# Table of Content

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Foreword</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Czech migration discourse and policy: fuelling the fire. <em>By Tomáš Jungwirth</em></td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recent Changes in Refugee-Related Policies in Hungary. <em>By Attila Juhasz and Edit Zgut</em></td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Migration climate, discourse and policies in Poland. <em>By Justyna Segeš Frelak</em></td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Migration politics in Slovakia: Balancing domestic and EU-level goals. <em>By Alena Kudzko</em></td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Foreword

With the number of migrants and refugees knocking on Europe’s doors relatively stable, there is now a sense of relief at the EU political level. In several summits held in 2016, EU leaders confirmed a shift in their focus from internal and structural to external and security dimensions of the migration challenge.

The policy shift in the EU’s strategy on migration had at least two effects: first, more common ground was established among various camps of member states that the priority needs to be focused on safeguarding the EU’s external borders and reducing the flow of irregular migrants. This development has meant that some policy ideas of the Visegrad Group (V4) - consisting of Poland, Hungary, Slovakia, and the Czech Republic - have been incorporated into the common EU approach. At the same time, the V4 countries, which led the opposition to the mandatory relocation scheme for refugees in 2015 (with Slovakia and Hungary even filing a court case against it), were put on the spot in terms of their own contributions to the common EU response, including in its internal dimension.

Two years later, there are emerging differences among the so-called V4. This publication examines the current national policy discourse and government policies on migration in those four respective countries. On the one hand, there is a more moderate Czech and Slovak duo, and on the other, a more conservative, ideologically driven Hungarian and Polish tandem.

The collection of policy briefs from each V4 country presents a snapshot of the national debates on migration amidst growing populism, a common feature not only in the region but also more broadly across Europe. Each policy brief also analyses how individual governments are managing their own asylum policies as well as how they are positioning themselves in the current discussions regarding reforms of the Common European Asylum System.

The diverging policies in the region have implications on the feasibility of the EU-27 in reaching a common ground on asylum policies. With the goal of facilitating agreement on common solutions in the area of migration, GLOBSEC launched a project in March 2016 that provides insights into the different positions of Central European countries. The project aims to foster understanding regarding what EU countries can agree on now, where political efforts should be expended, what is feasible to change, and which actors should be engaged with in different national contexts in terms of local debates.

For us, Central Europeans, the migration debate is not only about migrants. It’s also about our place and role in the European Union and our capacity to be part of common solutions to this long-term problem that will shape the future of Europe.

We would also like to express our gratitude to the Open Society Foundations who kindly supported the project.

Milan Nič, Head of Future of Europe Programme, GLOBSEC Policy Institute
Czech migration discourse and policy: Fuelling the fire
By Tomáš Jungwirth

Summary
Although the European refugee crisis has not had a material impact on the number of asylum requests in the Czech Republic, there are notable ramifications in its wake, particularly with the escalation of public debate. As of spring 2017, the political focus has shifted towards labor migrants who are on one hand in high demand on the Czech job market but at the same time ostracized and denounced as criminals. The Ministry of Interior has launched an initiative aimed to substantially curb migrants’ rights. This constitutes a part of the campaign for the general elections held this October, yet how high migration-related topics will rise on the public agenda ahead of the vote remains to be seen.

With the so-called EU refugee crisis gradually disappearing from media headlines, by late-2016 migration had also momentarily faded from the Czech public agenda. However, with the general election looming in October 2017, there is an effort to bring it back to the forefront. This time, as opposed to asylum-seekers, the discussion focuses on labor migrants including EU citizens. In the background of this development are nationalistic and xenophobic sentiments, fears of foreign workers dragging down wages, as well as real problems in civic coexistence. Nevertheless, just how significant the potential mobilization of migration-related topics will be prior to the election remains to be seen. The following study attempts to identify the most important developments which have taken place in the past several months, and also to provide some outlook on what to expect in the near future.

1. Public and political discourse
   a. Impressions v. facts
What the Czech Republic had witnessed in the 2015-2016 period was a migration debate on steroids. For decades, migration, asylum and integration of foreigners had been political and social non-issues. People working in the field had long found it difficult to attract media or the attention of politicians, and virtually all relevant policy was being adopted without much ado or broader public interest.

This situation changed dramatically and rapidly with the outbreak of the EU migration crisis in late-2014/early-2015, catching many stakeholders unprepared. In a matter of months, irregular migration, particularly from the Middle East and Africa, had become the number one political issue. Similar development could of course be observed among most European states, however, it appears that for the Central and Eastern Europeans it was even more of a novelty. The heatedness of the debate and the tensions which ensued reflect that.

Still, for several reasons – and unlike many European countries including Hungary – Czech Republic hasn’t in reality encountered a substantial spike in asylum claims by irregular migrants. In fact, the number of applications for international protection stood low in 2015 and even dropped further by 2016. For a while Czech Republic was an important transit country en route to Germany or Sweden but the shut-down of Hungary’s borders changed that. One could say that despite all the frenzy, the situation on the ground remains calm. In addition, as a result of the EU-Turkey agreement and the closure of the Balkan migration route, Central Europe at large has also seen the situation for Central Europe has normalize somewhat.
Migration politics and policies in Central Europe

b. Targeting migrant workers

Even though it is complicated to find hard data to support the following assumption, many signs point towards the fact that by late-2016 the migration debate in the Czech Republic began cooling down. Most of what could have been said had been said, and since no immediate crisis was taking place the public resonance of the topic was naturally decreasing.

Nevertheless, it was a safe bet to predict that many politicians would make their best effort to push migration back towards the top of the agenda in the context of the upcoming parliamentary elections this October. In fact from January 2017, the Minister of Interior and the Social Democrat’s vice-chair Milan Chovanec has begun doing just that, cynically decrying the alleged criminality conducted by migrant workers, i.e. foreigners including EU citizens in possession of a valid work and residence permits (a vast majority of the “crimes” were in fact minor offenses, mostly traffic-related). He undertook multiple demonstrative visits to regional industrial centers which employ larger numbers of foreigners (Pilsen and the Kvasiny area), and even suggested that their labor contracts be terminated as a result of them committing minor offenses, thus effectively advocating for a violation of the labor code.2

The issue has gained additional spin in the context of a heavily reported police raid in a company which had been employing Ukrainian workers in possession of Polish visas.3 This opened a Pandora’s Box of numerous issues starting from visa regimes, impacts of migration on the domestic labor market, all the way to questions of peaceful cohabitation and even identity.

c. Fragmentation of extremists

One notable characteristic of the Czech political landscape is the significant fragmentation of extremist forces. While the Muslim population and Islam as such have been politically expedient as key mobilizing topics for large parts of the society in the past years, attempts for the transformation

---

of the non-formal platform *Islám v ČR nechceme* (“We don’t want Islam in the Czech Republic”) into a relevant political force became futile. To a large extent, that is but a result of internal power squabbles among the hardline islamophobic leaders, undermining the credibility of what may have become a movement of sorts.\(^4\)

As it appears, the half-Japanese Czech populist politician Tomio Okamura who is one of the country’s leading islamophobes, will be struggling to repeat his party’s (initially called Úsvit before fragmenting while the Okamura wing established an offshoot named SPD) election result from 2013 (6.9 %) and thus secure at least some seats in the new parliament. No other openly anti-migrant, xenophobic party appears very likely to follow suit (though Petr Robejšek’s ambitions, contacts and capabilities should not be underrated\(^5\)). The other part of the story, however, is that much of the xenophobic parlance as much as policy proposals themselves was readily incorporated by mainstream political parties. Even if they do not fare particularly well in the election, the so-called “phobes” have already managed to radicalize the public and poison the discourse for years to come.

