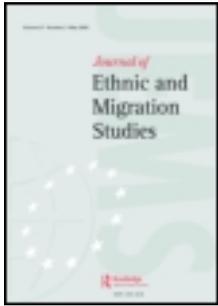


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Exchanging Knowledge, Enhancing Capacities, Developing Mechanisms: IOM's Role in the Implementation of the EU–Russia Readmission Agreement

Oleg Korneev

Research on European Union (EU)–Russia cooperation in migration issues often neglects important actors involved in these seemingly bilateral arrangements. This paper questions the role that the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) has been playing in the EU–Russia cooperation in migration management. The analysis is situated in the theoretical framework describing international organisations (IOs) as bureaucracies and within the discussions about international migration governance and migration management. The paper describes the context of the EU–Russia migration management cooperation and identifies the major activities of IOM in Russia. Treating IOs as bureaucracies that pursue their own interests, the paper argues that, far from being a mere implementing body, IOM is an actor that, to a significant extent, has shaped the outcome of EU–Russia migration dialogue. At the same time, it is the context of this bilateral cooperation that has allowed IOM to strengthen its position vis-à-vis both Russia and the EU and to be successful in the competition with other IOs.

Keywords: Migration Policy; Readmission; IOM; European Union; Russian Federation

Introduction

Most of the existing studies on European Union (EU)–Russia cooperation in the field of migration are focusing on the EU and the Russian Federation as unitary institutions observed from the outside by neglecting internal complexities and the various forces that underlie the policy choices of these two political systems and the context in which their cooperation is forged. However, both the EU and Russia are complex objects in themselves, each comprising a web of stakeholders

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with multiple policy agendas. For instance, while the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) formally negotiates international agreements, it is the Russian Federal Migration Service (FMS) that has the *de facto* mandate to define the content of migration-related deals. This situation sometimes provokes open tensions between the two governmental bodies, since their visions of EU–Russia migration cooperation are not always identical (Interview with Russian FMS staff, 28 October 2010). The same, diverging agendas of various EU institutions and member states, holds true for the EU. Moreover, the EU and Russia are interacting in a field full of other important actors, such as various international organisations (IOs).¹ In fact, the results of bilateral cooperation between the EU and the Russian Federation are typically shaped by formal and informal arrangements established under the influence of IOs and various other organisational forces outside the EU system and the Russian state administration. The ‘Agreement between the European Community and the Russian Federation on Readmission’ (EU 2006) provides a good case for the study of such arrangements, since the International Organisation for Migration (IOM)—a global leader in the so-called ‘migration management’—is significantly involved in its implementation.

This paper, as anthropologists would put it, has been ‘guided by the field’. In other words, it has been driven more by empirical insights than by pure theoretical interest. Based on fieldwork conducted in Brussels, Moscow and Central Asia, it scrutinises IOM’s involvement in the EU–Russia cooperation on migration management. The main questions addressed in this paper relate to the role of a formal ‘major implementing partner’ that the EU has assigned to IOM and to the actual ‘behaviour’ of IOM on the ground. Following more general theoretical reflections concerning the bureaucratic nature of IOs, the paper argues that far from being a mere implementing body, IOM seems to be an actor that, to a significant extent, has shaped the outcome of EU–Russia migration dialogue, while it is the context of this bilateral cooperation that has allowed IOM to strengthen its position *vis-à-vis* both Russia and the EU and to be successful in the competition with other IOs.

The paper is divided into three parts. The first part introduces theoretical reflections on international migration governance, international migration management and on IOs as bureaucracies. The particular viewpoint to perceive IOs as competing bureaucracies is then discussed in the case of IOM. The second part looks at IOM’s activities under the projects financed by the EU in Russia, focusing on the EU–Russia readmission agreement. The third part discusses the complex relationship between EU institutions, Russian authorities and IOM and the multiple roles played by IOM in this setting.

