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Schools of the First Wave of Russian Emigrants

- Factors for success and failure -

Svetlana Paichadze

1. Introduction

In the globalization era of today, the problem of education for immigrants has become a human rights issue. Compared to the attention given to the language rights of other minorities, the language rights of immigrants get almost no attention. This is especially evident in every-day life situations and in education¹

For Russian emigrants the problem of education has become again evident after the collapse of the Soviet Union. In 2001 the Russian government in its Special Federal program: "The Russian language for the years 2002-2005" ², has recognized the problem of education for Russians living in foreign countries.

It is needless to say that the education of immigrants and the establishment of schools for immigrants is not only a problem for the mother country, but mainly for the immigrants themselves.

However, I believe that for a school of immigrants to succeed, support of the mother country and motivation of the immigrants themselves are not enough; the situation of the host country is one more important factor to consider. This situation includes the host country's immigration policy, its economic situation and its bilateral relations with the mother country of the immigrants.

In this paper I analyze the influence of the situation of a host country over the success or failure of heritage language schools of immigrants.

For analysis I chose the First Wave of Russian Emigrants (1917-1922) because they had a very strong motivation to keep their mother tongue and heritage by establishing their own schools. Although the purpose of these schools was to prevent the loss of identity by using language heritage education, their fate was largely influenced by the situation of each host country, which caused their decrease and finally extinction.

The First Wave of Russian Emigrants settled in big cities such as Paris, Berlin, Belgrade, Harbin and Prague. Since the center of educational activity was situated in Prague, in this paper I focus on the Czechoslovakian case.

For Prague to had become center of educational activity of the Russian immigration in Europe is related to the positive Czechoslovakian policy to accept Russian immigrants at that time. However, as years passed the number of Russian schools in Europe, including those in Czechoslovakia, decreased heading down the road of disappearance. By analyzing the Czechoslovakian case, it will become clear that the fate of these schools could not have been other than extinction.

Due to political reasons, the historical records concerning the Czechoslovakian Russian immigration were not made public until very recently. However, in 1998 the Prague Slavic Research Center published the related data collection entitled Historical Documents of the

Russian and Ukrainian Emigration in the Republic of Czechoslovakia (1918-1939), under the project Russia and Ukrainian Emigration in Czechoslovakia during the period of the two great wars³.

I will use these historical records to examine the Czechoslovakian policy for immigration acceptance that dealt with Russian emigrants. I will also see the changes of the Czechoslovakian policy towards Russian immigration during that period and thus verify the influence of the situation of a host country to the success or failure of heritage language schools of immigrants.

2. First Wave of Russian Emigrants and their motivation to establish Schools

2.1. Characteristics and motivation

The First Wave of Russian Emigrants started to leave the country in 1917, just after the Russian Revolution, and the numbers increased during the Russian Civil War (1918-1922). The total number of emigrants during this period ranged from 2 to 3 million people⁴.

The First Wave of Russian Emigrants did not recognize the Soviet social system, and believed that they constituted the true Russia. Although they all belonged to different social groups, had different opinion about the Russian Revolution and about what the future of Russia should be, they all agreed on the importance of the Russian language heritage.

All emigrants believed that their situation was temporal, and that they will eventually return to Russia. For this reason they believed that all Russian emigrants must continue to keep the Russian identity and language. To do so, they tried to create a micro Russian society by publishing Russian newspapers and books, creating Russian associations, and especially, giving great importance to the establishment of Russian schools.

As early as 1924, the Yugoslavian representative of the “Educational Bureau”, professor I. Malinin wrote: “Instead of the rich and continuous influence of the Motherland, reaching us from various directions that existed in the past I have a deficient and discontinuous influence... [omission]... But for Russia, and for not losing our own children, with the aid of strong patience and well planned activities, I must supply artisan and insufficient influence. This role [the role of the Mother Land] should be carried out by the Russian schools” ⁵ .

From the 1930s, the emigrants’ perspective of returning to Russia became almost impossible. For this reason, they became very preoccupied with the process of denationalization, especially of the younger generation.

In the 1930s I can read about Russian children in Japan: “That the father and his children can not understand each other became Norma from the Turgenev’s time, but in these families [families with children born in Japan] they literally speak in different languages, with scovorodka [с к о в о р о д к а – a frying pan], maslyonka [м а с л е н к а – a plate for butter] with maslenitsa [м а с л е н и ц а – the week preceding the pre-Easter fasting period], and pronounce duhovka [an oven] like hudovka.” ⁶

Russian immigrants directly connected the process of denationalization to the absence of national schools. As an example of this, a Russian community in Brazil expressed that: “...the worst disaster for Russians life [overseas] is the complete nonexistence of Russian national schools. The direct consequence of this is the complete denationalization of young

people” ⁷. All this denationalization issue contributed to reinforce the idea of a micro Russian society.

