with Hungarians and other international students from across the post-Soviet space. Her studies shifted to agricultural economics, and in her third year she had her first child, later completing postgraduate studies while raising two children. Marriage to a fellow student anchored her life further in Hungary.

She gradually integrated into Hungarian society through education, work, and family life. Her first jobs were modest, cleaning and flower-picking, but entry into a Hungarian law firm marked a turning point, giving her stable work and professional development. In 2000 she secured permanent residency, and by 2002 she bought her first apartment. Hungary became her home in a very practical sense, with investments, stable employment, and a family life built around local institutions such as schools and kindergartens.

Though she once attempted to return to Russia, working briefly at Sberbank in Moscow in 2010, the wages (20,000 rubles a month) made living conditions unsustainable, and she quickly returned to Hungary, where her residency and housing made reintegration easy. Since then, she has firmly considered Hungary home. She sees Hungary as a place where one can build wealth through work and investment, unlike Greece (where she feels money “disappears” into rent and restaurants) or Russia (where salaries are low and opportunities limited).

Culturally and politically, she identifies with both Hungarian and Russian traditions. She is Catholic by faith (her father was Polish) but maintains respect for Orthodoxy, Judaism, and

Islam. She celebrates Hungarian holidays fully, while also preserving Russian ones such as New Year's, International Women's Day, and Defender of the Fatherland Day. Her children reflect this duality: her son, living in Greece, celebrates both Hungarian and Russian holidays; her daughter, who studied in Russia and remained there, is immersed in Russian culture.

She does not consider herself particularly politicized but has participated actively in Hungarian elections as a volunteer vote counter, supporting Fidesz, which she credits with "giving something" to the people in contrast to previous governments. Her attachment to Hungary is not framed in abstract ideological terms but in practical ones: economic stability, better wages, secure property, and a functioning social order.

Her sense of identity has shifted over time. While she does not consider herself "more Hungarian," she acknowledges adopting values of thrift, investment, and financial pragmatism. She defines herself less by nationality than by the life she has built: "I live here because I constructed my life this way." Still, she maintains ties to Russian culture and family, though her view of Russia is marked by disappointment — both in the limited economic prospects she experienced firsthand and in family difficulties, such as a dependent brother in Moscow.

Overall, her life course illustrates the long-term settlement of an exchange student who never initially planned to migrate but gradually constructed a stable existence in Hungary. Her narrative emphasizes economic pragmatism, family continuity, and cultural adaptation, blending elements of Russian and Hungarian traditions without fully abandoning either. It also highlights the role of structural opportunities, permanent residency, property acquisition, education, in making Hungary a permanent home.

Case 15. Interview

Q: First question: please tell me about yourself — where are you from?

A: I'm from Moscow — back then it was the USSR — and I was born in Moscow. I went to nursery, kindergarten, and school there. Then I entered an institute, and through a student exchange I ended up in Gödöllő.

Q: About the institute — you studied in the USSR, right?

A: Yes.

Q: What was your major?

A: Economics in Moscow.

Q: Did you plan to move to Hungary, or did it happen spontaneously?

A: Spontaneously, through a student exchange. There was an exchange to America and one to Hungary. I was afraid of going to America.

Q: Why?

A: It was 1993, and you also had to work on a farm there, and I had no connection to agriculture at all. I lived in an apartment in Moscow.

Q: Why did the opportunity to go to Hungary appeal to you?

A: It didn't particularly "appeal." It was a state-run student exchange: we arrived, had a look around, and later I got settled and stayed.

Q: So it was basically not a deliberate choice, more a program placement?

A: Yes. A state program — a "pilot."

Q: At that time, how did you see yourself — as someone belonging to the USSR? What were the defining traits of a person living then?

A: In 1993 I flew here on a nearly empty plane full of Chinese passengers. I had five dollars in my pocket that my dad gave me. In Hungary I had a stipend in forints. I had very little clothing and only one pair of shoes. So when I arrived in Hungary, it was a big lesson in how people live here versus how we lived in Moscow.

Q: And how did people live "there" and "here"?

A: We had shortages — trousers, well, everything: vodka, soap, detergent, sugar — you know the list. Here there were no shortages, you just needed money.

Q: When you came, you had to build a new social circle from scratch. Who were your contacts?

A: I ended up in a completely new environment — a dorm. In Moscow I'd lived in my own apartment, and here I was in a dorm. I had only one friend — a boy I knew from a pioneer camp in Moscow — no one else.

Q: Over time did you build more connections? How did that happen?

A: Yes. Through the university and life in general.

Q: What countries were the people you mostly interacted with from?

A: Russia, Ukraine, and lots of Hungarians, Belarusians, Kazakhstani students — basically all the nationalities from the region.

Q: Back then did you divide yourselves by nationality, or was there a single shared identity?

A: We were all young, so we had a common identity. They gathered, say, twenty people who didn't know each other to study in the same group.

Q: I'm curious about the timing. The Soviet Union existed earlier — by then it had collapsed. Did you identify as from the USSR, or as Russian, Ukrainian, etc.?

A: By 1993 the Soviet Union had already collapsed. I was from Russia; others were from Ukraine; others from African and Asian countries as well.

Q: Was it hard at first to live in Hungary?

A: Very.

Q: Why?

A: Because in the dorm everyone drank, and I didn't. And going from my own apartment to a dorm was a shock.

Q: Besides that, did you have communication problems with Hungarian?

A: We studied Hungarian for three months, and then all subjects were taught in Hungarian. At first it was strange — in Hungarian the cases come after the word, and in other languages before.

Q: Did the language let you communicate with Hungarians and form closer friendships?

A: Of course.

Q: Do you think that happened because you knew the language, or for another reason?

A: Because I started working — and then everything started spinning.

Q: What did you study at the Hungarian university?

A: Agricultural economics.

Q: How did your life develop after graduating?

A: In my third year I had a baby, then I went to work, and a year later I entered postgraduate studies and had another baby. I was constantly working and raising children. I learned how people live — studied a lot — and now we live normally.

Q: You got married then, right? To whom, if I may — nationality?

A: To a fellow student, two years older.

Q: While living in Hungary, did you learn the country's history and how it's organized?

A: Of course.

Q: Did you make an effort yourself, or was it part of your coursework?

A: It was part of university courses.

Q: Beyond that, did you take an interest on your own?

A: Yes.

Q: When you moved to Hungary, did you expect to stay?

A: No, not at all. I stayed after I had a child — then came kindergarten, school, and so on.

Q: Did you miss your country?

A: No.

Q: Why not?

A: It didn't interest me. I was working, earning money — I didn't have time to think about it.

Q: So you didn't consider returning?

A: No.

Q: Why?

A: I did consider it once — I went to Moscow and got a job at Sberbank — and I didn't like it.

Q: What period are we talking about — which year?

A: 2010.

Q: So that was already contemporary Russia. By then both Hungary and Russia had changed a lot. How did you compare them at that time?

A: In 2010 you couldn't live in Moscow on the 20,000 rubles I earned at Sberbank. So I went back.

Q: Was it easy to return to Hungary?

A: Yes.

Q: Why was that?

A: In 2000 I got permanent residency. In 2002 I bought my first apartment. I had everything; I just needed a job. I came back, found a job, and worked like before. Nothing else really changed.

Q: Economically and politically, where was it more comfortable at that time?

A: In 2010 I don't even know — I never thought about it.

Q: Have you ever been interested in politics?

A: I don't follow politics, but in Hungary I help the Fidesz party.

Q: So you do have an active civic stance?

A: Yes.

Q: Why is that important to you?

A: I don't know. I've counted votes at elections three times. I watch how people vote — it's surprising.

Q: That still doesn't explain why it's important to you.

A: Because Viktor at least gives something. Gyurcsány gave nothing — only took things away.

Q: What do you mean by "gives"?

A: Money and laws — for the people.

Q: So the other leader didn't provide that?

A: No. No new laws, no funds. Nothing — only taking away.

Q: Where did you first work in Hungary?

A: First I cleaned for an elderly grandfather — the department office secretary sent me. Then I went to pick flowers — the kind you see sold in shops; we grew them. Then I got into a law firm, and my life changed.

Q: Was that law firm mainly Hungarian staff or international?

A: Hungarian.

Q: Did you get along well with colleagues? Any misunderstandings?

A: Yes, we got along well. No misunderstandings.

Q: About identity: you arrived when you were about 17–18, right? How has your identity changed over time? Do you feel you’ve “become more Hungarian”?

A: No. I see myself as more thrifty, more economical, and more investment-minded.

Q: Why?

A: Because that’s life — you need money to live.

Q: I mean identity beyond the everyday — people are born with a certain cultural “cluster,” and over life it either deepens or changes under social factors.

A: What do you mean by “cluster” and “social factors”?

Q: “Cluster” meaning traditions and culture — the foundations of a person’s identity.

A: Well, I celebrate all Hungarian holidays. I’m Catholic — my father is Polish — so I have a normal grasp of what’s going on in the world. As for Orthodoxy, Judaism, Islam — I’m fine with all that.

Q: Do you feel comfortable in Hungary now as someone who moved long ago? Do you feel Hungary is home?

A: Of course.

Q: Because you rebuilt your life here, or just because you’ve lived here so long?

A: Because I built my life this way.

Q: You said you celebrate Hungarian holidays. Do you also celebrate any Russian holidays?

A: Of course.

Q: Which ones, for example?

A: New Year’s, March 8 (Women’s Day).

Q: Why is it important for you to celebrate these?

A: I studied in Moscow — of course I celebrate. I congratulate men on February 23rd (Defender of the Fatherland Day).

Q: Many people stop doing that after moving — I’m trying to understand why you keep it up. Is preserving Russian identity and culture important to you?

A: Do you mean Orthodoxy, or the “corporate drinking culture”? I don’t consider myself part of the latter, but Orthodoxy doesn’t bother me.

Q: Could we say you also celebrate some holidays so your children grow up with an understanding of Russian culture?

A: My son is 26, lives in Greece, and celebrates all the holidays. My daughter is 23 and lives in Russia, in Nizhny Novgorod. Naturally she’s more immersed in Russian culture — and we respect that.

Q: Why did your daughter decide to return to Russia?

A: She went there for university, then met a boyfriend and stayed.

Q: How did you view that choice?

A: It’s her life. I don’t interfere. If things go badly, she can come back here.

Q: Do you plan to move to another country soon, or consider moving back to Russia?

A: I’m not thinking about moving. I visited my son in Greece three days ago — seeing how people live there, I wouldn’t want that.

Q: What do you mean?

A: They mostly live in rented apartments and spend money in restaurants — I’ll leave it at that.

Q: And regarding Russia?

A: I don’t know. My brother lives in Moscow and behaves antisocially. No matter what I say, it’s pointless.

Q: What do you mean by “antisocial”?

A: He thinks he’s always right and that we should support him, provide for him — wants this and that — and does nothing himself. He’s over 40.

Q: Given all that, why is life good for you in Hungary? Why do you find it better than, say, Greece or Russia?

A: In Greece you throw money out the window; in Hungary you invest it. As for Russia — I didn’t like working at Sberbank. Twenty thousand rubles is far too little.

Q: That’s all my questions. Thank you for the interview.

A: Thank you. Have a nice day. Goodbye.

CASE 16

Case 16. Memo

The respondent is originally from Perm, Russia, where in 1990 she finished school and entered the Agricultural Institute. After the first year, she was unexpectedly sent to Hungary within a large-scale Soviet–Hungarian student exchange program. It was not initially her own decision and she hesitated, but eventually realized it was an opportunity not to be missed. At that time, the Soviet Union was going through the early 1990s crisis, with ration coupons, constant shortages, and long queues, though he remembers with nostalgia the stronger human relations of that period — neighbors knew each other, children could play freely, and there was a better sense of trust, alongside better education and medical care. She notes that today people everywhere, not only in Russia, have become more individualistic and less connected to one another.

She arrived in Hungary at the age of seventeen and found the transition very difficult, as she and her peers missed their families deeply. She studied at the Gödöllő Agricultural University, where the first two years were taught in Russian while students simultaneously studied Hungarian. From the third year onward, they joined Hungarian students and studied fully in Hungarian, managing enough of the language to pass exams. Her cohort was about fifty people, part of a larger program that had brought more than 200 Soviet students to that one university. The aim of the program was both educational — Hungary being a strong agricultural country and political, to strengthen ties between the two states. Students were deliberately placed in dormitory rooms with Hungarian roommates to accelerate adaptation. While she personally had few Hungarian friends, often due to language barriers and her introverted nature, others formed closer ties. Over time, however, Hungarian friendships grew naturally through study and shared circumstances.

She explains that in Hungary all people from the Soviet Union were, and still often are, called “Russians,” regardless of whether they were Ukrainian, Moldovan, or otherwise. Within his own community of fellow students, no ethnic distinctions were drawn — they all shared a Soviet identity. For her, being Russian means remembering and caring about her homeland and not being indifferent to its fate. She graduated in 1995, having married a fellow Russian student during his studies and already become a father. Initially, Soviet students were obliged to return

home after graduation, but following the collapse of the USSR these obligations were annulled. She and her husband chose to remain in Hungary, as by then life in Russia had become unfamiliar and unstable, and their new life — jobs, family, housing — was already established. She recalls that Hungarians were generally tolerant and welcoming, especially in smaller towns accustomed to foreign students, though tensions could appear during national holidays connected with history. In everyday life, however, she encountered only kindness. She reached fluency in Hungarian by the time he entered the workforce. News from Russia was difficult to follow in the early years, before the internet and regular satellite TV, but she stayed connected as best he could, later preferring Russian programs once available. Hungarian television and films also helped him to learn the language in the beginning. Politically, she avoids drawing parallels between Russia and Hungary, considering such comparisons too academic, and she prefers to stay distant from politics. In terms of mentality, she believes Hungarians and Russians are shaped by very different languages, but among his close friends she sees many similarities in values and outlooks, since people naturally gravitate to those with whom they connect.