1. Migration Management: IOs as Competing Bureaucracies

Several detailed ethnographic accounts of IOM’s origins, its organisational evolution and operative actions help to understand its specific place in the governance and management of migration (Ashutosh and Mountz 2011; Geiger 2010; Georgi 2010;

Schatral 2011). IOM is an intergovernmental organisation outside of the United Nations (UN) system. It was created after the Second World War and tasked with a very precise mission: to help states resettle forced migrants produced by the war. Even though the IOM's mandate has been gradually broadened, it basically defines IOM as a service provider for its member states aiming to regulate migrations to and from their territories; the original mandate does not include the goal of migrants' protection (IOM 1991). Unlike specialised UN agencies (International Labour Organisation [ILO], United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the UN refugee agency United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees [UNHCR], etc.) that base their legitimacy on the UN's all-inclusive membership and global role, IOM—as a product of much more tailored intergovernmental cooperation—constructs its legitimacy using the discourse on the growing need for migration management around the world and claiming that its actions benefit all—countries of origin, countries of destination and migrants themselves.² It is in this context that the empirical question about the scope of IOM's involvement in the EU–Russia cooperation on migration management might be translated into a theoretical question concerning the actual agency that an IO such as IOM might have.

A considerable share of the publications on IOs treats them as products and appendixes of states, as structures of rules, norms and procedures through which states act in international arena (Krasner 1983). Michael Barnett and Martha Finnemore (2004), on the contrary, argue that state-centric functional explanations limit our understanding both of the nature and of the actions of IOs. They show that IOs actually possess agency and can act in a self-interested, emancipated and meaningful way. Both authors reject the notion that IOs simply do what states want them to do, by providing empirical examples (of, e.g., the International Monetary Fund and the UNHCR) demonstrating that IOs are able to develop own ideas and pursue own agendas. They argue that IOs often behave in ways that are unanticipated by the states creating them and that are not formally sanctioned by their members. IOs tend to experience 'mission creep' and struggle to expand their often narrowly defined mandates. Barnett and Finnemore (2004) further explain that it is because of their own authority that IOs as bureaucracies possess autonomy and the ability to change the world around them, for example, due to policy transfer. Eventually, IOs through their rules create new organisations, form new interests for themselves, states and other organisations, create new 'global' and 'common' tasks and disseminate new policy models or 'scripts'.

Following Barnett and Finnemore (2004), this paper argues that IOs are not simply bureaucracies—they are competing bureaucracies. The natural strive for competition is something that is generally attributed to economic actors, namely enterprises. It is interesting to see that IOs as well show economic behaviour. This paper proceeds from the assumption that IOs compete to be identified as the best suitable providers of solutions to various international challenges. Moreover, seen from a constructivist perspective, IOs also creatively contribute to construct 'reality', often 'creating' problems to be solved—they manage to bring other actors' attention to these issues or

problems that in the perspective of a particular IO demand (more) intervention; some IOs then directly picture themselves as mostly suitable problem solvers. IOs are competing with each other (sometimes also with state actors) for mandates and, subsequently, resources; they tend to employ methods that are typical for private companies, such as marketing, co-optation of other actors and even unfair competition.

The ability of IOs to stimulate policy transfer is at the core of international migration governance; governance in this area is in part based on the plethora of existing IOs directly or indirectly involved in migration management and in arrangements that are being held among them and between them and states. There is, of course, a difference between international migration governance and migration management. The former denotes a complex structure of interrelations between various IOs that try to govern migration globally—mostly together with the governments of destination and transit countries—and thus implies a significant degree of politics involved. The latter refers to more concrete projects aimed at regulating migration in specific contexts and is based on the economic nature of relationships between the states that want migration processes to be managed and IOs acting on their behalf and providing relevant, mostly operative services. It has recently been shown with substantial empirical evidence that many IOs involved in migration management provide a technocratic-, neutral-, apolitical- and expertise-based way to achieve and implement agreements that are politically sensitive (Geiger and Pécoud 2010). Geiger and Pécoud (2010, 3) therefore argue that international migration management, though it is contributing to migration governance, mostly serves as an empty but functional concept—as ‘a convenient umbrella under which very different activities can be regrouped and given an apparent coherence... [it functions in] facilitating cooperation between actors who would otherwise have little in common’.

Some other scholars have been sceptical as to whether international migration governance exists emphasising that, first, there is no such thing as an international migration regime, and, second, that even though there are international migration norms and rules, there is no real ‘international migration architecture’ (Aleinikoff 2007). Kathleen Newland (2005, 4) argues that ‘it is difficult to see what would compel states to create a supranational authority to actually govern migration in the foreseeable future’ and suggests that international migration governance would require at least ‘acknowledging that different states have different goals, compromising where possible, and building first on recognized common objectives’ (Newland 2005, 17).

