A Reflection on Lidia Grafova’s Lecture - “Migration and Human Rights in the Russian Federation”

It was a unique opportunity to attend the talk on September 27th given by Lidia Grafova as part of the REEEC Distinguished Speaker Series. Ms. Grafova is a longtime journalist and Chair of the Forum of Migration Organizations who is dedicated to helping migrants in Russia. She is actively involved in working to secure equality and basic human rights for the many migrants who are currently suffering.

Her discussion focused on the issue of Russian migration to Russia following the collapse of the USSR, and the human rights abuses that have resulted. A large number of Russians have had an extremely difficult time securing citizenship and have been denied important rights. According to Ms. Grafova, it can take anywhere from eight to ten years for some migrants to get citizenship! She discussed issues of corruption and unjust governmental policies that continue to hinder the smooth integration of ethnic Russians into the country. Additionally, non-ethnic Russians have had a particularly difficult time with the citizenship process due to some officials who possess prejudices. This has led to some minorities turning to payments and bribes to get citizenship. They know how remote their chances are of getting it through legal means. Furthermore, she stressed that the Russian government has refused to actively assist migrants and provide them with the means to successfully integrate into the country. What makes the situation worse is that the government has taken a negative stance regarding the NGOs which have emerged to aid migrants. She discussed that NGOs who obtain funds from abroad must register as “agents of a foreign power.” I found this fact to be unbelievable.

Despite the obvious unhappiness and anger Ms. Grafova feels toward her country’s treatment of migrants, she stressed her love for Russia. I found it especially interesting when she commented that through her work, she is “defending Russia.” Ms. Grafova’s discussion demonstrates that the impact of the collapse of the USSR can be seen in Russia today, and that the country still faces difficulties from this major event, even after two decades. Her talk not only exposes major flaws in the Russian government’s migration policy, but it shows that governmental policies are actually hurting Russia. As Ms. Grafova mentioned, Russia is dependent on migrants. Lastly, attending this talk allowed us as Americans to gain a better understanding of the human rights abuses in Russia in extensive detail. I personally left this lecture with a new understanding of the complexities and difficulties of migration in Russia. Furthermore, I know that listening to someone with a firsthand account of this important issue has given me insight, in which I could not have received elsewhere.

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