2.2. Russian schools

The movement to establish Russian schools started quite early. One of the first schools was established in a refugee camp in Soloniki [Greece] in 1920, when the civil war in Russia was still going on. The same year another Russian refugee camp school was opened in Germany, and many other schools including those of Russian refugees in Turkey were established⁸.

In the 1920s, the Russians emigrants formed an educational system and developed a study program for Russian schools. The system included “Zemgor”⁹, the “Educational Bureau”¹⁰, the “Union of Overseas Russian Schools”, the "Union of teachers of secondary and higher education schools" in the Czechoslovak republic, the "Union of Russian academic organizations", the “Central committee to guarantee higher education to overseas Russian youth” also known as the "Fedorov committee" in Paris.¹¹

The Russian Orthodox Church played an important role in the formation of schools. This organization solved the problems of financing schools, job placement of teachers, and compilation of programs for the educational institutions.

2.2.1. School organization and programs

Until 1923, the schools of Russian emigrants followed the structure of those in the Russian Empire. They consisted of Elementary schools (parish, zemstvo and state schools), Secondary schools (gymnasium and technical high schools), and Higher educational institutions (institutes and universities). In 1923, the First Conference of Overseas Elementary and Secondary Russian Schools decided to unify the types of Russian schools.

All overseas Russian schools from the 1st to the 8th grade had Russian Language classes four hours per week. Until the mid-1920s, the main part of the program was writing and grammar. However, as a long-term stay overseas became evident, the purpose of the Russian language education changed and oral language and culture became the central topics. As a result, regardless of country, the core program of the Russian schools consisted of:

- **Rossika (Russian Studies).** Besides the Russian language, this subject included Russian history, literature, Christianity and music.
- **Religion (Study of Russian Orthodox religion).** Religious education was important in Russia before the revolution. Many overseas Russian schools were parish schools, and even other types of schools received support from the church; therefore the Orthodox religion played an important role for the consciousness of Russian identity.

Many schools of Russian emigrants were established as boarding schools. This was not only because of the many orphan children, but also because a very important purpose of these schools was to create a micro Russian society to preserve the Russian identity.

I must also say that from the 1930s, the programs of Russian schools started to include

not only the study of the Russian language, but also the language of the host country as a way to insure their long term stay. For example in 1935, I can see two goals for education in the Russian Gymnasium Dostoevsky at Harbin: Russian learning for raising a person useful to Russia and the necessary Chinese, English and Japanese studies for life in Harbin¹².

3. Host countries for Russian emigrants

I have seen that the First Wave of Russian Emigrants had a very strong motivation to get heritage language education and to establish schools. As stated before, I believe that the problem of education for immigrants must be solved from three sides: the mother country, the immigrants themselves and the host country.

In the case of the First Wave of Russian emigrants, the connection with the Mother country was interrupted and the emigrants took upon themselves the problem of organizing for education. But, one more important factor for the success or failure of their schools was the situation of the hosting countries.

In this section I will summarize how the situation of the countries hosting Russian emigrants affected their immigration policy.

3.1 Types of host countries

From our point of view three types of countries hosted Russian emigrants:

- Countries neutral to Russia
- Countries antagonistic to Russia
- Pro-Russia countries

The countries neutral to Russia included most countries of Western Europe, North America, South America, and Asia (excluding Harbin). In these countries, the Immigrants were responsible for their own education. In this group, I can see countries that gave some support to the immigrants, such as France, and others that gave no support at all, as was the case in Brazil.

The countries antagonistic to Russia were those that had been part of the Russian Empire or that had some territorial problem with Russia. They included: Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia, Poland, Finland and Rumania. After the Russian revolution, these countries became independent from the Russian empire.

Before the Russian Revolution, there was already ethnic Russian population living in these countries, and due to the closeness to Russia, after the Russian Revolution, these states were forced to receive many refugees from Russia. These newborn independent countries had very strong nationalistic ideals of anti-Russian ideology and did not desire to have Russians inside their borders. As a result, many Russian schools in these countries were closed.