Nevertheless, some scholars already talk about a nascent global migration governance that is ‘based on a range of different formal and informal institutions, operating at different levels of governance’ (Betts 2008, 6). Quite in the same vein, other researchers picture ‘a multitude of international norms and cooperation arrangements ... proliferated over recent years’ that eventually form ‘multilayered migration governance’ (Kunz, Lavenex, and Panizzon 2011, 3). In their view, within this particular kind of multilayered migration governance, those who ‘govern’ are

very often IOs that have sufficient expertise and means to suggest or even to impose international standards (Kunz, Lavenex, and Panizzon 2011).

At the same time, since the field of migration politics is not regulated by any overarching structure and states remain those who formally govern migration, 'international' norms and standards vary depending on those IO that introduce them to governments. The crucial importance of IOs is particularly obvious in the framework of Regional Consultative Processes, such as the Budapest Process that gave birth to the International Centre for Migration Policy Development (ICMPD), yet another 'migration IO'. It is thus this specific feature of international migration governance that allows talking about a high degree of competition between IOs involved in migration management.

One of the best examples of such competition is the field of labour migration. On the one hand, this is almost a sacred domain of the ILO. On the other hand, since ILO, even though being a specialised UN agency with a clear mandate for regulating labour migration, has the normative basis but does not have the means to impose some important standards (Newland 2005), some other IOs with sufficient resources and back-up from major international donors have been trying to interfere in this field. This is, in particular, the case of IOM that, unlike ILO, does not have a mandate covering the issues relating to labour migration. Nevertheless, IOM has been trying to expand its mission in such a way as to claim expertise and legitimacy needed to deal with labour migration issues in various regions of the world. Many examples come from the African continent (Betts 2011), whereas the post-Soviet space seems to be a sort of a 'virgin land' where IOM has been recently struggling to ensure its monopoly for providing advice and capacity-building on labour migration policy (Interview with ILO Central Asia staff, 15 April 2011).

Labour migration is not the only field to which IOM has been trying to expand its limited mandate. IOM has made similar moves in the field of border management competing with the UNDP that usually claims to have expertise and legitimacy in this domain referring to its formally defined international mandate (UNDP Kazakhstan staff, 20 April 2011). This drive of IOM to assert its monopoly and 'seek profit' in Central Asia (Korneev 2013) and some other countries of the former USSR has been repeatedly emphasised by various IOs that form part of the (evolving) architecture of international migration governance.³

Indeed, if one thinks about IOs in terms of enterprises trying to maximise their profit and looking for new financial sources by adopting the strategy of diversification, then IOM is a good example of such a successful enterprise. This trend has become especially obvious since the 2000s, when migration was 'all but invisible on the global policy agenda' (Newland 2005, 1). This was of course conditioned by the resources at hand. In the course of the 2000s, using its image of 'the most prominent IO working on international migration' (Betts 2008, 9), IOM has managed to become an implementing partner in projects carried out in sending and transit countries in Africa, Asia and Eastern Europe (Betts 2011; De Danieli 2011; Geiger 2010).

2. IOM's Involvement in EU–Russia Cooperation on Migration Management

EU documents present irregular migration, cross-border organised crime and other 'associated' activities as security concerns emanating from states in the closer and wider European Neighbourhood (Walters 2010).⁴ These security concerns were clearly reflected in the EU–Russia 'Road Map on the Common Space of Freedom, Security and Justice' adopted in 2005 (European Commission 2005). Undoubtedly, the most visible result of cooperation guided by this Road Map was the conclusion of the two EU–Russia agreements concerning visa facilitation and readmission, which entered into force on 1 June 2007.

According to the bilateral Readmission Agreement, Russia and the EU member states are obliged to readmit their nationals who are staying irregularly in the territory of the other party, as well as those third-country nationals who transited through their territory. A special clause of the Agreement provided Russia with a three-year transitory period, when the country had to readmit only its own nationals as well as the citizens of those countries with whom Russia itself had already concluded readmission agreements. It was decided that during this transitory period Russia would take measures to secure its territory from migrants planning to use it for transit to the EU as well as prepare for readmission of irregular migrants from the EU. This should have included the creation of centres for readmitted migrants, improving and strengthening border infrastructure, implementation protocols with EU member states and readmission agreements with countries on the perimeter of Russia (Interview with the Russian Permanent Representation to the EU, 4 May 2007; Korneev 2012). The EU wanted to ensure necessary changes in legislation and infrastructure relating to readmission procedures as well as in the practices of relevant Russian governmental bodies (Interview European External Action Service [EEAS], 15 February 2011). In other words, there was a need for both technical assistance and substantial policy learning and transfer through specific projects implemented in daily cooperation with the major Russian counterpart—the FMS.