\section*{2. Key legislative and policy changes}

\textbf{a. Replacement of the pro-refugee Minister for Human Rights}

The most outspoken Czech governmental official in defense of the rights of marginalized groups including refugees and migrants in the past years had been the Minister for Human Rights, Equal opportunity and Legislation Jiří Dienstbier.\(^6\) However, in the course of a government reshuffle in November 2016, the PM had removed Dienstbier from office, citing problems with comprehensibility of his policies with the voters.\(^7\) His successor, the young social democratic politician Jan Chvojka, indicated that he won’t continue in the attitude of his predecessor, and instead will pursue a more conciliatory approach in relation to the prevailing public opinion, and also towards President Miloš Zeman who is well known for his dismissive and often shocking statements on refugees, minorities, human rights defenders, and the civil society at large.\(^8\) As a result, migrants-assisting NGOs had lost an outspoken ally in the government.

\textbf{b. Paradoxes related to foreign workforce}

As mentioned above, migrant workers have been taken hostage in this new era of politicking. At the same time, however, the Czech economy has been increasingly dependent on workforce coming from abroad. Faced with some 140 000 vacant positions on the job market and under pressure from large industrial employers – and despite opposition from trade unions – in February the government has, for instance, more than doubled the monthly quota for Ukrainian workers who will be allowed to work in the Czech Republic from 320 to 800.\(^9\)

In late February 2017, the government adopted a document named *Measures for Addressing Security and Public Orders in Industrial Areas and Their Vicinity in Relation to Increased Employment of Foreigners*, tabled by the Ministry of Interior\(^10\), reflecting upon the outcomes of a new inter-ministry working group tasked with this issue. The envisioned measures shall lead to increased police activity in the relevant locations, legislative changes on residence and accommodation of foreigners, and the creation of a practical manual for affected municipalities.

\(^4\) This development has been already noted and to an extent foreseen by Magda Faltová in her October 2016 assessment, see http://www.cepolicy.org/publications/czech-republic-migration-trends-and-political-dynamics

\(^5\) http://ww.realiste.cz/


\(^7\) http://www.denik.cz/z_domova/sobotka-odvolal-dienstbiera-protoze-pry-nebyl-srozumitelny-20161113.html

\(^8\) http://zpravy.idnes.cz/150218_161603


All in all, the government’s focus at the moment is very much on the repressive measures while virtually omitting pro-active policies which could substantially improve the foreign workers’ situation and enhance their social integration. This would require closer involvement of both the municipalities and NGOs providing social services, but perhaps first and foremost the employers themselves. Instead, the government seems to be buying into the scapegoating of hundreds of thousands of foreigners residing legally in the Czech Republic – often for many years – thus creating a real risk for social cohesion.

### c. Amendment to the Aliens Act

The Aliens Act\textsuperscript{11} pertaining to the status of foreigners in the Czech Republic including work and residence permits, is one of the most frequently amended and heavily contested laws. In light of the aforementioned, it was probably only a matter of time before an effort would be made to alter its provisions in a way which would substantially curb the rights of the more than 500,000 foreign citizens living in the Czech Republic.

A suitable opportunity for this became an extensive and complex amendment to the Act tabled by the government with the primary aim to transpose new EU directives.\textsuperscript{12} The year-and-a-half-long drafting process, however, yielded a fairly moderate proposal, introducing certain restrictions (e.g. on the right to legal counsel in residence proceedings) but at the same time also some progressive measures (such as the public prosecutors’ oversight over the much-criticized detention facilities for irregular migrants).

Then came an unanticipated, blindsided blow. In a manifest attempt to sidetrack the official legislative procedure, the Ministry of Interior used a single social democratic MP as a white horse, tabling a last-minute comprehensive and highly restrictive amendment to the bill. If adopted it would abolish all independent judiciary oversight over administrative decisions on residence permits; enable authorities to prolong detention by additional six months due to lack of cooperation by the detainee’s state of origin; prolong the residence period necessary for an employed foreigner to become a freelancer/businessperson from 2 to 5 years; overregulate the employment of foreigners, etc. Many of the provisions are likely in violation of EU law, and ECtHR and domestic court practice.\textsuperscript{13}

Following a publicizing of the issue initiated by NGOs and its vocal denouncement by actors such as the Czech Chamber of Commerce and the Czech Bar Association, the Ministry of Interior, as sponsor of the initial bill, found itself in an awkward situation facing questions on why had it sidetracked a process which it was effectively in control of. The real answer, of course, is that much of the amendment’s content could not stand the test of compliance with EU law and human rights standards, and/or would face harsh criticism from other members of the government. From both a procedural and a substantative point of view, this case has caused quite a stir and was met with a concerted effort by civil society agents to repel the amendment. On 7 April the final vote in the Chamber of Deputies took place. Following a heated debate, the most controversial issue – abolition of court review in residence matters – was dismissed but all the other restrictive provisions had passed. The bill has now moved to the Senate which may still propose amendments to limit its restrictive impact.

### d. State Integration Program

In early 2016 the Ministry of Interior has launched a so-called State Integration Program (SIP)\textsuperscript{14}, a new concept of aid provided to successful asylum seekers. A tailored approach to each and every refugee promised to ensure better accessibility of the necessary social services, language courses, employment opportunities but also housing, furnishing etc. Since not more than 150 applicants are

---

\textsuperscript{11} Act No. 326/1999 Coll., on the residence of aliens in the Czech Republic.

\textsuperscript{12} Namely Directive 2014/66/EU and Directive 2014/36/EU.


\textsuperscript{14} [http://www.mvcr.cz/clanek/integrace.aspx?q=Y2hudW09Mg%3D%3D](http://www.mvcr.cz/clanek/integrace.aspx?q=Y2hudW09Mg%3D%3D)
granted asylum and a couple hundred people get subsidiary protection annually (excluding positive
decisions on prolongation of subsidiary protection)\textsuperscript{15}, it may have been assumed that the strain on the
new system wouldn’t be too great. However, the first year of the program yielded mixed results at
best. Caritas Czech Republic which was charged with overseeing implementation as well as certain
organizations directly involved in the program reported undervalued administrative costs, unreliability
of the language agency responsible for ensuring all Czech language courses, and suboptimal
communication with the Ministry of Interior as the main issues undermining the feasibility of the
project. Altogether 319 clients have taken part in the SIP in its first year of existence.\textsuperscript{16}

In early 2017 SUZ, a Ministry of Interior agency took over the implementation oversight over the
program after no non-governmental organization expressed interest. It took several months to build the
necessary institutional capacity and only in April it became clear who would be the service providers
for 2017. This effectively means there is a significant time lapse in integration support provided to
refugees. It is fair to appreciate that in contrast to some other countries in the region, the Czech
government has made an effort to upgrade its refugee-integration scheme, however, it clearly needs
to be further developed and enhanced in order to meet its envisioned goals.