She recalls two striking encounters with Hungarian perspectives on Russia. The first was when a teacher suddenly confronted her with the memory of Hungarian soldiers who died in Voronezh during World War II, which was shocking because her Soviet education had not emphasized Hungary's alliance with Germany. The second was the very opposite: a university gardener who had been a prisoner of war in the Soviet Union and who treated Soviet students with great kindness, remembering the generosity of peasants who had shared their meager food equally with prisoners. These contrasting experiences left a lasting impression on her.

Over time, she participated less actively in public life but admits she is not indifferent; for example, she sometimes votes but not always. In cultural life, she and her family used to celebrate both Hungarian and Russian holidays but gradually emphasized Russian ones more, to preserve traditions. In Gödöllő she is involved in the Samovar foundation, which brings together Russian speakers and organizes cultural evenings. She emphasizes that preserving Russian traditions matters to her because her nationality is Russian and she still feels it strongly.

Today, she does not plan to leave Hungary, as her children are Hungarian citizens, nor does she see himself returning permanently to Russia. She sometimes considers the idea, but whenever she visits and confronts daily realities there, she quickly abandons the thought. Hungary has become her home, and the life she built here, from education to work and family, makes returning unnecessary.

Case 16. Interview

Q: Please introduce yourself, from which city are you originally?

A: From Perm, Russia. In 1990, I finished school in Russia and entered the first year of the Agricultural Institute. After the first year, I was sent here to study.

Q: So was this a redirection connected with studies, or was it your own decision?

A: No, we came here in large groups, sent specifically as part of student exchange between Hungary and Russia—well, actually the Soviet Union at that time.

Q: Did you want to go abroad to get an education, or was it more that you didn't really want to, but had to?

A: I would say it was not in my plans. It was a very unexpected proposal, and I didn't agree right away. I had to think it over. But then I decided that such a chance should not be missed.

Q: What was the reality of Russia at that time?

A: That was just the very beginning of the 1990s, not even the hardest part yet. Life was with ration coupons — you could call it the typical Soviet reality. I say “good” reality with a bit of irony. Of course, some things are remembered with nostalgia. There were good things too. But now, looking back from a distance of several years, people understand that life was actually quite hard.

Q: When you mentioned nostalgia, what exactly did you mean?

A: Human relations. For example, children could safely play outside, go wherever they wanted, and parents weren't afraid for them. Neighbors had much better relationships, people in the courtyards knew each other. School education was much better, medical care was much better — even just the attitude of doctors towards patients was incomparably better than now. That's mostly what I meant.

Q: Why do you think relations between people were so strong back then? What could that be tied to?

A: Unfortunately, it's a general worldwide trend — people are becoming more distant from each other. Not only in the Soviet Union or later in Russia, but everywhere. Nowadays relatives, neighbors, people living in the same area interact much less. It's a global tendency, sadly.

Q: So, is it right to understand that people have become more individualistic, paying less attention to each other?

A: Yes.

Q: At that time, what was the economic situation in the Soviet Union?

A: There was a very strong shortage of goods. More and more products were distributed by ration coupons. Maybe people today don't even remember that word. Queues for anything — food, goods — were very long. And the economy fell into even worse condition after I had already left.

Q: How old were you when you came to Hungary?

A: Seventeen, if I remember correctly.

Q: Was it hard for you in the beginning, after moving?

A: Very hard. Everyone missed home terribly. We were practically kids when we came, of course everyone missed their families.

Q: At which university did you study here?

A: At the Gödöllő Agricultural University.

Q: And in which language? Hungarian?

A: Not right away. At first, for the first two years, we studied in Russian, while learning Hungarian in parallel. From the third year, we joined Hungarian students and studied in Hungarian.

Q: So, is it right that in two years you managed to learn the language enough to study in it?

A: Let's say we managed enough to pass the exams.

Q: Did you come alone, or with someone?

A: In a group. There were about 50 people in our group. And apart from us, there were also senior students who had come several years earlier. It was a very large program, signed already during the Gorbachev period, even before he became General Secretary.

Q: And after you?

A: After us, more students came as well, only in smaller groups. Altogether, at one time there were over 200 Soviet students here.

Q: Just at your university, or across Hungary?

A: That number was only for our university. Of course, there were students in other universities too.

Q: What was the reason for such an exchange?

A: Back then, exchange programs between countries were very active. Hungarian students and students from other countries also went to the Soviet Union. And Hungary was chosen not by chance — at that time it was a very strong agricultural country. There was a lot to learn here, and it was also about developing ties between the countries.

Q: When you first started living here, who was your circle of communication? Did you have many Hungarian friends, or foreigners?

A: Specifically for me — very few Hungarians. But they placed us in dormitory rooms on purpose: one Soviet student with two Hungarians, to help us adapt and learn the language faster. So naturally, at first we communicated more with our roommates. Gradually, we did make Hungarian friends, but often it was because of circumstances — living in the same place, studying together, or other shared activities. Personally, I had very few Hungarian friends. But many of my classmates had closer Hungarian friendships.

Q: Was that connected with language? In other words, to be friends with a Hungarian, did you need to know Hungarian well?

A: Yes, in a way. Today the situation is different, but back then, when we had just arrived and could only say one, two, three words, it was very hard to communicate. That, plus my rather introverted character, also limited it. Later, by the third or fourth year, it became easier.

Q: I'd like to ask: what does the term "Russian person" mean to you? How do you personally define it?

A: Here, "Russians" are still called all people who came from the Soviet Union. Even now. With friends who are former students from different Soviet republics, we don't distinguish who is Ukrainian, who is Moldovan, who is from elsewhere. It doesn't even occur to us to divide that way. "Russian person" — to me, that's someone who remembers their homeland and cares about it, who is not indifferent to what is happening there.

Q: You mentioned the Soviet identity. Is it correct that at that time identification as "people of the Soviet Union" was stronger than ethnic belonging?

A: Yes, of course.

Q: And for Hungarians, everyone was “Russian” anyway, right?

A: Exactly. For them, all people from the Soviet Union were “Russians.” And even today, they often still think of us that way.

Q: In which year did you finish the university?

A: In 1995.

Q: And what did you do afterward?

A: Well, life happened. During my studies, I married another student, also from Russia, one year younger than me. Our child was born while I was still studying. An important point: when we came, we had signed an obligation that after finishing we must return to the Soviet Union. But since the Soviet Union collapsed, those obligations were annulled. I graduated in 1995, my husband was still studying, so we stayed. I found a job, started working, we lived in a rented apartment. Later, when he graduated, he also got a job. Going back home... there was nowhere really to go, and after 5–6 years the country we left had changed, become unfamiliar. So it wasn’t even a conscious decision, more like just the natural course of things — and we stayed.

Q: At that time, how did Hungarians treat people from the Soviet Union?

A: When we arrived, Soviet troops were being withdrawn. It was the period of the military withdrawal. In general, Hungarians are very tolerant — I think maybe the most tolerant in Europe. Their attitude only gets sharper during national holidays in March and October. Otherwise, people were very good toward us. In everyday life, I never felt bad treatment, only kindness. Especially in a small town outside Budapest, where they were used to foreigners, including many Russian students — the attitude was very accepting, very normal.

Q: So you began to work, and by then you spoke Hungarian fluently?

A: Yes, by that time. Russian, of course, I always spoke.

Q: Did you continue following news from Russia then?

A: Yes, as much as possible. But at first it was difficult — no internet yet, no home computer. Only occasional telephone calls with family. Of course, I followed the big news — like changes of presidents, which there were many of since then. Later, when Russian television could be installed here, I preferred watching Russian programs and news over Hungarian ones.

Q: You just mentioned something that was my next question. At that time, did you also follow Hungarian news?

A: Not so much the news, more Hungarian programs in general. Especially TV series — they were very useful for learning Hungarian, memorizing phrases. Until Russian TV became available, that was the only option: Hungarian TV, Hungarian films, even going to the cinema. Later, Russian channels appeared, but they worked inconsistently — one year yes, then they disappeared, then came back. With the internet, of course, everything changed.

Q: Can you compare the politics of Russia and Hungary? Are they similar at the moment?

A: I don't think they are similar. And honestly, I don't think this question really belongs here—it feels more like a dissertation topic.

Q: Yes, perhaps I didn't phrase it very well. Some migrants believe Hungary is going down the road of autocracy, just like Russia, and they draw parallels between these political systems. My question was whether you see such similarities, as a migrant who can observe the situation from both sides.

A: I try to pay as little attention to politics as possible.

Q: I see. Do modern Hungarians resemble Russians in some way—or not—at least in mentality?

A: They always say that language reflects how people think. Hungarian and Russian are very different—very different. But as with any people, it depends a lot on the individual. The friends I've made, those in my close circle—they have a similar mentality, similar values. Maybe that's because we naturally choose people to be around. Of course, in every nation there are extremes, but there are also just normal, good, kind people.

Q: I understand. Over all these years, you said at the beginning that no one has ever said anything bad to you. Has there ever been a moment when you felt nationalism toward Russians living here?

A: I'll tell you two cases. The first one was when I was maybe in my third year. By then I spoke Hungarian, but not well enough to fully express myself. A teacher started talking with me, and suddenly he asked if I knew how many Hungarians were buried in Russia, in Voronezh—that so many Hungarians had died there. For me it was a huge shock. I didn't remember learning in school that Hungary fought against the Soviet Union alongside Germany. It had been taught

differently to us. I didn't know how to respond then. Now I would know what to say, but at that time it was a shock.

The second case: there was a gardener working at the university, who himself had been a prisoner of war in the Soviet Union. He adored Soviet students. He always stopped to talk with us, told us his story, and he was incredibly warm-hearted. He held no anger, no bitterness, nothing like that. On the contrary, he treated us with great kindness. Maybe precisely because of his experience—when he had been in camps and later resettled, he had seen that ordinary peasants, who themselves lived in terrible conditions and ate poorly, still shared everything they had with prisoners. They shared their last bits of food equally. That left a deep impression on him and shaped his attitude.

Q: Do I understand correctly that over time you made an effort to study Hungarian history?

A: To some extent, yes.

Q: And now, can we say you feel a sense of civic responsibility here? Do you participate in Hungary's civic or political life?

A: That sounds a bit heavy... Today, for example, I actually missed the chance to go vote—I planned to, but in the end I didn't.

Q: Do you take part in holidays and celebrations?

A: It depends which ones you mean. For example, we used to love going out on August 20th to watch the festivities. That was always on the program. Now honestly, we got tired of it and don't go anymore. We used to celebrate both Orthodox Easter and Hungarian Easter, and the same with Christmas. Later we focused more on "our" holidays, the Russian ones. But since the Hungarian ones are national holidays, you can't avoid them entirely—you still end up marking them in some way.

Q: Why did you decide to emphasize Russian holidays more?

A: To preserve our traditions.

Q: You mentioned elections. So is it fair to say you still show an active civic position?

A: I wouldn't call it "active." Let's just say I'm not an indifferent person.

Q: I understand. You also mentioned a diaspora that exists here in Hungary but is not formally registered. Do you try to support this diaspora?

A: I can't speak for the whole diaspora. But here in Gödöllő we have a foundation called *Samovar*, which unites Russian-speaking people. We try to organize different events, mainly cultural evenings.

Q: I see. Why is it important for you personally to preserve Russian cultural traditions?

A: Because I still feel Russian. My nationality is Russian. For me, it's important.

Q: One last question: do you plan to move to another country, or maybe return to Russia?

A: I don't plan to move to another country. My children are Hungarian citizens, and I couldn't go anywhere else with them. As for Russia—sometimes the thought crosses my mind. But whenever I go there and face everyday life, I quickly change my mind.

Q: Then let's stop here. I'll turn off the recorder.

A: Okay.

CASE 17

Case 17. Memo

The respondent is originally from Moscow, where he studied and worked in the IT field as an engineer, database specialist, and later as a tester. He generally liked living in Moscow, appreciating the convenience of public transport, parks, and city life, though he found the constant dirt and poor organization of urban spaces irritating. He described Moscow as an intense city, distinct from smaller towns or villages where life is calmer, and even somewhat separate from the rest of Russia in its character.

Politically, his departure coincided with the period following Crimea's annexation, which he viewed with skepticism. He and his family stopped traveling to Crimea, partly out of solidarity with Ukrainian friends. Although the political climate contributed to unease, his decision to emigrate was not only political but also practical, tied to everyday comfort, child-friendly environments, and lifestyle differences. Economically, life in Moscow was stable enough, with sufficient wages to maintain a normal standard of living. His circle of acquaintances in Russia was small, mostly centered around shared interests such as cycling, book exchanges, and a few colleagues who became friends.

When asked about Russian identity, he found it difficult to define and leaned toward calling himself "more European." In Hungary he now says he is from Hungary, not Russia, and notes that people rarely ask about nationality. His migration path began with a study program, Stipendium Hungaricum, where he pursued a bachelor's degree in computer technologies, since his Russian diploma was not recognized. He initially came as a student and later, in 2019, moved with his family, a process he calls "soft migration." The decision was gradual, with about six months of paperwork before the full move. Hungary was chosen for its quality of life: fewer crowds, well-developed spaces for children, and a more tolerant, friendly social environment.

