Analyses OSW

CENTRE FOR EASTERN STUDIES 4.08.2010 www.osw.waw.pl

The Russian government is betting on ‘selected’ countrymen from abroad

On 24 July, President Dmitri Medvedev signed an amendment to the law on the Russian diaspora, which illustrates a change in the government’s approach to the question of its ethnic fellows. In the face of the failure of the repatriation programme up until now, which was intended to bring Russians back to the ‘mother country’ from the CIS, the government’s new priority is to bring educated Russians into the country and involve them in modernising processes.

The new amendment, which was initiated by the government, minimally narrows the definition of affiliation to ‘countrymen abroad’. Previously, this definition had included the citizens of countries which once composed the USSR, as well as their descendants; however the new amendment excludes the descendants from this group, and somewhat increases the requirements to obtain the status of ‘countryman’.

The change in the Russian government’s approach towards cooperation with its diaspora is visible in practice. Previous repatriation programmes, which betted on a mass attraction of ‘countrymen’ to Russia, have so far failed; instead of the predicted 300,000, barely 10,000 have come to Russia. In addition, few of them wanted to settle in the regions of the Far East designated for them. As a result, the funds for this project were reduced in 2009 from 8bn to 1.8bn roubles.

Since the end of last year, a new approach by the government to its countrymen abroad has been apparent, which involves enrolling them in modernising priorities promoted by the Kremlin. The congress of the Russian diaspora in December 2009 saw the participation of President Medvedev, who expressed sorrow at the ‘brain drain’, and encouraged ethnic Russians to return, declaring that the state would assist them to do so. The next such congress is being prepared for this October, with some considerable pomp and circumstance; it will be entitled ‘Including our countrymen in modernising Russia’, and the organisers have declared that Moscow will take care to attract those countrymen who can help modernise the Russian economy. <jr>