3. Prospective dynamics

In the months to come the Czech migration debate will be shaped by ongoing political campaigns
ahead of the October elections. However, what will be the exact role of migration-related issues is
difficult to predict. It is certain that many politicians will still try to ab/use the topic to score points—
by fueling fear and insecurity among the wider public, by a continuous denouncement of the
Muslim community, by targeting migrants at large or even by waging identitarian wars and reigniting
nationalism. Such initiatives may well result in certain legislative and policy changes taking place
even ahead of the election. Mainstream political parties will probably step up the ongoing race to
the bottom in repressive attitudes towards foreigners. They will be dragged further to the extreme by
xenophobic populist politicians, even if a serious electoral breakthrough of any single one of them is
far from certain.

On the other hand, public fatigue with migration as a political topic may have a role too. Whether
disinterest will prevail depends very much on what the broader situation will look like. How will Europe
manage in 2017 is of paramount importance. Favorable weather conditions will most probably once
again increase migration pressure on Europe’s southern border. A potential terrorist attack could also
have a remarkable impact on the dynamics. But if the situation on the ground remains generally calm,
migration may end up as just one among a series of topics relevant to the Czech voter alongside low
wages, corruption, administration management, tax dodging, blaming Brussels for just about anything,
and so on.

By April 2017 all the polls suggest that the populist party ANO 2011, lead by the tycoon strongman
Andrej Babiš, will have an easy job winning the election. Babiš has already managed the unthinkable,
profiling himself as an anti-establishment candidate from the position of Minister of Finance and
Deputy PM. Regardless of who would he then form a coalition with, a deflection from the overall
predominantly moderate politics of the incumbent social democratic Prime Minister Bohuslav Sobotka
is in the cards. Not least for migrants living in the Czech Republic, this isn’t good news.

Indeed, Babiš certainly isn’t an ideologue of Orbán’s or even Kaczynsky’s sort but he will do almost
anything to up his popular appeal. This could even entail a reshaping of Czech Republic’s place within
the V4. While at the moment, there are policy divisions in migration-related topics between Hungary
and Poland on the one side and Czech Republic and Slovakia on the other, Babiš may steer Czechia
further apart from Germany and other western states and position himself as an outright ally of his
Hungarian and Polish anti-liberal-minded counterparts. Then again, a significant variable will be the

\textsuperscript{15} http://www.mvcr.cz/clanek/mezinarodni-ochrana-253352.aspx

\textsuperscript{16} Caritas Czech Republic briefing on SIP, 17 January 2017
vested interests of large employers who will pressure him into more open migration policies, even if for different reasons than the civil activists. As of now, only one thing is clear – if Babiš really does become PM, he will not find himself in an easy position.

Tomáš Jungwirth is Policy officer, Consortium of Migrants Assisting Organizations in the Czech Republic and Research Fellow, Association of International Affairs.
Recent Changes in Refugee-Related Policies in Hungary

By Attila Juhasz and Edit Zgut

Summary
- Hungary is still a transit country, not a final destination for asylum-seekers.
- The government’s approach has been based on securitisation of its policies and rhetoric.
- The already elevated level of xenophobia in Hungary increased further as a consequence of governmental anti-migrant campaigns and political actions in recent months.
- The Hungarian government uses the refugee issue consciously to transform the political system.

The refugee issue according to the data

Changes in the number of asylum-seekers

Hungary is still not a target country for asylum-seekers. Moreover, due to further restrictions under its refugee policy, it has become practically impossible to obtain refugee status in Hungary. BÁH (Immigration and Asylum Office) took 210,271 decisions in 2015 and 2016 altogether. 96% of all procedures were suspended primarily because the applicant left the country for an unknown location after the registration. Out of the 8,532 meaningful decisions only 940 were positive, 89% of applicants were rejected. In January 2017 the Immigration and Asylum Office granted international protection to 21 asylum-seekers (8 obtained refugee status, 13 received subsidiary protection), while it rejected 803 applications despite the fact that the majority of applicants (79%) came from areas affected by terror: 16% from Syria, 40% from Afghanistan, 22% from Iraq and 1% from Somalia. 38% of all applicants were children and 30% of them were women.

The dynamics of migratory processes

Hungary witnessed the most serious refugee wave in its post-democratic transition history in 2015, when authorities registered more than 177,000 thousand asylum-seekers. The migratory pressure decreased considerably after the closure of the southern border was completed in mid-October 2015.1 A legislative amendment that came into force on July 5, 2016 has played a large role in the drop in numbers. The law authorises police to forcibly move any migrant caught within 8 kilometres of the border fence to the Serbian side of the border. These individuals cannot submit their asylum-application and thus do not show up in the statistics.

In January and February 2017 authorities intercepted 2,602 individuals in the 8-kilometre-wide lane.2 The number of migrants affected is probably lower, as presumably those taken to the other side of the fence make more than one attempt.

---

Migration politics and policies in Central Europe

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>2014</th>
<th>2015</th>
<th>2016</th>
<th>2017 Jan-Feb</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of registered asylum seekers (change over the same period of the previous year in parentheses)</td>
<td>42,777 (+126%)</td>
<td>177,135 (+314%)</td>
<td>29,432 (-83%)</td>
<td>969 (-63%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of illegal border crossings (change over the same period of the previous year in parentheses)</td>
<td>n.a.</td>
<td>413,043 (n.a.)</td>
<td>19,069 (-95%)</td>
<td>304 (-90%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Migration policies

Securitisation

The government’s politics can be categorized in the context of securitisation with regards to both its policies and rhetoric. Tougher migration policies were being implemented during the anti-quota referendum’s campaign. The government repealed the integration benefit in June 2016, which had previously been given to individuals under international protection. The message here is consistent with the government’s explicit campaigns: it considers integration impossible and it does not support the process in any way.

- Consequently, the government closed the country’s largest open-door reception centre in Debrecen back in late 2015, decreasing the capacity of the refugee system further from that point forward. In spring 2016, the government closed the reception centre at Nagyfa as well, while the tent camp at Kőrmend built as a temporary solution was made permanent. In December 2016, the relatively well-equipped refugee camp at Bicske was closed as well.