It is here that IOM comes into picture: in 2007, the European Commission launched a special programme 'Assistance to the Government of the Russian Federation in Establishing a Legal and Administrative Framework for the Development and Implementation of Readmission Agreements (2006/120-282)' for the period from February 2007 to February 2009 (European Commission 2007). It was funded through Programme for Financial and Technical Assistance to Third Countries in the Area of Migration and Asylum (AENEAS) and implemented by IOM. While it is the General Directorates in Brussels that officially formulate project guidelines and take decisions on relevant tenders, it is often the EU delegation in the target country that makes an informal suggestion of candidates. In this case, IOM was identified by the Delegation of the European Commission to Russia as the ideal candidate for the role of major implementing partner and intermediary between EU and Russian authorities (Interview, European Commission Delegation to Russia, 16 March 2011).

This decision seems quite natural due to the experience that IOM has in dealing with issues linked to readmission, deportation as well as so-called 'transfer' and 'voluntary return' (Newland 2005). Moreover, by that time IOM had already had a long history of cooperation with the EU (Betts 2011; Geiger 2010; Potaux 2011) mostly defined by its role in the implementation of various EU programmes. Being an organisation substantially depending on external funding, IOM has always been actively searching for EU-financed projects. Moreover, in the absence of suitable projects launched by the EU, IOM itself has initiated some of them (in the case of IOM's project of the Albanian migration strategy, see Geiger 2010).

In fact, IOM drafted the above-mentioned programme of the European Commission targeting Russia already in 2005—a year before the signature of the EU–Russia readmission agreement—after a series of consultations with the European Commission delegation to Moscow and with the governments of several EU member states. IOM specifically asked for financial support from Germany and Finland, two countries that are often financing migration-related projects in Eastern Europe, because some 70% of readmission applications received by the Russian FMS from the EU come from Germany, while Finland has particular preoccupations about its border with Russia (Interview with IOM staff, 24 February 2011).

At the same time, IOM was positively evaluated as a trustworthy service provider. Some of the Commission staff members have characterised IOM as 'the most convenient partner' (Interview EEAS, 15 February 2011). They explained that in contrast to the UN agencies that, once having obtained the desired funding, tend to be relatively non-transparent and too independent in their activities, IOM is an organisation that strictly follows the lines defined in the projects, IOM is always ready to adapt to the changing needs of the EU and manages to establish stable relationships with governmental structures in the countries that fall under the scope of its action (Interview Operations Section, EU Delegation to Russia, Moscow, 26 April 2010).

This practical justification has become even more important when the FMS literally welcomed IOM involvement in the EU–Russia cooperation. This was partly due to the cooperation that had been previously established between IOM and the FMS. Not being a member of IOM, Russia (observer state since 1992) is not entitled to any direct financial assistance from IOM. However, some of the IOM's projects that involved external financial resources and were considered useful by the FMS subsequently manage to receive Russian institutional support and have been successfully implemented on the Russian territory. This was, for example, the case of the various projects against human trafficking (Schatral 2011).

Consequently, the FMS has cooperated with IOM in implementing a major EU-funded programme aimed at rendering practical and technical assistance and serving as a platform for knowledge exchange between the EU and Russia in the field of migrants' readmission and return. This programme was the first in a series of projects relating to the EU–Russia readmission agreement that were all financed by the EU and aimed at developing 'technical cooperation on migration management and capacity-building'. The overall programme budget was about 1.8 billion Euros.

Approximately 20% of this amount was granted by the German Government (115,000 euro) and the Finnish Government (234,473 euro) to finance particular activities. Germany focused on bilateral cooperation with Russia and on technical visits for Russian officials that would reveal mechanisms for smooth readmission. Finland had a different focus—mostly related to border management and to research on migration processes (Interview with IOM staff, 24 February 2011). These significant contributions from EU member states show that the EU is not the only actor that relies on international intermediaries in its cooperation with Russia and that individual member states stay involved and on their own fund IOM directly.