Integration was eased by earlier tourist visits and student life. He speaks only minimal Hungarian, working instead in Russian, English, and sometimes German, mostly through remote projects. He follows Russian news closely, less so Hungarian news, and admits that he only superficially knows Hungarian history. Culturally, he has adopted some small habits, such as putting away his phone when socializing and visiting local bakeries, but he does not celebrate

Hungarian holidays. At the same time, he values Hungarian social norms, especially the absence of intrusive criticism from strangers, contrasting it with his Russian experience.

His social life in Hungary is built around studies and cycling networks, where shared interests helped him connect, mostly with Hungarians. Some connections faded due to different lifestyles. He notes that he has not faced nationalism personally, and although a friend once mentioned an unpleasant experience, he does not consider it representative. Earlier, between 2015–2017, he volunteered with a Hungarian club, distributing food to the homeless and refugees, but today he is less active in civic life.

Looking ahead, he has already transitioned into self-employment in Hungary, with plans to extend residency and possibly continue studies. He does not plan to move to another European country and rejects the idea of returning to Russia, except for family visits. For him, Russia has passed “the point of no return,” with the war making relocation unimaginable. Beyond politics, he emphasizes family priorities: Hungary is more tolerant and child-friendly, which makes life more comfortable. Thus, his identity has shifted away from Russia, and Hungary has become home for the foreseeable future.

Case 17. Interview

Q: So, please tell me, where are you from?

A: I’m from Moscow. My father is also in Moscow, still alive in 2017.

Q: 2017?

A: Yes.

Q: And what did you do in Moscow?

A: I worked with computers—an engineer, a specialist, worked with databases. Later I was a tester, but everything was connected to IT in some way.

Q: And did you also study in Moscow?

A: Yes, yes.

Q: Did you like living in Moscow, in Russia in general?

A: Overall, yes. It was convenient—you could ride the metro, go to parks, take walks. Overall, it was convenient, except for the dirt—that annoyed me a little.

Q: The dirt—was that because of poor cleaning or because of the weather conditions?

A: The dirt in Russia is connected to poor organization of lawns and such things. And the cars that drive over everything spread the slush, which then turns into dust. That's the main cause, I think. Urbanists have written about it. Probably that.

Q: I see. So overall it was okay for you, since anyway it was faster than public transport or taxis?

A: Yes, moving around the city was okay.

Q: Since you're from Moscow, I can't help but ask: do you consider Moscow to be part of Russia, or is it more like a separate city that lives its own life?

A: Something in between. I'm not sure it's really part of Russia, but as a quasi-big territory with a huge number of people moving around, working every day... It's different from a non-capital city, like Saint Petersburg where life is more measured. For a while I even lived in a village—my work allowed that. In smaller towns, life is much calmer. Moscow is very intense.

Q: So you mean specifically in the city life is intense, right?

A: Yes, in Moscow.

Q: At the time when you left, how did you evaluate the political and economic situation in the country?

A: Well, things were turning strange with Crimea and so on. In my family, for example, we stopped traveling to Crimea. We didn't share the imperial joy about some new territory that, honestly, wasn't...

Q: You mean you stopped traveling specifically to Crimea?

A: Yes. I had Ukrainian friends too—we met at festivals, it was part of those trips. By then it was impossible. So yes, in general. I even once wanted to do a run through Ukrainian territory and then into Crimea, but now that's out of the question. Everyone lived their own lives.

Q: Economically, was it comfortable to live in Moscow? Was the standard of living sufficient?

A: Yes, overall yes. Wages, normal. We worked full-time, bought what was necessary, fuel, basic goods—everything we needed.

Q: You mentioned friends, including Ukrainians. Could you tell me more about your circle of acquaintances in Moscow?

A: Not so many friends—just a couple of people. We had a small circle that exchanged books, and that’s where most of my friends came from. A few cycling friends too—we rode together. Now we just follow each other online and check in on each other’s rides.

Q: And where were your friends from, mainly? I mean in the sense of a social network—not a platform like Web 2.0, but a network of people. Were they work-related, or longer-term acquaintances?

A: More about shared interests—cycling. Some I could call study friends. A couple of colleagues who also became close friends. We even converted some colleagues into cyclists. And then a few relatives—meeting cousins in the countryside in the summer, things like that.

Q: Okay, I see. If we imagine Russian identity as something separate—how would you describe a “Russian person” according to your understanding?

A: Oh, I don’t know... I wouldn’t be able to define that. I never thought about it. If I apply it to myself, I’d already call it something more European. So I find it hard to answer.

Q: Let me help a little—it could be about language, culture, nationality. Specifically for you: when people ask “where are you from,” what do you say?

A: Now I say I’m from Hungary, because that’s basically true. I moved a while ago.

Q: And if people try to clarify your nationality, do you say you’re Russian?

A: Honestly, people don’t really ask that. At least, I haven’t encountered such situations myself.

Q: Okay. When did you decide you wanted to emigrate?

A: Well, I first came here as a student—that was the initial move. Later, as a family, we decided to move just before COVID, in 2019. We postponed a bit but eventually did it. I’d already been living between the two countries—visiting often.

Q: So you visited both Hungary and Russia?

A: Mostly visited Russia, yes.

Q: Why did you choose Hungary to move to?

A: We visited as tourists, and we liked the quality of life. The attitude was noticeably better, and it turned out to be comfortable for a family too. Lots of well-developed spaces for kids, high-quality. Plus, fewer crowds—easier to attend events, or just go for a walk.

Q: You said “good attitude of people.” What do you mean by that?

A: A sharp contrast—for example, older people don’t scold you for how you raise your child, no unsolicited remarks. Almost no one makes comments to you as a parent. Neighbors greet you, ask if you need help. It feels friendlier.

Q: So in Russia it was more the opposite?

A: Yes, different. In our courtyard, you’d always have some old lady telling you off for something. I still remember that.

Q: How much time passed between the idea of moving and the actual move? How did your migration plan form?

A: Very gradually. First as a student, then gathering documents, preparing papers for my son—maybe half a year. I count the real move as when we arrived together as a family.

Q: So you came here originally to study? Which university did you attend?

A: Yes, a Hungarian university. Standard Stipendium Hungaricum program.

Q: What specialty?

A: Computer technologies.

Q: Bachelor or master’s?

A: Bachelor. My Russian diploma wasn’t recognized, but that was actually a plus, unexpectedly.

Q: Why did you choose education as the basis for migration?

A: Initially, it was the desire to study. Later that motivation decreased—the knowledge wasn’t always cutting-edge. Maybe 15% of it was applicable in real work. So it became more about living here, experiencing things, and preparing a base for family relocation.

Q: So a kind of “soft migration”?

A: Yes, exactly.

Q: Why did you want to migrate at all?

A: Partly the sense of worrying developments in Russia—Crimea, Donbas, that whole story. In Moscow it felt distant, but still. And also everyday convenience—the city environment, more comfort for a family, better cycling conditions.

Q: Did you ever participate in Russia's public or political life?

A: No, never.

Q: How would you describe your political position in Russia? Did you follow politics?

A: I followed, yes, but not actively. I didn't protest or anything.

Q: You mentioned bringing your family later. Was it difficult at first to move and settle here?

A: A bit. Sometimes I had to quarantine. But my family visited Hungary before, so they knew the apartment. The first couple of weeks were the hardest.

Q: And how about the bureaucracy here? Was it difficult?

A: Actually a big plus—things may move slower than in Moscow, but if you're with a child, you often get priority. Offices even have toys for kids. That makes it easier.

Q: Do you speak Hungarian?

A: Not much. Just very simple things.

Q: So your main working languages are English and Russian?

A: Yes. I currently work on a Russian project, so Russian, English, sometimes German.

Q: And you work while studying?

A: Yes. I already had remote work since 2017, later it changed. Now I also network with Hungarian recruiters and Austrian/German companies.

Q: Do you continue to follow Russian news here in Hungary?

A: Yes, because it affects the global situation too.

Q: And Hungarian news?

A: Rarely. Only big things, usually through Telegram channels in Russian or English.

Q: Do you know Hungarian history?

A: Superficially. Just basics from Wikipedia or from national holidays.

Q: Was there anything shocking or surprising in Hungarian culture for you?

A: Recently I discovered how much they like to put kohlrabi in soups. One time I bought it, added it—and since then I feel like I smell it everywhere. That was surprising.

Q: I usually hear people say Hungarians put paprika everywhere.

A: They do, but it's optional. They place it on the table—you can add it if you want. I used to like it, but not anymore.

Q: Do you participate in Hungary's public or civic life?

A: Not really. Earlier I helped a Hungarian club in 2015–2017—we handed out sandwiches to the homeless, and later to refugees. But now not so much.

Q: That was with the bike mafia, right?

A: Yes.

Q: Do you follow Hungarian politics?

A: Somewhat. Mostly through friends and acquaintances.

Q: Do you think Hungary is similar to Russia?

A: No, of course not.

Q: No points of similarity at all?

A: Well, there are some, like the shared Soviet past. But overall, very different countries, different mentalities.

Q: Looking back at your time here, have you adopted any Hungarian habits?

A: Yes. For example, I put away my phone when I'm in a café or with friends—something I didn't do in Moscow. And I go to local bakeries for fresh pastries.

Q: Any negative habits you picked up?

A: Not really.

Q: Have you faced nationalism in Hungary against Russians?

A: Personally, no.

Q: Your friends?

A: Someone once mentioned something, but he's a complicated person, so maybe it wasn't really nationalism.

Q: You said you had many friends in Moscow. Have you built a circle of friends here?

A: Yes and no. A small circle, mostly from studies or cycling. Mostly Hungarians.

Q: How did you connect with them?

A: Cycling creates connections. There's even a network where travelers stay at each other's places. That's how I met one of my good friends.

Q: And why did some connections fade?

A: Different interests. I'm into sports and activity. Others prefer wine tastings. Different lifestyles.

Q: Do you plan to study Hungarian seriously?

A: I'm not sure—it's not a priority. I focus more on Russian, German, and English for work.

Q: Do you celebrate Hungarian holidays?

A: Not really, unless it's just a chance to walk around.

Q: Do you plan to stay in Hungary after your studies?

A: I've basically already stayed. I registered as self-employed. I'll switch status to residency. Maybe continue studies as well.

Q: And do you plan to move to another European country?

A: Not really. I traveled a lot before, but here is comfortable enough.

Q: Do you plan to return to Russia?

A: Only to visit relatives. To move back permanently—no.

Q: Under what conditions could you imagine moving back?

A: Hard to say. At the very least, the recent war would need to end and things rewind—but that's already past the point of no return. For my family there's no foreseeable positive outcome.

Q: So the main reason is politics, or a complex of reasons?

A: Not just politics. As a parent, I value how much more tolerant and child-friendly Hungary is. So it's a complex of reasons.

Q: I see. Then I think we can finish. I'll turn off the recorder.

A: Okay.

CASE 18

Case 18. Memo

The respondent was born in Uzbekistan in 1992, but her family, being ethnically Russian, soon moved to the Belgorod region of Russia, where relatives already lived. She recalls little of Uzbekistan beyond early childhood impressions of instability—power and gas outages—and a subtle sense of not belonging. Although she emphasizes that no one treated her badly, she carries mixed feelings about her birthplace and does not view it as her homeland. Belgorod, where she grew up, she describes as a typical Central Russian city with Ukrainian linguistic and cultural influences due to its proximity to the border. Later, she spent his teenage years in Novy Oskol, a small town that lacked opportunities, which strengthened her determination to move to a larger city.

After finishing high school, she relocated to Moscow, where she enrolled at the Russian State University of Service and Tourism to study tourism management. Although the choice was somewhat naive, it proved decisive, as this institution offered international exchange opportunities that would eventually shape her migration path. While she quickly realized tourism was not her true calling, she took advantage of study-abroad and work-travel programs in Greece and the United States, experiences that expanded her horizons and helped her distance herself from small-town life in Russia.

Moscow itself she views as a city apart from Russia, cosmopolitan, culturally rich, and full of opportunities. She recalls it fondly for its theaters, museums, nightlife, and spaces for practicing English, but also notes the pressure, bitterness, and rigidity of Russian social life. She attributes this bitterness to historical hardships and cycles of survival that left people burdened with a heavy outlook. By contrast, she found societies in Western Europe, like the Netherlands, freer of this historical weight, which made people happier and more open.

In 2013, she moved to Budapest through a dual-degree program between Moscow State University and Oxford Brookes University. Initially, she viewed it as a temporary experience, a year abroad to study, improve English, and see Europe. Yet Hungary offered her recognition based on skills rather than diplomas, unlike Russia, and she soon found herself working and settling there. Despite not intending to remain, she stayed, telling herself that she could always return home if needed. Over time, however, she discovered the limits of life in Hungary:

although Budapest gave her international exposure, friendships, and opportunities, she never felt fully integrated.

A central barrier was language. She learned only basic Hungarian and often lived in an international bubble of foreigners and cosmopolitan Hungarians. She regrets not learning the language more deeply but also felt that even with Hungarian, she would have remained an outsider. She perceived Hungarians as reserved, sometimes suspicious of foreigners, and she experienced subtle moments of rejection. At the same time, she also encountered kindness, such as an old woman speaking Russian to her at the opera or children in orphanages where she volunteered. Still, Hungarian nationalism and the country's handling of migrants during the refugee crisis left her disillusioned.