- The government implemented new measures in November 2016: since then, asylum applications may only be filed in the transit zones at Röszke or Tompa, where public offices’ opening hours are observed, therefore asylum-seekers can only file their requests on weekdays. According to the data of the Hungarian Helsinki Committee, an average of ten individuals were allowed to cross the fence each day both at Röszke and Tompa, which practically means that the refugee system has been dismantled.5

---


The new restrictions in Hungary’s migration policies will lead to further international criticism. Already the European Court of Human Rights had denounced the laws that were in effect before the new one was approved. The court in Strasbourg ruled against Hungary because of the restrictive border defence laws introduced in September 2015. The basis of the Ilias and Ahmed contra Hungary case in connection to this is that two Bangladeshi citizens submitted an asylum application in a transit zone on the Serbian-Hungarian border, but the request was denied by Hungarian authorities. Afterwards, the two citizens turned to the court in Strasbourg, the decision of which was deemed “maddening” by the leader of Fidesz’s parliamentary group, Lajos Kósa, because “Hungary was punished for obeying the Schengen and Dublin regulations.”

The most recently approved measures from March 2017 set further restrictions to migration policies. First of all, the police have been authorised to take any foreigner staying illegally in Hungary to the other side of the border fence, which in effect re-establishes the “8-kilometre-rule” approved in July 2016 to the whole country. Second, asylum-seekers allowed into the transit zones will be kept in custody and can only leave the transit zones “through the exit” in the direction of Serbia or Croatia. All adult refugees, refugees with families together with their children and all unaccompanied children between the ages of 14 and 18 can be kept in custody in the transit zones without any possibility of judicial review. The government referred to the crisis caused by mass immigration as the reason for the implementation of these rules, although currently there are barely 400 asylum-seekers in the country.

Fidesz’s approach is highly questionable as neither the Schengen nor the Dublin regulations demand or even allow for the illegal detention of an individual of any nationality. Additionally, the Hungarian Helsinki Committee warns that the newly enacted regulation does actually question whether Hungary fulfils its obligations conferred upon the country by the abovementioned regulations: expelled invididuals are not screened in any way, they are not registered in any system, their data are not recorded at all and it is not checked in any database either.

**Violence against migrants on the Serbian-Hungarian border**

Several humanitarian and human rights groups claim Hungarian authorities beat, assault and sometimes cause serious injury to migrants. Migrants say that Hungarian uniforms protecting the border often beat them, use rubber truncheons or let their dogs loose to chase after asylum-seekers near the Serbian border. According to media information, doctors in Belgrade have had to treat more injured persons who say they got their injuries from the Hungarian police since the end of February 2017. Hungarian authorities rejected these allegations, the government claims these are political attacks intended to discredit Hungarian border protection efforts. No substantial investigation has ever been launched to verify the claims.

At one point a far-right paramilitary organisation self-admittedly had an active role in attacking asylum-seekers in the border area. The leader of the organisation called Army of Outlaws (Betyárserég), Zsolt

---


10 Catholic Relief Services (CRS, Katolikus Segélyszolgálat), Jesuit Refugee Aid Service (JRS), Human Rights Watch, Helsinki Bizottság [Helsinki Committee], Orvosok Határok Nélkül [Doctors without Borders]
Tyirityán, can be heard on a tape from July 2016 talking about the inability of mainstream political leadership to “handle the migration crisis” and the necessity of the Army of Outlaws’ participation. According to the leader, those in power “approached them personally”. However, as barely any migrants were able to move around freely on Hungarian territory, members of the organisation primarily spent time around Ásotthalom, the settlement led by Jobbik-affiliated mayor László Toroczkai. Later, authorities rejected allegations that they were contacting the organisation, but finally even the Army of Outlaws admitted the cooperation. It is unlikely that any government institution commissioned the Army of Outlaws because Hungarian secret services have paid special attention to the organisation – especially during the refugee crisis. Moreover, in September 2015 László Toroczkai tried to prevent members of the organisation from beating refugees near the southern border, but this obviously does not mean that the Army of Outlaws or other extremist groups could not attack migrants before or after that point in time.

The effect of the refugee crisis on public opinion

In the Standard Eurobarometer survey of May 2016, 28% of Hungarians believed immigration was one of the two most important issues facing Hungary – respondents had 13 options to chose from. With this result immigration was ranked the third most important issue after health/social security (37%) and unemployment (29%). In November 2016, after half a year had passed, 30% of Hungarians still considered immigration to be a pressing issue for Hungary, moving it to second place, only trailing health issues by 3 percentage points. The perception of the issue of terrorism also changed with immigration. 4% of respondents had considered terrorism to be among the two most important issues for Hungary in May 2016, but 8% did so in November 2016.

Strong prejudices against minority groups are characteristic of the Hungarian public according to every domestic and international survey. Among other factors, this is primarily connected to Hungarians’ strong perceptions of social threats. The generally high level of xenophobia in Hungary increased further as a consequence of the refugee crisis and the associated governmental anti-migrant campaigns and political actions, including the anti-quota referendum held on the 2nd October, 2016. Yet the one and a half year-long political campaign, the most expensive ever in Hungary, was not enough for a valid referendum. The 40% voter turnout shows that the campaign considerably underperformed the governing party’s expectations, the importance of which representatives had been speaking about before the start of the last week of the campaign. In terms of public law, not even a valid referendum could have overwritten a decision made by the European Union. The invalid referendum could serve as a warning to the governments of the Visegrád Group regarding how much one can gain by focusing on anti-immigration policies.

The role of the strongly biased pro-government media offering highly subjective coverage to viewers during the campaign cannot be understated. The news programme aired by the publicly owned M1 channel in peak times during the night, for instance, supported the government’s stance 95% of the time according to a survey conducted by the international organisation Democracy Reporting International (DRI).
With regards to long-term trends, Tárki’s survey found that by early 2016 the level of xenophobia had risen to record levels in Hungary and the share of people in favour of immigrants had practically fallen to zero. More than half of Hungarians (53%) responded that the country should not accept any asylum-seekers at all. These data show that general feelings of fear and uncertainty were replaced by a specific “enemy” in Hungary: the “migrant”. This tangible “enemy” is paired with characteristic fears, for instance, terrorism and crime.

The importance of the migration issue in terms of the political system

The Viktor Orbán-led governing party’s political strategy is to polarize society along political fault lines. The main principle of this strategy is that the governing Fidesz party divides the political field into “national” and “anti-national” camps, and contextualizes every political topic according to this division. If someone contests Fidesz’s viewpoint, they are almost automatically put into the “anti-national” group regardless of their arguments, because in the view of Fidesz the Orbán-government is the only voice of Hungarian national interest.

The conflict between the protection of minorities and minority opinion, the unconditional acknowledgement of human rights and the politically constructed will of the majority – on a national, ethnnical or cultural basis - has systemic importance. In the name of the government’s capability to act it can refer to the democratic will of the public and some sort of “special state” in order to relegate human rights and procedural norms considered to be the foundations of liberal democracies to secondary roles. Therefore, the Hungarian government uses the migration issue consciously to transform the political system.

Some of the NGOs put themselves in the crosshairs of the government by criticising Hungarian authorities and the government’s migration policy. Civil society organisations attempted to minimize the negative effects of the refugee crisis and assist refugees with their daily challenges, or tried to make the governments’ decisions and their results more transparent. Consequently, they deviated from the governments’ definition of ‘acceptable society’. Several civil society organisations were consequently labelled “foreign agents” attempting to steal the sovereignty of the country in the interest of foreign powers and the “international political elite”. As such, the government expanded its scope of securitisation to now include civil society organisations as well.