One of the major—and obviously most challenging—tasks for IOM in this context lies in balancing the interests of all parties involved. So far, IOM—a successful fundraiser—has been managing this task relatively well, as was emphasised by both EU and Russian authorities (Stock 2010). IOM provided assistance with drafting of the Federal Law on Amending the ‘Federal Law on the Legal Status of Foreign Citizens’ and the ‘Federal Law on the Procedure of Exit from and Entry into the Russian Federation’ (IOM 2009a). With the help of IOM, FMS officials were acquainted with existing practices and standards concerning the accommodation and reception of third-country nationals with an irregular legal status who are transferred to Russia under a readmission procedure and have to be further returned to their country of origin. During study-tours to the Netherlands, Germany and Austria, Russian officials were acquainted with these countries’ experiences in readmission. Russian officials were encouraged and ‘trying to take the best from the EU and to bring it to Russia’ (IOM staff, 24 February 2011).

IOM emphasised that the implementation of the programme brought to the forefront the issue of harmonisation of different forms of forced return, including readmission, administrative expulsion, deportation and the establishment and promotion of alternative forms of return, that is, voluntary return (IOM 2009b). With Finnish funding, IOM financed a small research project on irregular migrants coming from or through Russia to the EU. This money also went into writing and publishing of a two-volume manual on readmission and an interactive training module for Russian migration officials (Interview with IOM staff, 24 February 2011). EU financial assistance was used by IOM for upgrading temporary centres for irregular migrants.

By 2009, several centres for ‘temporary accommodation of immigrants’ in the European part of Russia were newly created—one in Pskov and several others in the regions of Rostov, Moscow, Krasnodar and Perm (FMS 2011a). In May 2009, the Pskov centre was transformed in a centre ‘for persons awaiting readmission’ (FMS 2011b). In November 2009, the same happened to the centres in Rostov and Moscow region (Kommersant 2009). IOM provided expert support and financial means for the development of the Pskov Readmission Centre as well as in the ‘refurbishment’ of the Migrant Accommodation Centre in Rostov. Apart from that, IOM also developed its vision of the centres’ functioning principles and rules of detention (Interview with IOM staff, 24 February 2011). Eventually, IOM (2009a) has declared that the Centre in Pskov

'has been equipped in accordance with international human rights standards, the fact of which was confirmed by an expert EU delegation who visited the Centre in 2007 within the framework of the joint IOM-FMS programme'.

IOM has also been active in fostering the ongoing dialogue that the Russian government has with EU and third countries on issues of return and readmission (Egorova 2010). This involvement was mostly a reaction to a misunderstanding on the part of some EU member states that emerged during the implementation of the readmission agreement. This was provoked, for instance, by Russia's refusal to readmit automatically everyone who spoke Russian which was interpreted by some EU member states as a non-cooperative gesture (Arestova 2010). Misunderstanding technical questions may easily jeopardise the implementation of the agreement. IOM representatives have emphasised that cooperation has not always been easy, even though the FMS is trying to do its best in order to properly implement the agreement (Interview with IOM staff, 24 February 2011). Therefore, IOM has been particularly persistent in its efforts aimed at improving the algorithm of readmission procedure implementation, starting from the point of a readmission application submission. Due to the assistance of IOM, direct technical-level contacts have been established between migration officers from EU member states and the FMS.

Evaluating the implementation of the readmission agreement over the three transitory years, both Russian and EU officials have underlined the fact that only a very limited number of Russian citizens were actually readmitted (Stock 2010). Russia started implementing the agreement in October 2007. By July 2008, the EU had determined only about 100 cases eligible for readmission (Lahti 2008). In the months that followed a steady increase was observed, by February 2009 Russian FMS had received already 1500 requests for readmission from EU member states. So far, Russia—since October 2007—has received 4715 requests from a total of 20 EU member states; more than 3500 requests have been examined and out of them 2214 have been accepted eligible for readmission procedure. By November 2010, 793 persons have been readmitted (Arestova 2010), including some looked for by the police and even some related to terrorist activity; cases of false documents have been discovered as well (Yakovlev 2009).

Finally, IOM provided assistance in the strengthening of dialogue and regional cooperation on readmission, namely through the organisation of 'Regional Technical Consultations' for officials from countries of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) (IOM 2009a). This was of particular importance for Russian authorities in dealing with the EU conditions on the dialogue on a visa-free regime. The EU here explicitly demanded progress from Russia in efficiently implementing the readmission agreement (Interview, Consular Department, Russian MFA, 28 October 2010). Russian officials recognised the fact that they need 'to use the potential of international organisations' in order to push forward Russian interests in negotiating with countries of origin and transit, especially those in the CIS region, and IOM in the context was mentioned as one of the most important IOs (Yakovlev 2009).