She stresses that she faced little overt nationalism personally, though she recalls one incident in a bar when a Hungarian walked away after learning she was Russian. In general, she notes differences between Russian and Hungarian mentalities: Russians may be bitter but remain open and willing to help, whereas Hungarians seemed more closed and protective of their own group. She draws parallels between Hungary and Russia politically, noting similarities between Orbán's governance and Russian autocracy, though she considers Hungary to retain stronger democratic elements than Russia.

Identity has been a recurring theme for her. She continues to identify as Russian, despite political events, emphasizing culture, traditions, and family rather than politics. The war made conversations with Ukrainian friends difficult at first, but she insists that one must separate individuals from governments. Living abroad has reinforced his attachment to Russian cultural identity even as she distances herself from Russian political reality.

After more than seven years in Hungary, she grew frustrated with structural limitations, weak currency, high housing costs, limited career progression, and an unforgiving path to citizenship. In 2021 she moved to the Netherlands, where she immediately felt a stronger sense of belonging and support, noting especially the positive, approachable attitude of police and society at large compared with both Russia and Hungary. She has since integrated better into Dutch life, and she values the opportunities and stability it provides.

She does not plan to return to Hungary, which she associates with stress and lack of integration, nor to Russia, where the war has created a "point of no return." She leaves open the possibility of returning to Russia only under radically changed circumstances, such as regime change or

family obligations. For now, her sense of identity and home is tied to his Russian roots culturally, but her everyday life and future are firmly anchored in Europe, with the Netherlands offering him the stability, openness, and professional opportunities she had long been seeking.

Case 18. Interview

A: Where from? I was born in [a city in Uzbekistan] in 1992, in April of that year. And at the age of 5–6 we moved with my parents to Russia. We settled in Belgorod region, in the city of Belgorod. Some of our relatives already lived there, and later we moved to a new town. That was also in Belgorod region, about two hours from Belgorod.

Q: How did it happen that you were born in Uzbekistan? Do you have one of your parents who is Uzbek, if I can put it that way?

A: No, it was the work assignment of my grandparents within the Soviet Union, they were relocated there for work. And so it just happened that all of us were Russian, we lived in a Russian district. My mother is Russian, my father too, as far as I know. They just worked there according to the assignment. My mother actually studied in Yekaterinburg, in Sverdlovsk region. So, in principle, I know she also had some plans for some time, but in the end she had to settle in Uzbekistan. That's why she didn't move back right away, but after the collapse of the Soviet Union...

Q: You were very young, but still — did you feel that Uzbek culture influenced you in any way, left some trace in your identity, or not?

A: No, I don't remember much, honestly, I remember very little. Practically nothing, except my kindergarten. I remember that I never really fit in, I don't even know how to explain it. With Uzbek kids I didn't get along very well, I only befriended a Russian girl. And, I don't know, after the collapse of the Soviet Union, I know there were wonderful people in Uzbekistan, people my mom and my grandparents kept in touch with. But for me personally, it felt more like a beginning of some hostility. I remember things like electricity being cut off, gas being cut off. What stuck with me was this unpleasant feeling connected with Uzbekistan. No one did anything bad to me personally, I don't have such memories, but on a subconscious level, that impression stayed. If you ask me whether I'd go back to Uzbekistan — I'd say no. Maybe just out of curiosity, to see Tashkent, which I hear is developing, maybe visit the neighborhood where I lived, that could be interesting. But to plan moving there or living there — no. So I

have mixed feelings. It's not my homeland, not the place I feel attached to, even though it's the country where I was born.

Q: Okay, very interesting. By the way, I'll be using the word "interesting" very often — not because my vocabulary is small, but because I'm not supposed to give you any judgments. I can't influence your answers by showing approval or disapproval. So you'll hear a lot of "interesting" from me.

A: That's fine, I say "interesting" a lot myself. It's okay.

Q: When you moved to Belgorod — so, to Belgorod, right?

A: Yes, to Belgorod, and later to another town.

Q: How do you think, is Belgorod a typical Russian city, or does it have its own special identity?

A: I think Belgorod is a very typical city for Central Russia. But since it's close to the border with Ukraine, there was a lot of cultural exchange. I remember when I moved there, people used to say "he" or "sho" — words closer to Ukrainian dialects, closer to Ukrainian language. For my parents it was really noticeable, and interesting. We, on the other hand, used to say "ge" and "chto" [the standard Russian words], and that made us stand out a little. But overall, Belgorod is a bright example of the Black Earth region.

Q: And later, did you start using those words yourself, like "he" or "sho"?

A: No, no. Because I started school there from grade 1 until grade 11 — so for 11 years — and then we moved to Moscow. And I think, yes, you adapt as a person, but the things that define you don't really change. Maybe food or traditions, yes. For example, there was a tradition to make okroshka [a cold soup], and that became part of our family table. I really loved okroshka, though I discovered it only in Russia. I know okroshka is eaten in many regions, but there they made it on kefir, not on kvass. That detail stuck with me. Later, I spoke with a girl from Kazan and she said they don't eat okroshka with kvass either — they use kefir — and for them it was strange that others do it differently. So, yes, these small details, traditions, traditional food — they entered my life, became part of me.

Q: Yes, that's a very important detail, what you just said. So, you mentioned that you later moved to Moscow, when you were 11, right?

A: No, after finishing 11th grade.

Q: Oh, after high school. Where did you study?

A: I studied at the Russian State University of Service and Tourism.

Q: Uh-huh.

A: Actually, when I lived in Novy Oskol [a small town in Belgorod region], it was a small town, once it was even considered an urban-type settlement. It had about 23,000 people. It didn't really feel like a city — no proper cinema, the theater was improvised. Very little resembled a city, honestly. And I understood already that I wanted something bigger. I don't know what defines it — your country, your culture — but I think some traits, your character or ambitions, they're simply yours. Already by grade 8 or 9, I knew I wanted to leave, to study somewhere else. Not necessarily abroad, but at least in a bigger city. Because there were no opportunities there, not enough to realize myself.

But I didn't know where exactly to apply. I wanted to travel, so in my childish mind I thought I should study tourism. It was a very naive idea. In the early 2000s the internet wasn't as accessible as now, and I didn't have many acquaintances in Moscow to ask advice. So I just decided for myself, heard something from someone, and applied to just one university. To this day I can't explain why I didn't try another. My mom wanted me to study economics or law, so I'd have a solid base. But if I hadn't applied there, I would never have ended up abroad later, never would have had those opportunities.

That university had many opportunities for exchange programs, to study abroad — not every Moscow university had that back then.

Q: And what was your major?

A: My major was tourism management.

Q: Interesting.

A: I was supposed to work in a travel agency. I did work in one for six months, just to save money for a trip to Kamchatka. But that was basically the end of my professional path in tourism. I realized it wasn't what I wanted. Honestly, I already understood it during my first year at university. They gave us basic knowledge, but I saw it wasn't aligned with what I wanted to do. I thought of changing my specialization, maybe going to another faculty. It was possible, but then I would have had to pay for tuition, whereas I was lucky to be admitted for free. In another university it would have been expensive, and my family didn't support that idea. So I stayed.

But from the first year I started using exchange programs. I went to Greece on a program called “Job Trust,” lived on the island of Kos for about half a year. I was taking my exams externally, came back, caught up, and then left again for a “Work and Travel” program in the U.S. I lived there six months. Later I went on a hiking trip to Kamchatka. Then I moved abroad again.

Q: Uh-huh, interesting. So, in fact, you didn’t live in Russia that much, in the end?

A: Well, in Moscow I did live for some time. But you’re right, if I look now — soon I’ll have lived in Europe longer than in Russia. I never thought about it this way, because I always felt Russia was my homeland. But yes, timewise, I’ve already lived abroad longer.

Q: Okay. You mentioned Moscow. Do you think Moscow is Russia, or is it something unique, different from the rest of Russia?

A: Oh, definitely different. Many people think so. Just like London, or Amsterdam where I live now. These cities don’t define their country. Moscow is a kind of melting pot, not really representative of Russia as a whole.

Q: Yes, that’s very interesting, I heard the same in other interviews. So, when you lived in Russia, did you like living there?

A: Yes, I liked it. Even though my hometown had little to offer, I still have warm memories. And Moscow gave me so many opportunities. As I said, Moscow doesn’t define Russia, but still, it’s Moscow, it’s part of Russia. If you wanted culture — theaters, concerts, museums — you had it. If you wanted nightlife — clubs, bars — everything was there. If you wanted to practice English, you could — there were bars, events, meetings with foreigners. I practiced a lot that way. Moscow gave everything. You could even find good jobs there.

Q: Were there things you didn’t like in Moscow, or in Russia overall?

A: Probably the people. Many people were bitter, angry at life and at each other. That was difficult. Some things I realized only after moving abroad — that I didn’t like them. But when you live inside, you take them as normal. For example, pressure during childhood: when you “must” do something, at a certain age. Like, you “must” start dating, you “must” go to music school. I was forced into music school, though I hated it, and it gave me depression. I even took an academic break. In the end I graduated with a diploma, with honors in school too, but I suffered. That kind of pressure, the constant “you must, you must,” I really disliked.

Q: I understand. So, you touched on a very interesting point about bitter people. Why do you think people in Russia are bitter?

A: I think it's historical. Life has always been very difficult. And even now, life is not easy. People got used to surviving hard times in Russian history. But I think this bitterness, it accumulates from wars, from hardships, and it's still there today. People always say, "Yes, we'll endure, we'll survive, it'll be fine." But in everyday life it's not easy. When you can't even properly feed someone, or clothe yourself — yes, I remember when we moved from Uzbekistan to Russia, my father worked in Siberia, and my mother and I were alone. She found a job, but at first it was very difficult. I remember wearing hand-me-downs from my sister, a sweater with Tom and Jerry on it. It was my favorite, not because my mom bought it, but because it was given to me.

And my mom is actually a very kind, soft person. But I also saw that many people around us, who were in the same situation, they were just angry at everyone simply because life was so hard. Later it got better, but the bitterness remained. And now again things get harder, and again there's some excuse, some justification for why life is tough. This repeats again and again.

When you live in places like the Netherlands, where I am now, or maybe even Hungary — though Hungary is closer to Russia in culture and political structure — here people are just happier. In Hungary, yes, they suffered too historically, but in the Netherlands they didn't. When the Germans came, the Dutch surrendered in a few days, they didn't want war, they didn't want death. They gave them grain, food, and avoided devastation. They never really experienced famine like Russia did. That's what I read, and what I understood. So here, people didn't go through the same hardships, and they're happier.

Q: Yes.

A: They don't have that heaviness inside.

Q: That's true. So am I right in understanding that you think economically Russia could live better?

A: Yes. I think it could be much better if the government cared more about people, rather than about how much military power Russia has, or how to protect borders. I think if you live in peace, you could focus not on protecting borders, but on protecting people within those borders.

Q: What was your attitude to politics when you lived in Russia?

A: I wasn't interested in politics at that time. I knew who the president was, I knew generally what was happening, but it didn't affect me much. I was living in my own bubble — travels, friends, personal life. Politics didn't really touch me.

Q: And did your perspective on politics change when you moved abroad?

A: Probably it happened gradually. Over time, when I started living abroad and comparing. For example, in Hungary, there are many differences from Russia. It felt more democratic — compared to Russia, at least. Democracy there was more visible, tangible, you could sense it. Of course, Hungarian nationalism existed too, in its own way. But in terms of human rights, for example, I could be a foreigner there and no one would hurt me for that.

Also, in terms of attitudes toward LGBT people — in Hungary it was double-sided. You could be open, but society would still judge you somehow. Still, human rights protections were stronger than in Russia. But socially, it was not always accepted.

And then, as you asked about comparison: yes, in Hungary you could speak out more freely. But I didn't always feel comfortable with the police, for example. Maybe that was my own perception, but I never felt like the Hungarian police would really protect me.

I remember when I moved to the Netherlands, I had a small accident on the street — I scratched a car while riding a bike. I had to call the police. I was scared. I was afraid of the police. But here, in the Netherlands, the police officer was so nice, she spoke English, she joked with me, gave advice, laughed with me. It was such a shock — I thought, “Wow, it can be different.” That was cultural shock for me.

Q: Yes, I understand.

A: So, in Hungary too, I didn't support everything. Their nationalism was one of the reasons I left.

Q: What do you mean by that? Could you explain more?

A: Nationalism — the attitude toward other cultures. I don't just mean toward Russians, but in general. The state didn't support diversity. Do you remember during the migrant crisis? Hungary often didn't let immigrants cross the border. Instead of treating them more humanely, they were kept at railway stations, forced to move further. I know, of course, that among immigrants there were people looking for benefits, but there were also families with children

fleeing hunger and war. In such cases, human compassion should appear. But I didn't see that in Hungary.

Also, there were often stereotypes — that immigrants commit crimes, steal jobs, take resources. Even though in reality they pay taxes just like everyone else, they contribute to the economy, but don't receive the same rights. That was visible.

Q: Did you ever personally face nationalism directed at you as a Russian?

A: There was one case. I was sitting in a bar, chatting with some people. A Hungarian guy came up, introduced himself, we started talking. When he asked where I was from and I said Russia, he just made a face, and without saying anything, turned around and left. It wasn't aggressive, but it was passive rejection. He didn't insult me, he didn't do anything, but his reaction was very clear. I don't know why. Maybe his grandparents suffered under the Soviet Union, or something else. But that happened once.

Q: Interesting, interesting. Okay, let's go back a bit, because we skipped an important part — how did you end up in Hungary, and in what year did you move there?