In conclusion, the politics of Prime Minister Viktor Orbán are built on the logic of perpetuating conflicts rather than creating some kind of constructive national consensus. This strategy is applied to both the domestic and EU levels to set the political agenda and consolidate domestic political support.

Attila Juhász is Executive Director of Political Capital, Edit Zgut is Foreign Policy Analyst of Political Capital, Hungary

---

Migration politics and policies in Central Europe

Migration climate, discourse and policies in Poland
By Justyna Segeš Frelak

Summary

- Anti-immigration fears and sentiments have been used as a political ploy in Poland.
- Majority of Poles oppose the admission of refugees or believe they should be granted only temporary shelter, with the younger generation the least in favour of receiving refugees.
- Poland continues to be in strong opposition to compulsory refugee relocation under any scheme. Instead, Poland has lobbied for increased assistance for the refugees’ country of origin and periphery, supporting the idea of treating with the root causes of the refugee crisis.
- A set of laws and amendments, including anti-terrorist legislation, have been introduced that ease surveillance and detention of migrants.
- Economic migration is seen as a possible solution for easing problems with demographic decline, but foreigners from Eastern Europe are preferred. People of Polish origin living abroad are another target group to attract to the country.

With low rates of foreign-born residents, Poland is a country of 38 million people that remains one of the most homogeneous countries in Europe. Nevertheless, it has faced the need to regulate growing migrant inflows, as over the past decade it has become a prominent destination for non-EU nationals, mainly citizens of Ukraine. This is due to a number of factors, including growing demand for cheap labour, geographical and cultural proximity, and relatively liberal migration policies compared to those of other Central European countries.

At the same time, similarly to what is happening in other countries of Central Europe, the attitude of Polish society toward migration and especially refugees differs fundamentally from that of many Western European countries. With knowledge about immigration limited and stereotypes widespread, the refugee crisis has contributed to an increase in negative opinions about refugees, despite the fact that refugees from Southern Europe have not reached Poland. A number of political actors have played upon these fears of immigration for political gain.

This paper presents an overview of the current trends in the public and political discourse on migration since the beginning of the refugee and migration crisis, as well as key legislative and policy changes that have been introduced since mid-2015. The analysis concludes with projections regarding the migration-related discourse and further policy changes.

Migration profile

In January 2017, according to official statistics, 266 218 foreigners held a valid residence card in Poland. Ukrainians occupy the leading position among immigrant groups in Poland, with their number continuously growing. Ukrainians also account for over 53% of all foreign students in Poland, which

---

1 Office for Foreigners, 2017.
as a whole is also growing. These statistics however do not systematically reflect temporary and seasonal labour migration.

While the refugee phenomenon is a major source of contention in Poland and the V4 as a whole, it affects them to a far smaller degree than other EU member states in absolute terms, both in number of applications and those actually residing there. The main countries of origin of asylum seekers in Poland are Russia, Ukraine, and Tajikistan.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Overall</td>
<td>4529</td>
<td>5177</td>
<td>6906</td>
<td>8079</td>
<td>6860</td>
<td>7093</td>
<td>10048</td>
<td>8517</td>
<td>10587</td>
<td>6534</td>
<td>6887</td>
<td>10753</td>
<td>15253</td>
<td>6621</td>
<td>12325</td>
<td>12319</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AFGHANISTAN</td>
<td>416</td>
<td>598</td>
<td>247</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>103</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ARMENIA</td>
<td>638</td>
<td>224</td>
<td>104</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>147</td>
<td>107</td>
<td>216</td>
<td>413</td>
<td>206</td>
<td>126</td>
<td>195</td>
<td>344</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GEORGIA</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>4214</td>
<td>1082</td>
<td>1735</td>
<td>3234</td>
<td>1245</td>
<td>652</td>
<td>394</td>
<td>124</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KYRGYZSTAN</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>101</td>
<td>147</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PAKISTAN</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>154</td>
<td>210</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RUSSIA</td>
<td>1501</td>
<td>3055</td>
<td>5563</td>
<td>7183</td>
<td>6248</td>
<td>6405</td>
<td>9239</td>
<td>7760</td>
<td>5726</td>
<td>4795</td>
<td>4305</td>
<td>6084</td>
<td>12849</td>
<td>2772</td>
<td>7989</td>
<td>8992</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SYRIA</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>107</td>
<td>255</td>
<td>104</td>
<td>295</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TAJIKISTAN</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>107</td>
<td>541</td>
<td>882</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UKRAINE</td>
<td>146</td>
<td>103</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>2253</td>
<td>2305</td>
<td>1306</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1: The number of application for refugee status in Poland between 2001 and 2016, Office for Foreigners (selected/ most numerous nationalities)

It should also be noted that despite a dynamic increase in immigration to Poland, it remains strongly a country of emigration with 2 397 000 Poles staying abroad, mostly in United Kingdom, Germany, Holland and Ireland.

Public discourse and political climate in relation to migration

Across the entire European Union, the refugee crisis has provided fodder for traditionally anti-immigration forces. In the case of the Visegrad countries, it has created a great opportunity for both populists and the mainstream right, or left-wing parties to build support using fear and xenophobia. For example, in the case of Poland, the scapegoating of non-existent refugees has proven to be a very

---

2 http://www.perspektywy.pl
5 Mapping and responding to the rising culture and politics of fear in the European Union..., “Nothing to Fear but Fear Itself?”, Demos 2017.
effective political tactic, with most of society having limited experience and knowledge on the subject, thus being unable to assess the veracity of the often xenophobic message. For example, in an Ipsos survey for IOM, only 28% of Poles declared to have had contact with a foreigner in 2016.6

The refugee crisis began at a very specific moment in the Polish public debate – just before the parliamentary and presidential electoral campaigns. “The invasion of refugees” and “are we ready for a wave off refugees?” are examples of common slogans appearing in Polish newspapers at the time. The crisis sparked a heated debate on migration at a previously unwitnessed scale. Typical anti-immigration talking points (“immigrants do not assimilate,” “they are terrorists,” “they are good for nothing,” etc.) became and have still remained very popular. The public debate at that time was characterised by emotional narratives, feeding fears connected with Muslim refugees, and a frequent neglect of facts and data.7 What was observed was the a clear ‘transposition’ of other countries’ immigration debates, as observed in France, Germany or Poland.

Unfortunately, the debate on refugees and migrants has been taking place a very low level, and the stereotypical approach to the issue seems to dominate. The media is also a culprit, describing the phenomenon with military allegories, comparing the crisis of refugees to natural disasters and diseases. According to a report by Kultura Liberalna’s Public Debate Observatory, two motives dominated the media: the “clash of civilizations,” and the moral obligation to help and accept refugees. While radicalised language can be observed across a wide spectrum of Polish media, news stories unfavourable or even hostile toward refugees could mostly be found in media closer to the right end of the political spectrum.8

The public debate on social media also experienced an unprecedented outburst of xenophobia. For example, according to the CBOS analysis posts from the social media conducted in October 2015, only 6% of Polish internet users commenting on the migration crisis spoke out in favour of helping immigrants and of their integration into Poland.