The overall positive assessment of the first EU project coupled with the identification of weak points in infrastructure and law enforcement practices

suggested that there was a need for a follow-up that would guarantee smoother implementation of the readmission agreement (Interview with the Political Section, EU Delegation to Russia, 16 March 2011). This resulted in two new projects entitled 'Development of Administrative Mechanisms in Support of Readmission of Migrants in the Russian Federation' (September 2009–March 2011, EU funding: 480,000 euro) and 'Enhancement of Management of the Russian Federation Border Checkpoints' (September 2009–March 2011, EU funding: 600,000 euro). While the first project (2007–2009) had a broader aim of developing readmission capacities in the context of the three-year transitory period, the new, second readmission-related project (September 2009–March 2011) aimed at a further enhancement of administrative, legal and practical readmission mechanisms. It also focused on the development of procedures related to readmission, accommodation and the further transfer of third-country nationals and stateless persons, including procedures and trainings for officials on very concrete issues (Interview with IOM staff, 14 March 2011).

Within this second phase of 'capacity-building' some of the major developments happened at the institutional level. IOM has managed to introduce an optimised institutional structure for the FMS; there have been transformations of several departments, and functions have been transferred from one to another so that their interactions would become more logical (Interview with IOM Russia, 14 March 2011). First, a special readmission department was created within the FMS. This was deemed necessary for the initial stage of the implementation of the readmission agreement. Later, the functions (and staff) of this department were transferred to the citizenship department. For IOM, such a move made perfect sense since it is the citizenship department that deals with the issues of citizenship identification and this procedure is of crucial importance for readmission. At the same time, some of the relevant competences were also left with the department of immigration control that is supposed to be active in cases involving third-country nationals. The final conference of this project took place on 27 April 2011 and gathered officials from the EU, its member states, Russia and CIS countries, as well as representatives of IOs. Access for researchers and a wider public audience was however restricted, with the exception of some accredited journalists (Interview with IOM Russia, 25 April 2011).

The mentioned third project on the readmission agreement and its implementation (September 2009–March 2011) was designed in a different way. It was to follow the lines of the regionalisation strategy prioritised by the EU for its Eastern European Neighbourhood. The reasons for this change are twofold. First, the EU was eager to foster intra-regional cooperation between Russia, Ukraine and Moldova since 'migration challenges' clearly have a regional character. This view is backed by IOM research and public relations brochures (IOM 2008a, 2008b). Second, while willing to continue the use of IOM in improving Russia's migration management, the EU faced a technical problem. Due to the Russia's refusal to cooperate in the framework of the EU-designed national indicative programme, there was no adequate financial framework that would allow a continuous implementation of a new follow-up programme on a bilateral basis (Interview with the Political Section, EU

Delegation to Russia, Moscow, 16 March 2011). The solution was found through a regional multi-partner instead of bilateral project called 'Support to the Implementation of the EC Readmission Agreements with the Republic of Moldova, the Russian Federation and Ukraine: Facilitation of Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration' (SIREADA; initial duration 1 March 2011–28 February 2013; financed by the EU and co-financed by the Austrian Ministry of Interior). This move was quite logical since, just like in the case of Russia, all EU projects relating to readmission in Moldova and Ukraine were implemented by IOM.⁵

3. The Multiple Roles of IOM in the Context of EU–Russia Relations

In the framework of EU–Russia bilateral cooperation on migration management, IOM is officially called an 'implementing partner' of the European Commission. This gives the idea that it's the Commission who is defining policies and policy frames and who is providing financial allocations for implementation. In this article, it is however suggested that IOM, as well as any other IO, has an own agenda. The question is to what extent IOM has been instrumentalised by the EU, whether IOM has stayed within the role bestowed on it by the EU or whether it has used its position of intermediary for its own purposes.

One would expect an IO, especially one such as IOM that is almost completely dependent on the financial resources provided by the donors of the projects, to act in line with EU expectations and thus be a passive channel of EU influence in Russia. Nevertheless, there are indications that IOM has repeatedly stepped out of this role. This confirms the argument pushed forward by Martin Geiger, Antoine Pécoud and Fabian Georgi (Geiger and Pécoud 2010; Georgi 2010) that IOM changes and extends its mission depending on circumstances with the eventual aim to exercise all-encompassing activities that would keep its monopoly in the sphere of international migration management. Contrary to the example of IOM engagement in migration management on the African continent (Betts 2011; Potaux 2011), the case of Russia demonstrates that IOM's active involvement was only possible because the authorities of the 'implementing country' (here Russia) themselves had a strong interest in such a scheme. In doing the job 'conforming to international standards', IOM has engaged in deals with the Russian FMS to guarantee its own survival and favourable working conditions in the country. In fact, IOM has never been critical of the Russian government or Russian policies, even though Russia is not an IOM member state.

