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Konstantin D. Kotelnikov

St. Petersburg State University, St. Petersburg, Russian Federation

Number of the Russian Emigrants in Berlin of the 1920s according to German Sources

Abstract

The article analyzes in detail the issue of the number of Russian emigrants in Berlin of the 1920s. The existing data of the historiography is contradictory, incomplete, and based on imperfect sources: emigrant press and journalism, fragmentary reports of international and charitable organizations that didn't have a centralized systems of tracking refugees in Europe. The interest of emigration and the role of Germany and Berlin as a transit zone in European travels led to exaggerated estimates of the number of emigrants of the "first wave." The number of the Russians in Germany in 1923 was proclaimed around 600,000; 360,000 in Berlin. These huge estimates were transferred to historiography and still appear in the works of researchers.

This prevents a realistic assessment of the scale of the “Exodus” from Russia after 1917 and of the size of the emigrant “colonies” in Europe. The article attempts to revise the number of emigrants in Germany and especially in “Russian Berlin” of the 1920s. Having studied the materials of the emigrant press (the newspaper *Rul'*) and the Berlin archives (Geheimes Staatsarchiv Preussischer Kulturbesitz; Bundesarchiv Berlin-Lichterfelde), the author comes to a conclusion that the number of emigrants in Germany and in Berlin was significantly exaggerated by the contemporaries. However, the size of the “colony” in Berlin can be revised using estimates of the Berlin police officials involved in the supervision of foreigners. Official correspondence and public interviews of the police officers show that they never assumed that there were more than 100,000 Russians living in the German capital in 1920-24 (this highest estimate was made in March 1924). As the police was engaged in registration of foreigners, its employees were best informed on the scales of migration flow, thus, their data is most credible.

### Keywords

Historical sources, number of the Russian emigrants, Russian Berlin, Russian emigration in Germany, refugees, statistics, migration processes.

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## About the authors

Kotelnikov Konstantin Dmitrievich, St. Petersburg State University, Institute of History, department of modern and contemporary history, post-graduate student, St. Petersburg, Russian Federation, +7-904-602-51-47, kotelnikowk@mail.ru

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