A: In what year? I started studying there — I don't remember exactly, but it was until 2011, then I continued until 2013. In 2013 I came to study. There was a program between Oxford Brookes University and Moscow State University, to get a degree from both. It was like a triangle exchange.

So, in 2013 I went to Budapest. I finished in 2014 — I got a diploma from Oxford Brookes, and also from the Russian university. But honestly, with the Russian diploma I had almost no support — my supervisor wasn't responsive, they didn't really work with me. In the end they just gave me a "B" without much effort, only because I studied well otherwise.

So I graduated around 2014 and then started working in Budapest. At first, I didn't plan to stay. Not because Hungary is bad, not because Budapest isn't beautiful, but simply because I hadn't planned to live abroad. For me, traveling was one thing, but living permanently was another. I went to Budapest just to see the world for a year, to live in Europe, to improve my English, to write my thesis in English. I always thought I'd go back home.

But after a year, when my studies ended, I realized Budapest gave me so many opportunities. I didn't have to be a travel agent. They valued me as a person, for my knowledge and skills. I studied corporate finance, accounting, strategic management, and they judged me by what I

knew. In Russia, at that time, it would have been very hard to get a job without the “right” diploma. Employers mostly looked at the diploma, not at skills.

In Hungary, they looked at skills. And that encouraged me to start applying for jobs. Honestly, at first, I didn’t even want to stay — but I saw my friends applying, and I thought, why not try? Out of curiosity. And then they hired me.

At that point I thought: okay, what next? I was scared — staying alone in a foreign country. Friends are not family, you can’t really rely on them fully. But then I thought: what do I lose? I can always go home, pack my suitcase, and return. So I stayed. And time passed quickly.

Q: During that time, did you manage to learn Hungarian?

A: No. And I think... that was a mistake. I believe it was my mistake, because I never really understood the culture fully. I tried, in my own way. I wanted to integrate into Hungarian families. I had friends who were Hungarian, but they all were kind of international — they traveled a lot, they knew life outside Hungary. So it was easy to talk with them. But with people from villages, people who didn’t speak English, or Russian... since I didn’t study the language, I never managed to get into the culture.

Why did that happen? I don’t know. I wouldn’t say Hungarians are unfriendly, but I felt they put up a wall when I tried to start conversations. And I had this impression that even if I learned the language, it wouldn’t help. For some reason I thought that on a human level, they wouldn’t let me in. So I didn’t push myself. Instead, I ended up living in a bubble again — with foreigners, colleagues, people I met in bars and cafés, Russians I knew.

I did learn some Hungarian, like basic phrases for shops and daily life, but I didn’t need more. My life didn’t require the language. And whenever I interacted with Hungarians who weren’t used to foreigners, they seemed very closed. Later I realized — they weren’t unfriendly, they were shy. They were embarrassed to speak English. Many simply didn’t know it well — like in Russia, foreign language education wasn’t great. And when I was there — about 12–13 years ago — foreigners were still new for them. So I partly understood.

But that also showed me: Hungary as a country has potential for welcoming foreigners, but ordinary people weren’t yet ready. They still looked at us with suspicion, not fully comfortable. Once I understood this, I knew I wanted to leave. By then, studying Hungarian seemed pointless.

Q: I see. Do you know Hungarian history in general? How deep was your interest?

A: Not very deep. I like history, so I learned some things. For example, what happened during World War II — their ties with Germans, their difficult path. I knew about those periods out of respect. But Hungarian art or literature — no, I didn't know. Music, yes — I liked Hungarian composers, Liszt, Bartók. I often went to concerts in Budapest, even opera. Once I sat next to an old lady who, when she realized I was Russian, started talking to me in Russian. That was very touching.

But in other aspects — no, I wasn't deeply engaged. I remember one time, at university, we got an email: "Students from Russia, don't go out on October 23." Because there might be fights or clashes. That scared me. I thought, why? I wasn't guilty of what happened decades ago. But from then on, I always stayed home on that day.

Q: When you lived in Hungary, did you join public events, demonstrations, or celebrations?

A: I joined Pride parades — I always supported them. Other political events, no, I didn't join. I didn't stand under parliament with slogans. But I did a lot of volunteering — in orphanages, animal shelters, environmental clean-ups. I remember once a little girl in the orphanage gave me a drawing of a butterfly. I couldn't even say anything in Hungarian back to her — I felt so ashamed. That moment stuck with me.

Q: Did you ever celebrate Hungarian national holidays like St. Stephen's Day?

A: I just went outside and joined the crowds. But it wasn't "my" holiday. I didn't feel the same spirit.

Q: Many people say Russia and Hungary are similar. Do you agree?

A: To some extent, yes. For example, if you look at Orbán — how he holds onto power, how the regime is built, it resembles Russia. Hungary joined the EU in 2004, yes, but I don't think it has developed in the same way as other EU countries. It's closing itself off more, like Russia. Preserving its own identity — which is normal — but often in conflict with EU values.

Q: And do you think Russian and Hungarian people are similar?

A: No. Russians are more open-hearted, even if sometimes bitter. A Russian can still help you even if they're angry at life. Hungarians seemed more closed, less willing to help outsiders. Though yes, I did meet helpful Hungarians too.

Q: When you lived in Hungary, do you think your life there was better than it would have been in Russia?

A: That's a very good question. I asked myself that often. Financially, yes — with my degree, I think I earned more in Hungary than I would in Russia. Though friends in IT earned more in Russia, but I wasn't in IT. With my profession, Hungary gave me more opportunities.

But emotionally, maybe Russia would have been easier. Family, friends, my home — I would have been calmer, more balanced there. As an immigrant, you're always a little lonely. Even if you travel, meet people, you're still alone.

On the other hand, Budapest gave me travel opportunities, international contacts, a beautiful city full of people from all over the world. That was priceless. That was one of the main reasons I stayed.

Q: Did you pick up any Hungarian or European habits during that time?

A: (laughs) I stopped being on time. No, seriously — I learned to travel more, to go to Balaton in summer, spend weekends in nature, ride a bicycle. I started sorting trash, yes. From food — I fell in love with goulash. And I started always having a bottle of wine at home.

Q: Okay. Now let's talk about identity. When people ask who you are and where you're from, what do you usually say?

A: I say Russian. Even now, after the war began. Because you are not Putin, not the propaganda party. You are just you. At first it was hard, especially with Ukrainian friends — I didn't know how to talk to them. But I realized: people who understand, they won't blame you personally.

Now, when I say I'm Russian, especially here in the Netherlands, people say: "We're sorry, we understand it's hard." I feel supported.

Q: And what do you mean by "Russian" when you say it?

A: It's more like culture, traditions, people. From weddings to landscapes beyond the Urals. Family, samovar, Maslenitsa, music, creativity, inventiveness. It's an overall feeling — not one thing, but many. For me now, it's mostly family and childhood memories.

Q: I see. So you moved to the Netherlands in 2021, right?

A: Yes, in August.

Q: Why did you decide to leave Hungary?

A: Because I didn't see a future there. Work was fine, but it was all back-office. There was a ceiling, no career growth. Housing was unaffordable alone. The currency was weak, everything outside Hungary felt expensive. Bureaucracy for citizenship was harsh — they demanded proof of wealth, not just years of taxes paid. After seven years and all the stress with lawyers, I realized it wasn't worth it.

Also, I never felt truly at home — with people, with culture. So I started looking for another country where I could grow, feel stable, and belong.

Q: Would you ever return to Hungary?

A: No. I went through too much stress there. Even if they offered me citizenship and a house, it wouldn't change the fact that I never integrated.

Q: And what about Russia — do you consider returning?

A: I never said “never.” I didn't leave because I hated Russia. But now — after the war — I can't. Maybe if the regime changes, maybe if there's a strong reason, like family. Then maybe for a time. But not just to return — no.

CASE 19

Case 19. Memo

The respondent was born in a provincial Russian town to a Russian mother and Udmurt father. Despite this mixed background, she identifies fully as Russian, since she never learned the Udmurt language, something her father regretted not passing on. For her, Russianness is primarily the Russian language, culture, films, music, and childhood memories. After finishing a mid-level legal education in Russia, she arrived in Hungary in 2000 through a state-funded exchange program designed for Finno-Ugric peoples. Initially planning to return home, she discovered that the calm, non-aggressive Hungarian lifestyle suited her temperament better than Russian “upheavals,” and she chose to stay.

The first year was dedicated entirely to mastering Hungarian, followed by preparation for law studies. The academic path proved extremely demanding, especially in a field so deeply language-based. She faced repeated failures and retakes but eventually succeeded, passing her bar qualification and building a career as a lawyer. Over time she opened her own private legal practice, where she now works independently. She considers her contribution to Hungarian society substantial, particularly for Russian-speaking migrants who rely on her legal expertise to navigate property, company registration, and immigration procedures.

Social integration followed a layered path. Initially, she socialized mostly with Russian-speakers due to language barriers, but later developed positive professional relationships with Hungarian colleagues. In private life, however, her circle remained predominantly Russian-speaking. Marriage to a Ukrainian reinforced a Russian-language household, with her children raised primarily in Russian while also acquiring Hungarian through school. She emphasizes the difficulty of full assimilation: after 22 years, she sees herself as neither entirely Russian nor entirely Hungarian. Instead, she lives in a “middle state,” common among Russian-speaking women in mixed marriages in Hungary.

Her relationship to identity and politics has shifted dramatically. Once a patriotic, apolitical young woman, she now feels pain and shame connected with being Russian due to the war in Ukraine. While she avoids deep political engagement, personal experiences—such as Hungary’s school-entry law for six-year-olds—drew her into civic participation. She donates, volunteers, and votes, convinced of the importance of political involvement. At the same time,

she remains deeply shaken by Russian aggression, which she views as fascism reborn. She explicitly refuses to return to Russia as long as the current regime remains in power, despite strong emotional ties to her family there.

She describes Hungary as the country where she grew up, formed her adult personality, and built her professional identity. The slower pace of life, legal order, and manageable distances make it more livable than Russia, though she laments certain political tendencies under the Orbán government. Still, her professional integration is strongly tied to Hungary, and she sees no real possibility of emigrating elsewhere—both due to language limitations and her embeddedness in the Hungarian legal system. Only in the event of severe political decline would she consider leaving, prioritizing her children’s safety over her professional role.

This case exemplifies professional legal integration without full cultural assimilation. The respondent is anchored in Hungary by her career, citizenship, and family, yet maintains a strong Russian-speaking identity and household. Her trajectory illustrates how migrants can achieve structural integration while remaining culturally in-between.

Case 19. Interview

Q: Please tell me about yourself—where are you from?

A: From Russia. I was born in a remote province. In Peterto-Taika, that’s where I lived as well. Basically, later I moved, to Hungary—I had lived in Udmurtia. Oh, my father is Udmurt. So I myself am half Udmurt. And I came to Hungary through an exchange program. Fortunately, I got into a state-funded exchange program for Finno-Ugric language groups. Apparently, some Hungarians had gone there, and they provided a full opportunity to get an education here. So I arrived in 2000 and studied the language for a year—probably at the best language school in Budapest. The first half-year was only language, Hungarian only. We had wonderful teachers. I didn’t know any foreign language other than Russian, and I managed just fine. I really liked it. The first half-year was only language; in the second half-year we already had specialized subjects depending on which faculty the student planned to apply to. I chose law. I had legal subjects—history, Hungarian (not “state and law,” more general history), analysis of legal texts. It was all very engaging. And there were exams, of course. Practically everyone, I think, got in. Naturally, we didn’t sit the same exams as Hungarians—we had a separate exam. That saved us. Everyone dispersed to their faculties and started studying. I studied; I really liked it. From my first year in Hungary I really liked it here. Although I left Russia intending to return home—

I loved Russia very much—here I liked the calm life so much that I decided to stay as long as I could. And, well, it's been 22 years now. I have citizenship. I'm not going anywhere—my home is here now.

Q: Interesting. Before you moved, what were you doing in Russia?

A: I was a student. I was 18. I had just finished... well, a college there. After school I did two years of law—jurisprudence—I'd already been doing it quite a while. At school we had basic, introductory subjects. I liked it. So after school I studied two years at a college attached to the university. So I got a mid-level legal qualification. There's no such tier in Hungary, but in Russia I had a red diploma in secondary legal education. And after that—well, I was a student, studying. I came here also to study, to continue my education, so to speak.

Q: You mentioned your dad is Udmurt—so you're half Udmurt?

A: Yes. I don't know the language. I didn't want to learn it. Unfortunately, he didn't speak it with us. He spoke Russian; he regretted not speaking Udmurt with us, his children. So I didn't know Udmurt. I spoke only Russian.

Q: In terms of personal identification: there's the notion of a "Russian person." How does being Udmurt fit with "Russian identity," if we can put it that way?

A: I identify as Russian. As unfortunate as it is to say at the moment—though perhaps I'll come to terms with it. I didn't identify as Udmurt. I only spoke Russian and always considered myself Russian.

Q: Could you explain how you characterize yourself—as a Russian person? What does that include?

A: The Russian language, Russian culture, Russian films, music, cartoons, all that comes from childhood—school subjects. Mostly the language. Of course now I know Hungarian well and think in Hungarian for professional topics. But at home we also speak Russian, with my daughter. Nowhere else, so to speak.

Q: You also said that being Russian now is unfortunate.

A: That's not really our topic here...

Q: I understand. I'd just like to clarify: am I right that this is mainly connected with current events and the war in Ukraine?