The engagement of civil society demonstrates that solidarity with refugees is not entirely lost in Poland. As is the case with many other countries, there is a segment of society that expresses solidarity and humanity, but these efforts are often overshadowed by the anti-immigration discourse. Some activists, part of civil society and academia attempted to influence the debate through positive messaging. It is worth mentioning the example of the Polish Day of Solidarity with Refugees, which took place on October 15, 2015 and involved 130 institutions (NGOs, theatres, museums, etc.) or “Chlebem i solą” initiative of informal grassroots origins initiating activities to improve the refugee situation in Poland and Europe. What’s more, more than 40 Polish newspapers initiated action “more knowledge - less fear - refugees in Poland” to fairly characterize the refugee problem and bring it to the Poles.9 Another initiative is the Refugees Welcome Poland (RWP), which is the Polish wing of a German project that started in November 2014 and is now active in 12 countries.

At the same time a number of Polish municipalities have announced pro-migrant and refugee positions and started to work on local migration policies. The announcement of welcoming orphans from Syria lead garnered a response from the Law and Justice (PiS) government that such decisions may have “negative impact on the security of Polish citizens”.10 Such incidents show that local authorities may became important actors in the area of migration in the future.

It is important to note that the previous Polish government, after long negotiations, supported the EU’s proposed policy of distributing refugees, and hence agreed to admit approximately 7,000 people,
which it knew would be difficult to accept domestically. By breaking the coalition of countries of the Visegrad Group, it was accused by the opposition – mainly PiS – of betraying the country and members of the group.

At the peak of the campaign, the Law and Justice party (PiS) warned that Poland was in severe danger of a massive inflow of Muslim immigrants, and that they were the only ones who could prevent it. Jarosław Kaczyński incited fear using tabloid arguments that migrants bring “all sorts of parasites and protozoa, which (...) while not dangerous in the organisms of these people, could be dangerous here.” At the same time, other parties (including left-wing parties) avoided taking a concrete position defending the acceptance of refugees into Poland.

Public opinion

A public opinion study showed that it is not only politicians that have a critical attitude towards refugees; a considerable share of Polish society also opposes admitting people seeking international protection. Between 2015 and 2017, Poles have transformed from cautious supporters to decisive opponents of admitting refugees into the country. In the early stages of the refugee crisis, Poles were less sceptical than citizens of other countries in the region, with 21% opposed to admitting any refugees, while 58% agreed to admit them temporarily into Poland. To compare, in the most recent research poll conducted by CBOS, over half of respondents (52%) opposed the admission of refugees. Two out of five respondents (40%) believed they should be granted temporary shelter (until they can safely return to the country from which they came). Fewer than one in twenty respondents (4%) believed that they should be allowed to settle in Poland permanently. The same poll also showed a clear difference in attitudes between supporters of the more conservative PiS, and the more liberal PO. Among the supporters of PiS, 64% opposed receiving refugees, and only 30% expressed support. Additionally, the attitude of Poles towards accepting Ukrainian refugees has been more positive compared to people from the Middle East or Africa. Significantly more than half of respondents (58%) believed in helping their Eastern neighbours, while one in three (37%) disagreed.

At the same time, according to a Pew Research Center survey, a significant number of people see a link between the refugee crisis and the threat of terrorism. Seventy percent of Poles believe that the presence of refugees could increase the likelihood of terrorism in Poland. Furthermore, a majority also think that they are a burden on the host country, taking jobs and social benefits.

Young people are least in favour of receiving refugees. Moreover, young Poles, similarly to their counterparts in the Visegrad Group, are more sceptical towards migrants than young people in Germany or Austria are. Only 26% of young Poles believe that immigrants contribute to the country’s economic growth, compared to 42% of Germans. In turn, Hungarians (79%), Slovaks (72%) and Poles (70%) do not perceive such positive influence of immigrants on the demographic situation in their countries.

Analysis of the various research results shows that PiS’s strategy of building support by inciting fear - toward more issues than just the issue of migration - seems to have magnified society’s feelings of insecurity. Although Poland sees very few foreigners from Arab countries and has never been a victim of a terrorist attack, IPA/DEMOS polling from 2016 showed that Islamic terrorism is the biggest problem currently facing Poland.
Towards comprehensive migration strategy

Steps to facilitate access to the Polish labour market were taken several years after the country joined the EU in 2004. This decision was primarily brought about by labour shortages, especially after a major wave of Polish emigration in 2004 and sustained economic development. These factors have led to more interest among employers in searching for workers from outside the country. As a result, the business community lobbied to open the Polish labour market to foreigners, which resulted in the liberalization of access of selected groups of foreigners to the national labour market, starting in 2006 with the introduction of relaxed rules for seasonal work.

Three main instruments have been employed in the partial opening of the Polish labour market. First, to deal with sectoral (mostly low-skilled) work shortages, citizens of Belarus, Russia, Ukraine, Moldova, Armenia or Georgia could be employed seasonally without the need for a work permit. Foreigners subject to this system have thereby obtained very easy access to the Polish labour market (relative to other foreigners outside the European Union). For the second policy, students in certain fields and university graduates have been authorized to the same employment rules and conditions as Poles. At the same time, the EU Blue Card, aimed at facilitating immigration of qualified workers, remains essentially a dead letter in Poland. Finally, the Polish Card (Karta Polaka) allows people of Polish origin to obtain a long-term visa, with entry/exit rights that can secure legal employment without having to obtain a work permit, and access the Polish education system free of charge.

The above mentioned policy decisions prioritize seasonal employment and immigration from Eastern Europe, mostly from Ukraine, which is the unambiguous priority of past and present Polish authorities, targeting culturally and linguistically aligned migrants that do not constitute a significant challenge in terms of integration.

These regulations allowing access to the labour market have, however, not been accompanied with any comprehensive integration measures. From lack of political initiative and a perception of migration as mostly temporary and limited in terms of scale, no systemic integration policies have been implemented in Poland. Migrants encounter numerous barriers to their active participation in the labour market, including insufficient knowledge of the language, legal complications and unequal treatment by employers.

Asylum seekers are allowed to access the labour market six months after an asylum application is submitted if a decision has not provided in this time, while refugees and beneficiaries of subsidiary protection have access to the labour market according to the same rules as Polish citizens. The most acute problems for refugees are the unavailability of (permanent) work and a surplus of jobs below their qualification, linked to their poor command of the language – and this is tied to limited access to language lessons or their low quality. Access to appropriate housing, housing exclusion or event homelessness remains another important problem.

Only those who have been granted refugee status or subsidiary protection qualify for participation in the annual Individual Integration Program (Indywidualny Program Integracji - IPI), while other groups of migrants are not entitled to state funded support and rely on NGO assistance. Persons who have obtained permission for so-called tolerated stay are deprived of the state funded integration assistance, only having the right to assistance in the form of shelter, food, necessary clothing and designated benefits that cover costs of the purchase of food, medicines, household goods, etc.