The pro-Russia countries included Bulgaria, Serbia, Croatia, Slovenia and Czechoslovakia. These countries had also just become independent, but it was independence from the Ottoman Empire or Austro-Hungarian Empire and their leadership had the ideology of Pan Slavism, in which Russia had a very important role. These Slavic

countries received many Russian immigrants and created the necessary conditions for the establishment of Russian schools and the education of the young Russian immigrants.

As stated above, Czechoslovakia was one of these pro-Russia countries, which also had an especial policy for receiving Russian immigrants.

4. Czechoslovakian Immigration Policy

In this Section I examine the situation changes of Czechoslovakia, how they affected its policy towards Russian immigrants and how these policy changes directly affected their heritage education.

4.1. First period: establishment and success of Russian schools

The Republic of Czechoslovakia got its independence from the Austrian-Hungarian Empire in 1918. The country was built on principles of national independence. Due to the principle of Pan Slavism that was a part of the country's ideology, Czechoslovakia received Russian immigrants. On 12 March 1919, the Czechoslovakian/Russian Association (Česko-ruská jednota), invoking Human support and faithfulness to the Slavic idea, made a call to accept Russian refugees in Czechoslovakia¹³.

4.1.1. Czechoslovakian policy for Russian immigrants (Ruská Akce)

The real policy supporting Russian immigration started in August 1921, under the initiative of then President T.G. Masaryk and was called Russian Action (Ruská akce). This policy was linked to the diplomatic policy of the new independent state. The Ruská Akce policy had the following political purposes:

- Good relationship with a future Russia. Czechoslovakia accepted immigrants from the anti-Soviet Russian elite expecting that after the collapse of the Soviet Union, this elite would go back to Russia and become a pro-Czechoslovakia human resource.
- Foster the development of Czechoslovakia. For this reason immigration was permitted only to the Russian Intelligentsia and to Russian peasants.

On 3 August 1921, the Czechoslovakian Ministry of Foreign Affairs sent a telegram to the Diplomatic representative section of Czechoslovakia in Constantinople instructing to choose especially students from the Russians that were to be moved into Czechoslovakia. On 3 August, the Ministry sent another telegram to Constantinople forbidding the issue of visas to Russians who did not have permission from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. On 22 August, a similar telegram was sent to the Diplomatic representative section in Beograd¹⁴.

The transportation of Russians from Constantinople, Gallipolis and Lemnos to Czechoslovakia started on 7 September 1921. For this purpose the Czechoslovakian government released the following instructions:

- 1) The Russians who will move into the Republic of Czechoslovakia are 1,000 students and 4,000 peasants. But it is only possible to accept Russians from Constantinople, Gallipolis and Lemnos.
- 2) The movement of this people can be realized only through the Black Sea, and then

along the Ron River to Bratislava. The cost of this movement will be covered by France. Movement by railroad throughout Serbia, Croatia, and Slovenia is forbidden.

- 3) In addition, Miss Zhekulinova will accompany 500 people among children and teachers.
- 4) We repeat that the transport of troops and extreme right or left elements to Czechoslovakia is strictly forbidden¹⁵.

A total of 30, 000 Russians immigrated into Czechoslovakia¹⁶.

The researchers of Russian immigration in the Balkans note the gap between the social structure of agricultural Balkan states and the social structure of the Russian immigrants¹⁷. In comparison with the Balkan countries, Czechoslovakia was more developed industrially and the process of industrialization continued, causing the flow of peasants into the city.

In 1921, the Czechoslovakian social structure was: peasant 39.56%, worker and enterprise 33.64%, merchant 10.62%, others 16.38%. From the 1900s to the 1930s, the ratio of peasants had decreased from 46% to 35%. For this reason, from one side, the developing industry needed people with higher education, and from another, the Russian peasantry could be integrated to the agricultural system, which had its population decreased. For example, in 1921 the agricultural and forestry labor union sent a letter to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to protest against the integration of Russian peasants to the agricultural system¹⁸.

4.1.2. Russian education system in Czechoslovakia

How we can see in figure 1, until 1928, the Russian schools in Czechoslovakia were under the control both of the Ministry: Education and Foreign Affairs. All subjects were taught in Russian, and Czech was a compulsory second language. From 1928, the system was changed and the schools of the Russian immigrants were administered as the part of the Czech Educational System.