A: Of course, of course, of course.

Q: And before these events—would you say being Russian was something you were proud of?

A: No—not pride exactly—I was just calm about it. I didn't dwell on it. I don't know how long you've been in Hungary, but here among Russian-speaking people from the post-Soviet space we didn't divide ourselves up at all. I often didn't even know where my friends were from—Kazakhstan, Russia, Ukraine—it didn't matter. We just spoke the same language. The language united us. And where you came from didn't matter. Essentially, the culture was the same. We grew up in similar conditions. We were all born in the Soviet Union—I arrived in 2000, but I was born in the USSR. So what's happening now... I'd rather not go into it—it's very painful.

Q: Got it. When you lived in Russia, could you evaluate the situation in the country in terms of economics and politics?

A: No, I was a child. No. I was a child, and a very patriotic one. If I think about it, we had a healthy, fairly normal patriotic mood in the country despite perestroika and all that. We were proud to be Russian—at least we weren't ashamed of it. I felt fine and comfortable; I had everything I needed. We didn't starve, I had friends—and that gives you, at least it gave me, a comfortable life and society. Everything was fine.

Q: And after coming to Hungary—how did your feelings change?

A: What I now understand is that despite my patriotic mindset, and the fact languages didn't come easy—I studied French and English at school, but neither really took—imagining myself speaking Hungarian was like a nightmare. Living in a country where everyone around me speaks another language—unthinkable. But I liked it here so much. I appreciated the calm atmosphere. Even with that patriotic mindset at 18, I liked it so much here that I realized this country fit my mentality better—the non-aggressiveness, the calm. I realized I value peace most of all, and Russian-style upheavals didn't appeal to me. So I tried to stay—and I still am. Of course, honestly, over the years I've often reflected that you end up neither fully Russian anymore—after living here 22 years, most of your life abroad—nor fully integrated into Hungarian culture. That's my personal case too, because my husband is Ukrainian, and we speak Russian at home. Looking at mixed marriages, even then the language tends to remain, one way or another. Among my girlfriends too—I can't say all of us who arrived “become Hungarian women,” specifically Hungarian—there's a sort of middle state, and even that not for everyone. It's mixed.

Q: Okay, I understand. Let's move to the second block—about moving and life in Hungary. Was it hard at first?

A: Yes—of course it was always hard. Language, difficulties: as I said, the language came to me only with effort. In my first year at university, I could write well—writing was fine—but speaking was bad. So after the first exam session I realized I wouldn't last long like that, and I took a student job. There, very quickly, I improved my language—soon I spoke freely and understood freely. For me, the language barrier stopped being a problem; that's how I solved it.

Q: And studying at the university?

A: (call glitch) Hello?—Right, yes. I was saying: studying was sheer hell. Very hard, very. I was in law, and they really drilled us—full throttle. Later it even got worse. There were easier paths, but mine wasn't. So studying was very hard: endless failures, endless retakes. But overall I managed. After I graduated, I got a job, and from then on things went well. Later there was also the bar qualification exam after three years of work—that was hard too, but the exam itself wasn't so hard to sit; I passed. And after that, work was fine. I like working more than studying—but I did have to suffer through it.

Q: So mainly the issue was language?

A: Of course—law is all language-based. And beyond language—there's an enormous body of statutes, procedural rules, administrative regulations—so much to learn and memorize. The exams were very voluminous; the material was huge.

Q: Did you experience cultural shock?

A: Probably, yes. I was struck in Hungary by the fact everyone smoked and kissed on the street—I remember it vividly. I was at a school with lots of foreigners; the Vietnamese struck me—running around in coats, running through the streets because it was already cold; in Russia we dress properly for cold, but the Vietnamese didn't. Maybe that was “shock.” Still, I really liked it. I arrived a young student—and that freedom from parents, of course, I liked that too.

Q: Was it hard to find friends?

A: No. I adapt well to almost any social setting. We studied at the language institute for a year and lived in the dorm there. I was in a four-bed room—another Russian-speaking girl, a girl who spoke Russian named Margolka, and a Ukrainian—we were all Russian-speaking. Thanks

to whoever assigned rooms! So we had no problems; we were friends. There were many other foreigners, but since I didn't speak other languages then, I socialized only with Russian-speakers—which, of course, made language learning harder.

Q: What about Hungarians—did you have Hungarians in your circle?

A: Not then—later, yes. When I started working—first in a student job—then yes, Hungarians. And later too; I worked with Hungarians. In my private life, my friends were mostly Russian-speaking because, as I said, the language was hard—I couldn't speak freely. Since I studied a lot of specialized topics, I could speak well professionally once I improved, so at work I had no problems. With colleagues I had wonderful relations; we were friends—until life took us different directions when people left. But while we worked together, it was great. So no, I didn't have difficulties; I adapt well, and over the years I learned to get along with people easily.

Q: And now?

A: In the end, oddly enough, I've come full circle. Now I work alone—I opened my own private law practice—and I couldn't be happier not having to adjust to anyone. With age I've lost my “flexibility,” so to speak.

Q: Do you think it was easy for you to communicate with Hungarians because of the language, or because it was a work setting—or both?

A: I was simply lucky with colleagues in both cases. I've essentially had two workplaces: that student job at the university while I studied, and then a law firm after graduation where I worked many years. It was small, and the bosses selected staff well. We got along—no intrigues, no drama—we were on the same wavelength and worked smoothly. In the student job too I was lucky—good colleagues, good attitude. Later, after I married and had kids, and while I was on parental leave, I worked more remotely on specific assignments. Over time, up to now, I don't even feel like adjusting anymore—or socializing much. I realized I'm more comfortable working alone. It's hard to assemble a good team; my former bosses invested huge time selecting among many candidates. And even then the team fell apart; they decided to work separately and everyone went their own way. That was sad. But that's life.

Q: You mentioned during university... (connection) Can you hear me?

A: Yes, I hear you.

Q: You mentioned studying Hungarian history—how much do you know?

A: Not much—very briefly. What can you learn in half a year? It’s impossible. At the language school, in the second semester, we had Hungarian history—but very little, literally a notebook of notes. Before arriving I knew nothing about Hungary—not even that Buda and Pest are two sides of the city. I came completely from zero, unexpectedly. I hadn’t prepared seriously; I applied “just to try.” So I arrived knowing absolutely nothing. That short history course was only at the language institute. At the university it was harder: there wasn’t “Hungarian history,” there was “History of the State and Law of Hungary,” which you need to study based on a good knowledge of Hungarian history—but I didn’t have it. So it was very hard. I only know the very basics—roughly when they arrived here... and even that has faded. I remember 1956, the 1848 revolution—the holidays we celebrate annually. And that they fought on the side of Nazi Germany in WWII. That’s especially relevant now because I see them again actively supporting the fascist side in the current war—but that’s another story. They have a habit of joining the wrong side—sad, from my point of view.

Q: I see. After learning some history and language, did you follow current events in the country?

A: Not really. I lived my life and focused on my issues. Global politics, economics—those things are distant for me. Studying was hard, and my legal field took all my capacity; I simply didn’t have the energy to delve into more. I was so busy with immediate problems—exams, work. We did study political science and economics briefly, but emphasis was elsewhere. I didn’t have the bandwidth. I didn’t “follow” things. Of course, I felt changes directly—for example, I couldn’t even apply for permanent residence at one point, because while I was at university and Hungary entered the EU, they changed the law so that years of study didn’t count toward PR. Later they canceled that, and study years counted again. But I still “lost” about three years because of it—so I applied for PR three years later than I could have. Plus I had years off with kids. In the end, I could only get PR in 2008, after eight years here. Accordingly, I could apply for citizenship only in 2016 and received it in 2017.

Q: May I ask about PR? I’d heard study years count...

A: Now they do. For third-country nationals they count half.

Q: So one academic year counts as half a year?

A: Yes, as half a year.

Q: So that’s a legal provision, right?

A: Of course—currently, yes.

Q: You work in this field?

A: I'm a lawyer—an attorney.

Q: Then we'll reach out later!

A: Please do—feel free. I get many such questions. That legal area is part of my profile; I even wrote my thesis on acquiring citizenship. And I personally went through the whole path over 22 years—arrived as a student on a visa, then had residence for study, then for work, then for family reunification; later PR; I've done work permits for myself and then for others. It was a long road.

Q: How do you think Hungary changed you? Any habits you picked up?

A: Yes. Considering I arrived almost a child—18—I can say I grew up here. My personality as an adult formed here, in Hungary. Of course I retain some of my own, and what's "normal" in Russia may seem wild here and vice versa. For example, that combative patriotic fervor—"we'll defeat everyone"—I cannot understand at all. I think people should live peacefully, strive for prosperity with neighbors, not for some "victories." I simply can't wrap my head around it. But that's another topic. I've lived longer in Hungary now, and the Hungarian rhythm of life is much closer to me. I already knew even before recent events that I probably couldn't survive in Russia's frantic rhythm. My family and mom are in Moscow; commuting an hour each way—I can't imagine it. In Hungary I can reach any point in 15 minutes; you can drive across half the country in two hours. Everything is different. I had business trips involving Russia—court hearings too—it was fascinating. Even then (2011) I noticed differences: in Hungary a court schedules 3–5 hearings per day, each allotted time (30 minutes, 15, or an hour) depending on the case; in Russia we saw lists of 15 cases per day—15 minutes each—and you could sit for hours if anything got delayed. A completely different pace. The downside here is cases can drag on for years because generous time limits, adjournments—though it's shorter now than back then. Still, deadlines of 8–15 days for procedural actions are common; immigration appeals have decent timeframes. So things progress slowly; but I prefer that—"hurry slowly," as we say; if you rush, you make mistakes.

Q: Any specifically Hungarian habits you adopted?

A: Not really. My family is Russian-speaking, so we live in our own rhythm. We celebrate Hungarian Christmas and Easter—well, everyone does. We end up celebrating both—our Orthodox dates and the Hungarian ones.

Q: Why is celebrating both important for you?

A: Celebration is always nice. These days it's mostly for my daughter—she loves it—so we dye eggs for her, that kind of thing. Personally I'm not into holidays much; I could do without them. For my daughter—it matters. As for me, I feel like an old Tortilla the Turtle sitting in a swamp—I'm tired and don't want anything.

Q: Do you celebrate other Hungarian holidays—for example March 15th?

A: No. I don't even really celebrate my own birthday—again, except for my daughter's sake. A holiday is a holiday—maybe yes, maybe no. I'm just not interested in going out to squares and waving flags. Perhaps it's good for feeling unity with the people—but I don't need it; I'm quite self-sufficient that way.

Q: Do you keep following news from Russia?

A: My God, I can't tear myself away from Russian news. For the first time in my life it has grabbed me so much. Hungarian politics grabbed me too when they made school entry at six mandatory—that enraged me so much I can't describe it. Then I realized the truth of the saying: if you don't engage in politics, politics will engage with you. I was outraged and went all the way to the Constitutional Court—nothing came of it, because we have a government that doesn't like to follow Constitutional Court orders, and the Court doesn't like confrontation with the government. As for what's happening in Russia—Ukraine—it shocked me deeply. In previous years, as I said, I was busy with my life; I didn't have bandwidth. Earlier policy changes—PR counting, kindergarten from age three—didn't please me, but I didn't protest. But school at six really angered me, and I took a close look at politics and saw they weren't exactly shining. As a lawyer I see laws being passed not in the way they should be. There is a law on how to make laws—and I don't see it being followed, at least in what I examined. And the events in Russia and Ukraine devastated me. I think they affect Russians abroad like me even more than those inside the bubble behind the iron curtain who, it seems to me, barely grasp what's happening outside. I follow constantly—it's exhausting. Especially exhausting is opening Facebook or Index and reading the comments—I want to curl up my ears. The same

comments I see on Yandex—where do they draw it from? Clearly from the same source. It’s... surprising, to put it mildly.

Q: In peacetime, did you follow the news?

A: Not really. There wasn’t anything that affected me strongly—and things were relatively stable. Looking back to 2014 and after—yes. My husband told me then too. Now I see that those who could sound the alarm did so—they were jailed or killed. I, meanwhile, looked away. There’s that cartoon: a boat with a hole, one person says “we have a hole,” others say “it’s a special hole,” “I actually like it more,” another “what water?”—and one says “I’m not listening.” That was me. I ignored it. So February 24 felt like a bolt from the blue to me.

Q: Do you take active part in public-political events in Hungary?

A: I volunteered. Donated. I can say I do my part—to the extent I can. My kids were sick all March, so—family first. I vote—though I’m very disappointed with the results—but you still have to. Since that school-at-six law, I’ve been convinced we all must vote, otherwise you get these consequences. We’re not North Korea; in Hungary we can still influence things. I want peace; I hate war. I cannot, in any serious way, accept the idea that Russia was “forced.” That doesn’t exist. They didn’t even bother to stage a proper provocation—they didn’t have the wit for it. That’s how I see it now.

Q: In your view, what’s your contribution to Hungarian society as a Russian migrant?

A: I’m a lawyer—my contribution is substantial. And specifically for Russian-speaking migrants, my help is often needed. Attorneys here have significant powers. For example, you cannot open a company or register a real-estate deal without an attorney. So for those who want to do business, or buy/sell property, it’s advantageous to go to a Russian-speaking attorney if they’re not comfortable with the language. I speak Russian—and Hungarian. English... not so much, mostly written.

Q: Do you think—if we rewind to before the war—Russians lived better economically than Hungarians?