From discourse to policy change: PiS government and migration policy

When it first came to power, the new PiS government announced a continuation of the relocation plan. However, after the March 2016 terrorist attacks in Brussels, the new Prime Minister Beata Szydło abandoned the plan and announced that Poland would not accept any refugees. The Polish position,
expressed by such government officials as Interior Minister Mariusz Błaszczak, emphasized that the redistribution mechanism is “a way to attract more migrants” rather than a solution to the crisis situation.

One of the priorities of the Polish Presidency of the Visegrad Group (1 July 2016 – 30 June 2017) is coordination of the position of the V4 at the EU forum that “should enhance solutions to address the migration root causes with emphasis on the effective protection of EU external borders. The V4 countries should focus on opposing any changes that would result in the introduction of any permanent and compulsory redistribution mechanism or would significantly reduce Member States’ competencies in this area”.18

Simultaneously, the office for Foreigners has been cooperating with EASO, and in 2016 organised around 60 missions to Italy and Greece. Poland has also been lobbying for increased assistance in the refugees’ countries of origin and their neighbours, supporting the need to address the root causes of the refugee crisis. Among others, Poland helps refugees and victims of war from Syria that stay outside the country, in the following countries: Jordan, Lebanon and Iraq. Despite the noticeable increase in humanitarian aid, Poland assistance still seems to be comparatively low.19

At the same time Prime Minister Beata Szydło announced that “Poland accepted one million Ukrainian refugees” which was clearly an element of PiS propaganda since the recognition rate for Ukrainian asylum seekers in Poland remains at an extremely low level, as Poland implements the concept of ‘internal flight alternative’ that serves as the legal basis for rejection of almost all asylum applications. With such careless extrapolation of data, Polish leaders have been using Ukrainian labour migration to avoid accepting refugees as part of the European Union’s relocation program.

The new government first suspended, and in March 2017 subsequently abolished the “Polish Migration Policy” document written by the previous government. Reasons for this decision included the elevation of the refugee and migration crisis, as well as an increase in Ukraine immigrants due to the military conflict with Russia. However, by far the most significant reason was the ideological incompatibility between the current government and the previous one. According to the official statements, the key differences included the attitudes toward the idea of multicultural society, and opening doors for migrants of various cultures and religions. According to Jakub Skiba, secretary of state in the Ministry of Interior and Administration: “This is a pragmatic position, rather than an ideological one. In our opinion, an ideological approach that is based on a vision of multiculturalism and broad migration absorption is incorrect.”20

The political change resulting from the elections in 2015 has put the discussions on the Polish integration policy on hold. It should also be underlined that the low priority given to the issue of integration is manifested not only by the suspension of work on integration policy but also the reduction of funding for the NGO sector in these areas.

The PiS government has recently expressed the following priorities in the field of migration policy that is now under consideration: internal security (including border protection), facilitation of channels for economic migration, and further easing of the inflow of people of Polish origin.21 It is therefore safe to assume that integration policy will not be treated as an important element of this new strategy.

The securitization of migration and the perception of migrants as potential threats can be seen not only in the political discourse, but also in the actions that have already been taken. In June 2016, the government adopted a so-called antiterrorist law, in accordance with which every foreigner in Poland

---

18 Programme of the Polish Presidency of the Visegrad Group, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Warsaw 2016
19 Development aid in 2015 continues to grow despite costs for in donor refugees, OECD, Paris, 13 April 2016
20 “Pragmatycznie, a nie ideologicznie” - o polityce migracyjnej Polski,” Interview with Jakub Skiba, Biuletyn Migracyjny, December 2016.
can be put under surveillance without a court order, for essentially an indefinite period of time. It also grants the Internal Security Agency, the police and the Border Guard the right to take fingerprints, facial images and even biological material (DNA) from foreigners in the case that there are doubts concerning their identity. The NGO sector has criticised the new regulations for potentially leading to discrimination and stigmatization.22

The new approach to migration policy has been exemplified by the draft of an amendment to asylum law that introduces border asylum procedures (applicable to almost every asylum seeker), including the option to detain people during border procedures and accelerated procedures, a de facto deprivation of the possibility to appeal against a negative decision in the border procedures (and the possibility of immediate deportation), and denial of the chance for court appeal.23

The frequently-reported cases of foreigners being denied entry into Poland at the Polish-Belarusian border crossing in Terespol are another example of this new course in migration policy. These instances of people who were repeatedly rejected entry to Poland and are often forced to stay at Brześć railway station have been reported by both the NGO sector and the media.24

At the same time, economic migration is seen as a possible solution for easing problems associated with demographic decline. However, the government has also clearly noted that foreigners from Eastern Europe are preferred over any other group.

To conclude, the recent developments may lead to a situation where Poland will de facto close itself for both refugees from Southern Europe (relocations) and so called spontaneous asylum seekers crossing the Polish Eastern Border. It is also highly probable that the government will play the “Ukrainian card”, framing the immigration from this country as a significant challenge for the Polish state. The priority of migration from neighbouring countries will probably be maintained as a safe reservoir of cheap, temporary labour with theoretically no or limited integration needs.

**Perspectives**

The PiS government has been successfully exploiting Poles’ anti-immigration fears and sentiments. As the examples of Poland or Hungary show (changes in the legislation, Hungarian referendum), the governments’ strategy is to project and exploit the topic in the long run. The question is, how long will it be possible to keep migration at the top of their agenda, seeing that hostile discourse can be counterproductive even for the government’s own goals. A prime example of this is combining xenophobic rhetoric with plans to further open up the labour market to Ukrainians.

In the longer outlook, the diminishing funding for civil society that is not openly pro-government may hinder the possibilities of creating pro-migrant coalitions and narratives in the future and hault almost all integration initiatives in the country.25 At the same time changes in the asylum law that will likely be introduced in 2017 may result in the detention of almost all foreigners applying for international protection in Poland, a systemic violation of the rights of foreigners that are included in the Geneva Convention and international law.26 A similar strategy combining both detention and closure of the border to many potential asylum seekers can be observed in Hungary.27

23 Projekt ustawy o zmianie ustawy o udzielaniu cudzoziemcom ochrony na terytorium RP oraz niektórych innych ustaw z dnia 30 stycznia 2017 roku
25 http://repozytorium.ofop.eu/
26 Uwagi Helsińskiej Fundacji Praw Człowieka do projektu ustawy o zmianie ustawy o udzielaniu cudzoziemcom ochrony na terytorium Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej oraz niektórych innych ustaw (projekt z dnia 30 stycznia 2017 r.)
27 Hungary: Government’s New Asylum Bill on Collective Push-backs and Automatic Detention Information update by the Hungarian Helsinki Committee 15 February 2017
Looking at the international dimension of the refugee crisis, the Visegrad Group response and solutions proposed by the European Commission have been particularly striking. Unexpectedly, the migration crisis has reunited countries that are divided on many other issues. For the Visegrad Group this is connected to a common vision of EU migration: reducing and controlling the migration flows (border protection) and increasing aid to refugees staying outside of the EU. It remains to be seen whether disagreement over the EU mainstream approach to migration challenges will lead to a fundamental reassessment of their EU membership in the future.