A telling example of this IOM double diplomacy is the very first project funded by the EU with the purpose of a better implementation of the readmission agreement. When the agreement was signed and the European Commission issued a call for project proposals, IOM—before officially submitting the project—consulted the Russian FMS and first secured its support for the project design (Interview with IOM staff, 24 February 2011). Having in this way ensured the trust of Russian authorities, IOM subsequently managed to create a monopoly for operational cooperation with high- and middle-ranking officials of relevant Russian governmental bodies. IOM thus

became an indispensable ‘translator’ and trustworthy intermediary between Russian authorities and the European Commission (Callon 1986).

The recent history of IOs in Russia shows that not all of them, including some of the UN agencies, have managed to sustain good working relations with Russian authorities. The Russian government, for example, asked UNDP to shut down its Moscow office (Interview with UNDP Kazakhstan staff, 20 April 2011). Being a very adaptive structure, IOM has managed to keep good relations with Russian authorities. This has been possible due to the way IOM views and presents things to the Russian government: the organisation has never talked about imposing or even recommending any of the international standards as opposed to other options (Interview with IOM Central Asia, 19 April 2011). Instead, the IOM discourse has always been framed in politically neutral terms of ‘informing the Russian side about the range of possible solutions’ (Interview with IOM staff, 14 March 2011).

EU–Russia migration management cooperation has been characterised by IOM representatives as ‘a very sensitive sphere’ (Interview with IOM staff, 24 February 2011). It is indeed so for a number of reasons: an absolute and relative increase of migrants, a growth of xenophobic tendencies and the importance given to migration issues in Russia’s bilateral relations with its neighbours, including countries of origin and transit in the CIS regions and EU member states. In this volatile context, IOM, since it is interested in protecting its own strategic interests in Russia, is trying to avoid activities that might provoke Russian discontent. Hence, IOM does not work on migrant rights’ advocacy, the protection and support of asylum seekers and refugees in Russia and any broader human rights-oriented activities.

Both the EU and Russia have attributed to IOM high strategic importance. For the EU, it is best described as ‘they do the dirty job’ by introducing in Russia some of the measures for which both the EU and its member states have already been criticised. Thus, some observers voice concern that newly established centres for migrants awaiting readmission in Russia replicate the worst practices of similar facilities with inhumane conditions on EU territory (Pro-migrant NGO Moscow, 30 September 2011). The freedom of people that get into such centres is limited to the extent that migrants become *de facto* imprisoned; despite the fact that they are not criminals and that their offence—if there is any at all—is of an administrative nature (Valluy 2005).

IOM has managed relatively well to deal with criticism. For instance, quite an intriguing note is included in the Human Rights Watch (HRW 2005) report on migrants in Ukraine. It says that this report ‘was amended in January 2007 to correct errors. The original version of the report incorrectly characterized the role of the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) in Ukraine. The section on IOM has been removed’. This strange statement sheds light on the powerful position of IOM in the field and on the relationship that IOM has with the outside world and on other organisations. Even an influential non-governmental human rights organisation as HRW has had to withdraw some conceivably not very pleasant evaluation given to IOM actions in Eastern Europe—a region of particular importance for the EU. The mediation of IOM claiming that all the changes in Russian migration law and practice

correspond to international standards gives the EU protection at least against some of the direct accusations by multiple NGOs and human rights activists. The same works for the Russian authorities trying to legitimise some policy changes internally by making reference to international experience introduced to the country by IOM.

IOM is also used by the EU as an IO that helps in securitising migration ‘in a civilized way’ (Interview with Catherine de Wenden, 6 May 2011) and, by doing this, helps in legitimising the securitisation of migration in the EU’s countries and regions of interest. At the same time, IOM guarantees a minimal degree of ‘democracy’ that is needed to present EU projects to the public and, more broadly, to the international community. Contrary to its narrowly defined mandate focusing on the assistance to the participating states in their migration management efforts, IOM in fact has managed to create for itself to some extent the image of an IO that is representing and ‘protecting’ migrants’ interests. This view is promoted in mostly all publication materials and other audio-visual products created and distributed by IOM offices.