A: No. Never. That’s simply impossible. I don’t even think it ever will be—with that approach, forgive me, it can’t be.

Q: You said you have a child—I understood correctly you have children?

A: Yes, two.

Q: Are they growing up bilingual?

A: No—ours is a Russian-speaking family; we speak Russian. Though, in a sense, yes—they go to Hungarian kindergarten/school, so that’s Hungarian. And since my husband is Ukrainian, our daughter sometimes speaks Ukrainian with her grandma. So they get some Ukrainian, too. But the main family language is Russian. So at this stage I wouldn’t call them fully bilingual; they’re primarily Russian-speaking, with some Hungarian. Our son is non-verbal—autism—so speech isn’t in play for him yet; he attends, but for him there’s no speech as such. Our daughter speaks, so all the holidays and such are mostly for her—our son isn’t interested, like me.

Q: Last questions: do you plan to move to another country, or return to Russia?

A: You’ve got a lot of interviews—will you publish excerpts? I have around 40 interviews, maybe more—very interesting; please send me something if anyone can. For me these events are horrific mostly because my mom and relatives are in Russia—we’re very close, we love each other, we visited constantly. I went there every year, often twice; they came to me two or three times a year. Constant visits, constant contact. COVID interrupted that for a year, year and a half—but even COVID wasn’t as hopeless as now. So this hit me hard—I can’t see my people. But I will absolutely not go to that country while that man is in power—never while he lives. I’ve never felt this way before—I used to be neutral, not “in the topic,” didn’t notice the horror. Now the puzzle pieces clicked. I even watch Russian propaganda deliberately; I read comments everywhere. My mind can’t accept it—I see no logic, not even the semblance of law. I have a decent education—however superficially—I studied economics, political science, law. What I see is very frightening. I thought humanity had moved on since fascism. Seeing fascism rise like a phoenix—from the ashes, in the very country that defeated it—throws me into a deep horror I can’t put into words. So returning—absolutely not. I hope my family can come here; they don’t want to emigrate. I feel endless pity for refugees—leaving your home is terrible—but I understand why my relatives there can’t just drop everything; they have their lives. We’ll see. But I won’t go back. As for another country—

I wouldn’t want to move. My education is Hungarian; I’m deeply tied to Hungary professionally. Only here can I fully realize myself. My English is weak; languages come hard. Hungarian I mastered because I live and work in it. With English I can’t immerse like that—especially with kids now; starting from scratch at 40 with English is very hard. I’m no longer young. If Hungary goes in the same (wrong) direction and things start here—then maybe we’d move. My husband knows English and is mobile; his profession is IT, the most wonderful—he

can get a job anywhere. But I'd have to put a cross over myself as a specialist; I wouldn't like that. Still, profession is profession, and children are dearer—you have to save them. If it comes to that, we'll go.

Q: Understood. I'm turning off the recorder now.

CASE 20

Case 20. Memo

The respondent was born in Crimea but raised in Moscow, where she identifies culturally as Russian though never fully embraced a “100% Russian” identity. Her family background is ambiguous due to lost documents during Stalinist repressions, and in childhood she often faced teasing in regional Russia for her “non-typical” appearance. Moscow, however, provided a multicultural school environment where she felt secure and supported.

She studied at the Higher School of Economics, graduating in 2017 with a humanities degree. Already during her school years she was politically engaged, attending opposition protests starting in 2011, though she avoided the most dangerous ones. She recalls that, at the time, activism felt relatively safe, even fun, and that there was a genuine sense of hope for democratic change. Her teachers were progressive, and her peers openly discussed election fraud. She describes herself as having always held oppositional views.

From early on she sought an international career rather than attachment to Moscow. Traveling abroad, volunteering, and interacting with international students fostered her cosmopolitan outlook. She considered HSE a “branch of Europe in Russia,” but by her second year decided to apply abroad, specifically to the Central European University (CEU), attracted by its liberal mission and English-language programs. In 2019 she moved to Budapest for her master’s studies with a tuition waiver.

Her transition was smooth: CEU supported students with migration procedures, Budapest offered an English-speaking environment, and she quickly built a social network both through the university and local activities. She acknowledges CEU’s unique liberal character, sharply contrasted with Viktor Orbán’s government, which eventually forced the university’s move to Vienna. She views CEU as a hub of open society values, integrated into Budapest but also clearly distinct.

Her social life was international, with classmates, Hungarian acquaintances, and some connections via Tinder and sports clubs. She praises Hungarians as friendly and supportive if English is available. She engaged somewhat with Hungarian history and literature, but her main intellectual ties remained with CEU’s academic environment.

Professionally, she initially aimed for an academic career, but Hungary's limited opportunities and small economy pushed her toward international nonprofit and corporate roles. She briefly left Hungary for a job abroad, later returning during COVID, but she describes herself not as an immigrant but as an "expat" — living wherever work takes her.

Culturally, she maintains some Russian traditions, particularly New Year's, Maslenitsa, and commemorations such as May 9, which she reframes as remembrance rather than state celebration. She also celebrates Hanukkah, reflecting her hybrid identity. She sorts waste and uses public transport, habits acquired in the EU. She does not intend to learn Hungarian, as she views her stay as temporary and the language as having little utility outside the country.

Politically, she follows Russian independent media closely and draws parallels between Russian and Hungarian regimes: authoritarian leaders, suppression of NGOs, media, and minorities. She notes, however, that Hungary's EU membership introduces constraints absent in Russia. Economically, she compares Moscow favorably to Budapest but emphasizes that Hungarian life is easier for foreigners.

She firmly rules out returning to Russia, citing both politics and quality of life factors. For her, Moscow never suited her, and Russia lacks a city where she could imagine living. Her orientation is international: she plans to live and work wherever meaningful job opportunities arise, not tied to any single country.

Case 20. Interview

Q: So, please tell me about yourself, where are you from?

A: Yes, well, my family is from Moscow, but I was born in Ukraine, in Crimea. But I rather... I spent my early childhood in Ukraine, but my family is from Moscow, so I'm more of a Moscow person.

Q: Aha, but ethnically, are you Russian or...?

A: No. That's a good question, because due to repressions our grandfathers on both sides destroyed the documents, so we don't know, but as for... I'm not Ukrainian, no, but I never felt 100% Russian either. But culturally, of course, I am Russian, yes. It's my native language. But still, kind of in-between.

Q: Why did you never feel 100% Russian?

A: Well, because I don't exactly have the "typical" face type I was supposed to. In Moscow it wasn't an issue, but whenever I went to the Russian regions and to my grandmothers, children could say something to me, call me names depending on their background — they could call me Chinese, or Jewish... yeah, so I always had some struggles with that. But I had a healthy family, a healthy school environment. The school was very multicultural, nobody bullied me there. But outside Moscow, yes, there were, of course, questions.

Q: Aha, okay. Interesting. What did you do in Moscow?

A: I studied. I studied at a top university, that's why I later moved... I left Russia in 2019, right after I finished my bachelor's.

Q: Sorry, repeat please — in which year? 2016 or 2017?

A: 2017.

Q: Aha, okay. And which university?

A: Higher School of Economics.

Q: Aha. And what was your major?

A: Well, let's say, I think if I give too many facts, it will be clear, so let's just say it was the humanities.

Q: Okay, fine. How, in your view, did you perceive Russia back then?

A: Well, how did I see Russia? As a country, normally. But of course, I had some questions, because I first went to protests in 2011.

Q: That was the Bolotnaya Square, right?

A: Well, I didn't make it to Bolotnaya itself, but afterwards there were spring protests. I didn't go there. I somehow managed to avoid the most dangerous ones. When there was May 6th, I didn't go, but there was Occupy Abai. Well, at Chistye Prudy we and my friends lay down. Then in 2013 too. While I was in school I had a lot of time, I went to protests. So yes, that's how it happened.

Q: I see. Tell me, was it dangerous back then?

A: No, back then it felt relatively safe. And that's also interesting — I recently reminded my school friend. I studied in Moscow in an ordinary district, but our teachers were pretty progressive. In the sense that when the elections were stolen — well, they didn't vote

themselves, they weren't 18 yet. But it was obvious that in our district everyone voted for Yabloko. They stamped us, but we could open the results and say, "No, this is wrong, this is all rigged." From the protest perspective, the police were guarding, there were concerts. Nemtsov, Navalny, Udaltsov — all of that. It was absolutely cool. I liked it, it was fun. There was a movement.

Q: In your view, at that time did Russia have a future?

A: Of course, yes. It felt like if we protested a bit, something would change. At that time I was also choosing... I didn't consider studying abroad for my bachelor's. I thought my English was not so great, average, but I knew I wanted humanities and social sciences. It was clear that it wouldn't pay off immediately. And it seemed like HSE was a kind of branch of Europe in Russia. And of course, I thought, "I'll do my bachelor's here, then a master's later." Mostly for general development.

Q: So, am I right to understand that even back then you had somewhat oppositional views?

A: Of course, yes. I think I always had oppositional views. I don't even know — I think I had them right away.

Q: How do you think, was it good or bad? How would you assess the economic situation in Russia back when you lived there?

A: Good question. Around 2011–2012. My family wasn't super rich, but I had my first trips to Eastern Europe — at that time you could still go to Hungary by train. I had an exchange in Budapest, it was my first school trip. I immediately loved the city. Before that too, I had been to Europe a few times, when my dad traveled on business. We had trips. And it felt like things were okay. The dollar was around 30. So I'd say — even for my family it was fine, and in the country it seemed okay too.

Q: When do you think things in Russia really went wrong?

A: Crimea, 2014, of course.

Q: And how did you come to the decision to emigrate? Did you always want to emigrate?

A: I'll rephrase: I didn't really want "emigration" — I wanted an international career. I never felt... well, there are people who really love Moscow. I never had that. Moscow wasn't for me, even health-wise, it didn't suit me. I just wanted an international career. I wanted to live in

different countries. Plus, I was active, I started traveling, I did volunteering, I communicated a lot with international students, so it seemed to me that this international lifestyle would be great.

Q: Okay. So, there's a certain image of a "Russian person." Who do you think that is, what does it mean — in your view?

A: Oh, a "Russian person." I don't really like to say "Russian person," because I don't identify with it at all. I'd rather say "Rossiyanin" [a citizen of Russia].

Q: And what's the difference between the two?

A: "Russkiy" is nationality, ethnicity. "Rossiyanin" is just by passport. There are more "Rossiyane" than "Russkiye," because all citizens of the Russian Federation, regardless of their ethnic background, are Rossiyanes. In Russia there are, if I remember correctly, 150+ nationalities. Not all are "Russkiye."

Q: Okay, then let's rephrase: how can we describe the image of a "Rossiyanin"? What qualities?

A: Good question. It's hard to say something general. I think there are kind of two types. There are Rossiyanes I'm friends with — people who try, develop, do business. They're like the old Russian merchants, or like Kollontai, our political activist in the 1920s, or like Gagarin. The kind you want to look up to, active, ambitious people. And then there's another type — someone who just lives, watches TV. Yes, I'd probably divide it like that: there are those who watch TV, they're not very active, post-Soviet people who couldn't get over the collapse of the USSR, couldn't adapt to the market economy, couldn't raise their living standards. For many reasons, I don't want to blame them. And then there's the other type, closer to me — the more active ones.

Q: Okay. Which type do you consider yourself?

A: Active, of course.

Q: And how did you manage to move, and in which year?

A: Well, as I said, I traveled a lot, and it became clear I wanted to study abroad — because it was cool. And I chose a specific university, a specific narrow program — social sciences. There aren't many such programs in the world, but I knew they existed. Plus CEU suited me very well in terms of values, because it was founded by George Soros, and the mission is to build an open society. Also I won't hide — language was a factor. I only speak English fluently. So I think

already in my second year of bachelor's, maybe even earlier, I consciously decided I would apply to CEU. And I went right after graduation.

Q: Aha, so you managed to get in right away?

A: Yes, yes, I did. I applied to several universities besides CEU, but I got into CEU with a tuition waiver, I didn't pay for studies. So everything worked out for me.

Q: Aha, so am I right that your choice of Hungary as a country for migration was because of the university?

A: Yes, of course, because of the university. That was the main reason. Interestingly, even when I was applying, there was already scandal around CEU — eventually it moved to Austria. But I thought, “If I apply, okay, I'll move to Vienna if needed.” I didn't care, because I knew the education was good and the professors I needed were there. So yes, CEU was the key factor. Budapest I liked too, but I knew I wouldn't learn Hungarian. And let's be honest — this is Eastern Europe, it's quite poor and modest.

Q: Poor and modest — what do you mean?

A: Poor and modest in the sense that — in my opinion, and maybe I'm biased — Hungarian universities are overall much lower-level. Except CEU, which I think was clearly the best in the region. Everything else seemed about the same as HSE. If you look at rankings: Corvinus, ELTE — okay, fine, but they're good if you want to study the region. But if you want a serious international academic career, it's different. I initially wanted an academic career: master's at CEU, then PhD in the US. But the country is small, not wealthy. So, yes, that's why.

Q: And which year did you arrive?

A: 2019.

Q: Sorry, I already asked that a bit. Okay, I see. Was it difficult for you to settle here?

A: No, because the university helped a lot. They basically took us by the hand to the migration office. So it was super easy. Also, in Budapest people speak English fairly well, so I didn't have problems. Even the older generation — I had a neighbor, a grandpa who studied in Russia, very nice man, invited us for dinner a few times. So the migration process was smooth. Hungarian is a hard language, but the system is quite adapted for foreigners. Also, CEU is a multicultural family — so I never felt lonely, I felt great.