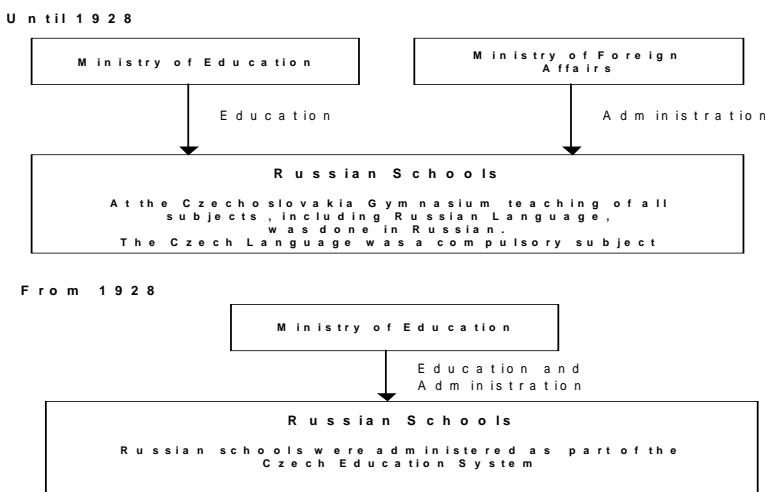


Figure 1. Russian Education System in Czechoslovakia

In Czechoslovakia, the Russian immigration policy, Ruská Akce, was the base for the

Russian school system, which included schools ranging from preschools to universities. The Pedagogical Conference held in Prague in 1923 reported that "...in Czechoslovakia there is not a child, who does not have the possibility to go to school".

In fact, by the years 1928-1929, the number of Russian schools in Czechoslovakia was: 29 preschools, 52 elementary schools and 37 secondary schools. The total number of Russian children receiving education was 7,673¹⁹. The Higher Education System was also very advanced.

Name of the school	Number of teachers	Number of students
Prague University	100	2730
Gymnasium in Moravska Třebova	30	523
The Prague technical gymnasium (Real gymnasium)	20	141
Accounting professional school	7	0
Railroad professional school	5	40
Automobile and tractor professional school	6	100
Agricultural institute	5	64
Junior economic course in the Agricultural institute	5	40
The agricultural and industrial professional school of Czechoslovakia		303

Table 1. Russian higher education schools of Czechoslovakia

Going to study to Czechoslovakia was the dream of many Russian young people. By this time Czechoslovakia had truly become the center of Russian overseas education. But from the 30,000 Russian immigrants accepted into Czechoslovakia, only 8,000 remained by the middle of the 1930s.

4.2. Second Period: Decline and failure of Russian schools

I will analyze now the change of the immigration support policy towards Russian immigrants, which eventually caused the failure of Russian schools. The main factors for the change of policy can be summarized as follows:

- From the beginning there was no long term policy to fully integrate Russian immigrants.
- The economic crisis in Europe, influenced the economic situation of the country and caused a movement opposing Russian immigrants.
- With the change of situation in the world, Czechoslovakia had to correct its relationship with the Soviet Union and thus avoid the support of Russian immigrants.
- Russians were never recognized as a minority.

4.2.1. Short term policy

As shown in Section 4.1, the Czechoslovakian immigration policy to accept Russian immigrants was more advanced than in other countries. However, assuming the final return of Russians to their home country, this policy did not provide for the integration of immigrants into the Czechoslovakian society.

From the second half of the 1920s, just when Russian Action (Ruská Akce) was fully implemented, the impossibility for immigrants to return to Russia became obvious.

On 31 December 1925, the Cabinet Ministry sent a letter to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs about the reduction of the financing of Russian Action. Then in 1926, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, E. Beneš reported: “The gradual reduction of the Russian Action begins.... We cannot immediately end this large scale Action. Furthermore, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs has moral obligations before the students, who began to learn and would not finish their study, because the support will be discontinued”²⁰.

In spite of constant reductions, Russian Action continued to exist until 1938. Midway, many educational institutions were closed: the Russian Department of Law and the Commercial Institute in 1925, the Russian Education University in 1926, and the Ukrainian Economy University in 1927.

In 1930 there was the danger of closing also the Russian Gymnasium of Prague. The reduction of student scholarships started in 1931 and from 1933 financial support of Zemgor stopped. The economic crisis and the change of political situation in Europe influenced the situation in Czechoslovakia and accelerated the end of Russian Action.

4.2.2. Economic crisis

The economic crisis in Czechoslovakia, first of all affected the labor market. The closure of Russian institutes and the reduction of state grants deprived of work to Russian immigrants with high educational background.