Nevertheless, to say that IOM is a mere implementing tool in hands of EU officials would be an exaggeration. And it is the very nature of EU–Russia relationships that strengthens the position of IOM. Exchanging knowledge, enhancing capacities and developing mechanisms necessary for an efficient migration management, IOM has attempted to ‘speak in the name of the others’ (Callon 1986, 209)—for the EU, for the Russian migration authorities, for migrants and even for some IOs provoking serious tensions with the latter. At the same time, giving IOM the right to speak in their name is, for the EU and for the Russian authorities, a necessary price to pay for the legitimacy that IOM has provided to their actions. IOM provides legitimisation for Russian migration policy since multiple references to international experience play an important role in the construction of new Russian migration policies—in particular in their advanced securitisation. The same concerns the EU: IOM helps in (re-)legitimising many of the EU actions that are critiqued by NGOs and scholars.

Moreover, Hernandez i Sagrera and Korneev (2012) argue that in its cooperation on migration management with the Eastern European countries the EU does not necessarily always use the strategy of ‘Europeanisation’. Implementing EU projects in Russia, IOM has been importing to the country not only European but also international norms and own ‘best practices’ (some of them coined in other corners of the world). In the way of chain reaction, persuaded that the same ‘best practice’ can be applied everywhere, IOM has eventually started using the same methods in other countries of a wider area symbolically labelled as the EU’s ‘great neighbourhood’. This confirms the ideas put forward by Alexander Betts (2011) arguing that the EU has exerted trans-regional authority by developing a regional capacity through IOM. In the case of Russia, this has enabled the EU to use different mechanisms of influence—and not only conditionality—to shape Russian policy in a suitable way. Considering that Russia is less susceptible to conditionality than, for example, the European Neighbourhood Policy countries, the use of other mechanisms—namely

the intermediary of other international structures—has become particularly important for the EU.

Conclusion

The article has analysed IOM activities in the framework of the EU–Russia bilateral cooperation on readmission. It has highlighted the complex relationship developed between EU institutions, Russian authorities and IOM. The EU in the last years has started to shape Russian immigration policy, making it more control-oriented and thus pushing the burden of migration management onto its biggest Eastern neighbour. The desired outcome was impossible to imagine without at least a limited policy transfer. The political sensitivity of migration issues and the generally complicated character of EU–Russia relations, have made IOM an easier interlocutor for Russian authorities in terms of ‘learning’ since in their eyes this organisation represents an international expert, working on narrowly definable issues and not problematising any other issues. IOM is not directly seen as a political machinery and intermediary of the EU. Since the EU–Russia cooperation on migration management is an example of functional cooperation, IOM might be regarded as a major agent of socialisation that is providing channels and instruments for cooperation. The IOM’s mediation has proved to be beneficial for both sides, because it has allowed Russian migration officials to avoid the discussion of certain sensitive issues directly with the EU officials and thus has kept partners less frustrated with each other.

In the current circumstances when international migration governance is only taking shape, IOs such as IOM have a chance to secure the key position simply because they constantly recreate demand for their specialised services. Major international actors and dominant states, such as the EU and Russia, find themselves in need of recognised, reliable and strong—both resource-wise and symbolic-wise—international partners to implement their migration policies. IOM, exemplifying an international enterprise-minded bureaucracy at its best, perfectly suits such needs. In the context of the EU–Russia cooperation, IOM has managed to sit on two chairs. While being a channel for the EU interests on the Russian territory, IOM has been playing a double game by responding to both direct and more subtle expectations of the Russian authorities as well and, thus, has secured itself a special ‘independent’ status in this complex power arrangement.

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Notes

- [1] In this article, the term 'IOs' is used in its narrow sense and refers only to intergovernmental organisations (IGOs) such UN agencies (e.g. UNCHR) or IGOs outside the UN system (e.g., IOM).
- [2] IOM official website, <http://www.iom.int/jahia/jsp/index.jsp>.
- [3] Interviews with the representatives of ILO, UNDP, United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) and International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies in Almaty, Astana and Bishkek. March–April 2011.
- [4] The interesting fact is that many of these EU documents are based on knowledge produced by ICMPD, IOM and other IOs (Geiger 2011); on the production of knowledge for migration policy-making, see Boswell (2009).
- [5] See the websites of IOM in Moldova and Ukraine: <http://www.iom.md/> and <http://iom.org.ua/en/>.

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