Q: Could we say that CEU is in some sense an island, separate from the rest?

A: Yes and no. I wouldn't call it a closed island, because CEU did a lot for Budapest. If you look at the English-speaking life of the city — many expats are there because of it. There were lots of open events, famous lecturers came. Thanks to that, I met many locals too. So I wouldn't call it just an island. Maybe rather an island of liberal views, yes.

Q: An island of liberal views opposed to what the Hungarian government does?

A: Of course, because Viktor Orbán expelled the university. In 2018 the law on foreign agents was passed, and Open Society Foundations were expelled. So yes, there were purges — not like in Russia, but still. I saw that already in my first year of master's. It became clear that my academic career might collapse.

Q: Okay, got it. You mentioned your social circle. Can you tell more — who did you mostly build connections with?

A: Mostly with people from the university. Then I used Tinder for a while — I met some Hungarians that way, some nice guys. Outside CEU, I did team sports, there were girls not from the university. So, I had enough — I never felt lonely. I also had good landlords and neighbors. Hungarians are nice: despite their difficult language, if they speak English they try to help and be friends.

Q: Okay. During your stay in Hungary, did you engage with Hungarian history?

A: Yes, since I have a humanities background. I read some Hungarian literature. I don't remember the name, but there's a Nobel laureate who wrote about the Holocaust, one book was about an unborn child. So yes, I read that, got some understanding.

Q: What was the reason for your re-migration to another country you mentioned?

A: They gave me a very good job offer. Originally, I had planned an academic career, but Hungary is a poor country, and for foreigners corporate careers are limited to a few offices. I wasn't interested. I got an amazing offer in another country, so I moved. Later, because of COVID, I changed career tracks again and returned to Budapest. But I don't really see myself as an immigrant — more as an expat. I live where the job is. If I get a cool job in Africa, I'll move to Africa.

Q: Okay. Do you know Hungarian?

A: No. Just a few words like “köszönöm.” And I'm not planning to learn it, because as I said, I don't see the point.

Q: While living in Hungary, do you read Russian news?

A: Yes. I read Novaya Gazeta, Holod (which my friends run), sometimes Meduza, also Insider (Dobrokhotov's media). So yes, I read a lot, partly for work, partly to follow the political situation in Russia. Hungarian I read with Google Translate, I follow one Facebook page, but mostly I read English media.

Q: Do you take active part in public or political life in Hungary?

A: Good question. Well, I can't really participate politically since I'm not a citizen. But as for protests: I supported the opposition, I went once to the Russian embassy. But mostly I find it a bit of a waste of time. I do volunteering for Ukrainians. Before that, while studying, we had a program at the university: we walked shelter dogs in the park. Also, I buy newspapers sold by homeless people — I don't read them, but I buy for support. So I'd say I participate, but not very actively.

Q: Okay. Do you know Hungarian holidays?

A: Yes, of course. In March they celebrate the 1848 revolution, in October 1956, plus Christian holidays. I don't celebrate them, but I know them.

Q: Do you still celebrate Russian holidays here?

A: Until this year I used to invite guests and celebrate Maslenitsa — one evening at least. This year, because of the war, I didn't. I also celebrate Hanukkah, New Year. On May 9 we went to the Kerepesi cemetery to lay flowers at the graves of Soviet soldiers. But I don't really see it as a holiday, more as remembrance.

Q: Why is it important for you to keep these traditions?

A: New Year — my boyfriend really loves the Russian-style New Year. As for May 9 — it's a chance to be with the community. I think May 9 is important — not in the way Russian authorities treat it, but as a day of mourning and liberation of Europe. We should remember the people who died, both Soviet and European. We should remember the Holocaust. I think everyone in Europe should mark this day.

Q: Okay. Do you think Russia and Hungary are similar?

A: Governments — yes, definitely.

Q: Could you explain that?

A: Well, both were authoritarian regimes — before the war, at least. Problems with media, opposition, NGOs, LGBT rights. Of course, differences too: Hungary is in the EU, so there are more checks and balances. But overall, yes, there were similarities.

Q: And culturally?

A: Culturally, we're Europeans, so similar in some ways. In cuisine — not really. But in classical music, like Brahms and Tchaikovsky, yes, quite similar.

Q: Do you think life in Hungary is economically better than in Russia?

A: Hard to say for Russia overall. If you compare Budapest and Moscow — before the war, Moscow was much wealthier, life was better there. If you compare to the Russian regions — I can't really say.

Q: So do you see Moscow as somewhat separate from Russia?

A: Of course. Different salaries, opportunities, everything.

Q: Did you ever encounter nationalism in Hungary? Against you personally?

A: No.

Q: Okay. What habits did you acquire living in Hungary or the EU?

A: More EU than Hungary specifically — but waste sorting, I take more seriously now. Also, I switched from car to public transport. Overall, not much else. Maybe because I moved abroad young, I didn't have many habits fixed yet. So apart from sorting waste, nothing radical.

Q: Okay. Do you plan to stay in Hungary permanently?

A: As I said, I live where the job is. Probably not Hungary. Unless, with the war, maybe something changes — I work in the nonprofit sector. If a great job appears here, I'll stay. But otherwise, the labor market is too small.

Q: So am I right that for you the economic factor is more important than the political one?

A: No, I didn't say that. I don't separate economics and politics. But for me personally it's about having an interesting, meaningful job.

Q: Under what conditions would you return to Russia? Is it possible?

A: None. Even before the war, I had that position. First, I like international life. Second, climate — Russia doesn't have a city that suits me. Maybe Sochi, but I hate it: bad infrastructure, dirty sea. Maybe only regime change. But my future I see as international, definitely not in Moscow.

Q: Got it. We moved a bit faster, so I think that's all my questions for now.

A: Yes, I see.

Appendix 3: Comparative Coding Matrix

Case	Motivations (H1/H1a)	Transit vs. Settlement (H2/H2a)	Integration: Language, Social, Professional (H3/H3a)	Policy & Structural Factors (H4/H4a)	Identity & Transnation al Ties
1	Economic stagnation in Russia; search for better opportunities	Initially temporary → later permanent settlement in Hungary	Learned Hungarian; mixed social circle; moderate professional success	Faced visa/residency hurdles, overcame via work sponsorship	Maintains Russian cultural ties; partial Hungarian integration
2	Academic opportunities abroad	Settled long-term	Full language acquisition; professional career in Hungary; family ties	PR and citizenship acquired after years of residence	Dual identity: Russian cultural background, Hungarian professional belonging
3	Dissatisfaction with Russia, lifestyle motivations	Permanent settlement	Language learned; integration via work and friendships	Bureaucratic challenges but navigable	Russian-speaking home, integrated socially in Hungary
4	Career opportunities	Stayed permanently	Moderate Hungarian, English use at	Navigated PR/citizenship process	Russian identity retained; Hungarian

			work; stable career		lifestyle habits
5	Political disillusionment; academic path	Permanent, but ambivalent	English-focused environment; minimal Hungarian; social ties mostly international	Dependent on CEU support, precarious legal environment	Cosmopolitan identity; Russian ties loosened
6	Family reasons, marriage	Settled long-term	Partial Hungarian acquisition; integration through family and children	Legal residence via family reunification	Hybrid Russian-Hungarian family identity
7	Education + professional opportunity	Permanent, though with mobility	Invested in language learning; mixed friendships; professional growth	Managed migration status; eventually stable	Dual identity: embraces Hungarian civic belonging, retains Russian ties
8	Education (CEU), dissatisfaction with Russia	Settlement in Budapest	Strong integration socially, partly linguistically	Benefited from CEU institutional help	Hybrid identity, cosmopolitan orientation

9	Political repression (opposition activism)	Forced permanent settlement	Learns Hungarian; builds activist/social networks	Visa issues, asylum-like precarity	Exile identity, maintains strong Russian opposition ties
10	Political exile + career prospects	Semi-permanent, open to Scandinavia	Weak Hungarian, relies on English; political activism community	Visa difficulties; relies on NGO/legal support	Strong Russian opposition identity; sees self as exile
11	Initially mother's decision; later pragmatic moves	Pragmatic, mobile (Hungary → Turkey → Hungary)	Weak Hungarian, strong social integration via friends	Housing discrimination; employment sponsorship issues	Apolitical, pragmatic identity; no deep national ties
12	Lifestyle + family	Settled	Learns Hungarian; children integrated	PR via family; bureaucratic challenges	Russian-speaking family identity, mixed cultural habits
13	Academic path + dissatisfaction with Russia	Settlement in Budapest	Limited Hungarian; relies on English;	CEU support crucial	Transnational orientation; Russian ties loosened

			academic network		
14	Family migration	Permanent	Children integrated linguistically; parent weaker integration	Family reunification PR	Retains Russian cultural space; dual orientation
15	Economic professional +	Settled	Good Hungarian; professional advancement	PR, later citizenship	Russian-speaking family, Hungarian workplace
16	Political repression	Forced exile, permanent	Learns Hungarian; opposition networks	Precarious visa; NGO support	Exile identity, activism abroad
17	Family, children's education	Settled	Hungarian through children; social ties mixed	PR through family	Russian cultural space retained, some duality
18	Academic/professional	Semi-settled	English-focused integration; weak Hungarian	Dependent on CEU & job sponsorship	Cosmopolitan identity
19	Exchange program (Finno-Ugric), later lifestyle preference	Permanent settlement, anchored in law career	Mastered Hungarian despite difficulty; became	Years of study initially not counted toward PR;	In-between identity: Russian-speaking at home,

			lawyer; mixed social circle	eventual citizenship	professionall y Hungarian; politically engaged
20	Academic/professi onal (CEU) + opposition mindset	Expatriate-like mobility, not permanent	No Hungarian; English only; integrated socially via CEU	CEU support crucial; no intent for citizenship	Cosmopolita n identity: celebrates mixed traditions; refuses return to Russia; international orientation

Appendix 4: Emerging Comparative Patterns

1. Motivations (H1)

- *Economic/professional*: Cases 1, 3, 4, 15.
- *Academic/CEU-driven*: Cases 5, 8, 13, 18, 20.
- *Political/forced exile*: Cases 9, 10, 16.
- *Family*: Cases 6, 12, 14, 17.
- *Mixed / pragmatic*: Cases 7, 11, 19.

2. Settlement vs. Mobility (H2)

- *Firm settlement*: 1, 2, 3, 6, 7, 12, 14, 15, 17, 19.
- *Semi-settled, open to mobility*: 8, 10, 13, 18.
- *Expat / mobile identity*: 11, 20.
- *Forced settlement (exile)*: 9, 16.

3. Integration Modes (H3)

- *High linguistic & professional*: 2, 7, 15, 19.
- *Low linguistic, English reliance*: 5, 8, 10, 11, 13, 18, 20.
- *Activist/civic integration*: 9, 10, 16, 19.
- *Family/children-driven integration*: 6, 12, 14, 17.

4. Policy & Structures (H4)

- CEU as anchor: 5, 8, 13, 18, 20.
- PR/citizenship hurdles: 2, 6, 12, 14, 15, 17, 19.
- Precarious/asylum-like: 9, 10, 16.
- Employment/housing barriers: 11.

5. Identity & Transnationalism

- *In-between (Russian-Hungarian)*: 7, 19.
- *Cosmopolitan/expat*: 5, 8, 13, 18, 20.
- *Exile identity*: 9, 10, 16.
- *Family-anchored Russianness*: 6, 12, 14, 17.
- *Pragmatic, apolitical*: 11.

Appendix 5: The List of Publications to Date by the Applicant Submitting the Doctoral Dissertation

POPOVA, E.: *Religious nationalism: The case study of the Russian church schism.* – In: Central European Political Science Review, 2022. 23. évf. 87. sz. pp. 135–149.

POPOVA, E.: *Dissenters march: Russian migration trends and forecasts.* – In: KISS, R. (szerk.) Critical Rethinking of Public Administration: Book of Abstracts. Budapest: Doktoranduszok Országos Szövetsége (DOSZ), 2022. p. 23.

POPOVA, E.: *Migration integration approaches: The case study of Russian-speaking immigrants in Hungary.* – In: Košická Bezpečnostná Revue, 2022. 12. évf. 1. sz. pp. 71–86.

POPOVA, E.: *Rubik's cube: Simulations of migrant integration models in Hungary.* – In: American Hungarian Educators Association (AHEA) 46th Annual Conference. Online, 2022. p. 1.

POPOVA, E.: *Digital migration and state: Threat or benefit.* – In: FEJES, Zs. (szerk.) Az állam és jog digitális környezete a 21. században. Szeged: Szegedi Tudományegyetem, 2022. p. 34.

POPOVA, E.: *Mother Russia, step-mother Hungary: New home for Russian migrants.* – In: Multidiszciplináris Kihívások Sokszínű Válaszok, 2021. 2. sz. pp. 28–46.

POPOVA, E.: *Virtual states as a new form of governance.* – In: Central European Political Science Review, 2020. 21. évf. 79. sz. pp. 153–168.

POPOVA, E.: *The role of the economic corridor China–Mongolia–Russia.* – In: BARÁTH, N. E., PATÓ, V. L. (szerk.) A haza szolgálatában: Konferenciakötet 2019. Budapest: Doktoranduszok Országos Szövetsége (DOSZ), 2020. pp. 268–277.

POPOVA, E.: *The case of emergency: How does COVID-19 influence nationalism development in Hungary.* – In: Košická Bezpečnostná Revue, 2020. 10. évf. 2. sz. pp. 98–108.