Even though the resistance of Czech peasantry to the immigration of Russian peasants dated back to the beginning of Russian Action in 1921, the problem became real after the Work Protection Law of 1928. According to this law the local residents obtained advantage for finding work.

In 1932, the Commission of Russian immigrants submitted a memorandum to the Czechoslovakian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. This memorandum, entitled The Subsidy Reduction to the Russian Immigration and the Work Protection Law, said that “the Russian refugees in Czechoslovakia are equated to other foreigners who have their embassies and the capability to return home in the event of an extraordinary situation.”²¹.

There is documentary confirmation that this memorandum had resonance in the Czechoslovak government. The Presidency Chief of Cabinet P. Šamal, analyzing the employment problems of Russian immigrants in Czechoslovakia pointed out how France had employment equality for its nationals and the Russian immigrants²². However, the problem remained without solution.

In 1933 the Czechoslovakian politician K. Kramář sent a letter to the Department of Interior, requesting to give the Czechoslovakian nationality to Russian immigrants. In that

letter he wrote about the anti-Russian movement in Czechoslovakia: "there is rough anti-Russian immigrants movement inside the Czechoslovakian daily newspapers and the state institutions...The Government has been pushed into this kind of agitation and unscrupulous ingratitude, and has been denying to people who would like to acquire the Czechoslovakian nationality..."²³.

The Czech government eventually made possible for Russian immigrants to obtain the Czech citizenship.

4.2.3. Change of the world situation

One important reason for the end of the Czechoslovakian immigration policy towards Russian immigrants was the change of the world situation. In connection with the danger of a military attack from Germany, Czechoslovakia was forced to enter a mutual aid treaty with the Soviet Union.

For this reason, the public attitude of the government toward the Russian immigration largely changed. For example, a memorandum on 25 November 1935, about the conduct of government employees indicated: "we entered into the mutual aid treaty with the Soviet Union, for Czechoslovakian officials and their ladies to participate in social events of Russian immigrants which have anti-Soviet tendency is not desirable"²⁴.

After the 1938 Munich Pact on no aggression between the Soviet Union and Germany in connection with the disintegration of Czechoslovakia to become a part of the Protectorate of Moravia, all public support for Russian immigrants was stopped. During the ruling period of the Protectorate of Moravia, it was impossible for a Russian immigrant to acquire Czech citizenship²⁵.

4.2.4. Anti-assimilation Consciousness of Russian Immigration

During the period of the multinational Republic of Czechoslovakia (1918-1938) the Republic granted rights to ethnic groups that lived in the country. The territorially concentrated lingual, national and religious groups had the right, also, to education in their native language²⁶.

As stated before, the Czech government eventually made possible for Russian immigrants to obtain the Czech citizenship. There were only 2 options for Russians: to accept the Czech citizenship and be assimilated or to remain a foreigner without rights.

However, for most Russian immigrants the heritage of their culture and language was very important and they feared assimilation. The fear of assimilation and the impossibility to remain in Czechoslovakia as a national minority led to the departure of many Russians.

5. Conclusions

In this paper I have analyzed the First Wave of Russian immigrants in Czechoslovakia to verify the factors contributing to the success or failure of heritage language schools of immigrants. The following can be concluded:

1. For schools of immigrants to succeed, not only the support of the mother country and the motivation of the immigrants themselves are important, but also, the

support derived from the situation of the host country. This includes immigration policy of the host country, its economic situation and its bilateral relations with the mother country of the immigrants.

2. The success and then failure of the educational system of Russian immigrants in Czechoslovakia was strongly influenced by the Czechoslovakian economical and political situation which caused drastic changes to its Immigration Policy for accepting and supporting Russian immigrants.
3. The Russian immigrants in Czechoslovakia never got status of national minority, were never integrated into the Czechoslovakian society and eventually lost their right to receive education in their mother language.

At the historical point of this analysis, for immigrants not to have status of national minority was normal. However, in the present society, which since the 1970s recognizes rights to almost all kind of minorities, little has been done to change the situation of immigrants. In the current era of globalization, the most important part of immigration policies should be to seriously consider the right of immigrant minorities to their heritage language education.

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- 9 Земгор, Земско-городской комитет. *Zemstvo* was a Russian rural self-governing system established by the Rural Administration Reform of 1864. Zemstvo was in charge of the creation of primary schools and hospitals in rural areas. In 1915 Zemstvo was combined with the Urban Council and became Zemgor to participate in the World War I. From 1921 Zemgor became an organization to support the Russian emigration and played an important role in the formation of schools.
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