Justyna Segeš Frelak is Director of the Migration Policy Programme at the Institute of Public Affairs, Poland.
Migration politics in Slovakia: Balancing domestic and EU-level goals
By Alena Kudzko

Summary
Since 2016, Slovakia’s position on migration has become more measured. Compared to the harsh rhetoric that the country earlier employed and its vehement refusal to accept EU refugees in 2015-early 2016, Slovakia’s spring 2017 stance represents a more constructive approach. Tainted with the now unfavourable image of the Visegrad Group, Slovakia has sought to distance itself from the regional grouping and improve its own position in the EU, also using its EU Council Presidency for these purposes. A number of forward steps have been initiated, including the provision of relocation spots and scholarships for refugees, the sending of personnel to Frontex and EASO, and the pledging of assistance to address the root causes of migration. These steps, nevertheless, have been taken at a minimal level of engagement. This approach enables the country to score some points at the EU level, while still maintaining a low profile for the issue of migration at home to avoid pushback from populist and nationalist parties that have gained domestic influence.

Public and political discourse
The Slovak EU Presidency in the second half of 2016 put a lid on domestic broils over migration. Hushed, the debate has still been sizzling.

The rather acrimonious debates about migration in the run-up to the Parliamentary elections in Slovakia in March 2016 left Slovak society divided. Three nationalist and populist conservative parties with an anti-migration agenda won seats, including the far right People’s Party – Our Slovakia (Kotleba–Ludová strana Naše Slovensko, ĽSNS), and one of them – the Slovak National Party SNS – is part of the governing coalition. Even with the cooling effect of the EU Presidency, the divisions that were fostered during the purposefully spiteful election campaigns and the open anti-migration position of some of the parties in the Parliament made it close to impossible for the country to return to business as usual after the elections.1

The rising extremist, nationalist, populist and anti-EU rhetoric has been sweeping the region. Slovakia itself has not managed to survive entirely unscathed from these ongoing debates. Still an outsider of the European mainstream, Slovakia, however, has quietly distanced itself from its more outspoken members – Hungary and Poland.

Reality check: Impressions and/versus facts
The public perception of migrants in Slovakia is rather lukewarm, but varies in different segments of the population.

According to the Eurobarometer survey from fall 2016, immigration from non-EU countries evokes negative feelings in 79 percent of Slovaks. Only 31 percent of Slovaks think that Slovakia should help refugees.2 In September 2015, around 60 percent of Slovaks, according to several polls, were of the conviction that Slovakia should not accept any refugees.3

---

1 For the analysis of the migration-related political dynamics in Slovakia in the run-up to the 2016 elections, see GLOBSEC report “Slovakia: Migration Trends and Political Dynamics” from May 2016 written by Martin Dubéci http://www.cepolicy.org/publications/slovakia-migration-trends-and-political-dynamics.
2 Standard Eurobarometer 86, Fall 2016, Slovak National Report
At the same time, in the fall 2016 only ten percent of Slovak respondents in a Eurobarometer survey, when prompted, mentioned migration as an important problem facing Slovakia, a 7 percent decline from the fall 2015. The higher perceived threat level of migration in late 2015-early 2016 reflects the hyped up discourse employed during the election campaign and the strategy of fear mongering employed by, among others, the SMER party and Prime Minister Fico. Surveys conducted by Slovak agencies in 2015 reveal that 39.7 percent of Slovaks considered refugees to be the biggest problem facing the country (July 2015). A total of 70 percent of respondents were worried about migration according to another poll from December 2015. The most frequently cited reasons for concerns are increased security risks (criminality, Islamic extremism and terrorism) and the lack of cultural compatibility. Respondents also cited the economic burden on the country. Slovaks are typically much more averse to refugees and migrants from the Middle East and Africa compared to those from Ukraine (the latter enjoy noticeably higher support).

Although the perception of migration in Slovakia as an urgent problem needing to be addressed is at a relatively low level, it does not mean that Slovaks are enthusiastic about welcoming migrants. A total of 82 percent of respondents disagree with the statement that foreigners are a great contribution to Slovakia. On average, 44 percent of respondents in the whole EU think that migrants are a contribution to the hosting country, 31 percent higher than in Slovakia.

These results imply that the majority of Slovaks do not see migration as the most important issue on the domestic agenda. But they are also not eager to aggravate this situation by accepting more migrants in Slovakia.

Public opinion has been considerably influenced by misperceptions and/or entrenched fears. This situation is, of course, the case in many Western countries. However, in Slovakia, the gap between reality and public perceptions might be greater precisely because there are fewer migrants in Slovakia.

Unlike many other countries in Europe and in the region, the most profound way in which Slovakia was affected by the migration influx in 2015-2016 was through public discourse and media coverage. It was not the migrants who came to Slovakia – very few did - but rather the discussions about them that made many people cautious and averse to welcoming foreigners. Moreover, Slovaks often do not distinguish between migrants and refugees, which further conflates a number of different economic and social issues in the discourse.

During the peak years of 2015 and 2016, only 49 and 179 people, respectively, received international protection status in Slovakia. Unlike in Hungary, there were no visible mass flows of people transiting to Germany or farther West and North through Slovakia either.

According to official statistics, in 2016, around 93,300 foreigners with a residence permit were living in Slovakia. This is about 1.7 percent of the total population. Around 55 percent of foreigners are from other EU countries. The majority of foreigners from outside the EU are of Ukrainian (around 14 percent of the total number of foreigners, 31 percent of non-EU nationals), Serbian (17.5 percent of the non-EU nationals), and Russian (9.8 percent of the non-EU nationals) origin – and typically integrate particularly well due to linguistic and cultural proximity. Slovakia’s 1.7 percent share of foreigners among the total population is the sixth lowest in the EU. By comparison, the Czech Republic’s figures are at a 4 percent share and Poland is at 0.3 percent (as of 2014).

---

4. Standard Eurobarometer 86, Fall 2016, Slovak National Report
7. Polls by 2muse, Polis, Focus
8. Standard Eurobarometer 86, Fall 2016, Slovak National Report
Table 1: Share of non-nationals in the resident population (1 January 2016). Source: Eurostat.13

Table 2: Immigrants, 2015, per 1,000 inhabitants. Source: Eurostat.14


Concerns about the allegedly increased levels of crime or risk to national security are similarly not grounded in reality. The crime rate among foreigners in Slovakia, in fact, is not disproportionately higher than among the Slovak-born population (Number of crimes committed by foreigners in 2016: 1372, out of which 297 from the Czech Republic, 182 Hungary, 179 Ukraine, and 109 Poland. Number of crimes in 2016 committed by Slovaks: 42 146). And most of the offences that are committed are “economic crimes” and “property crimes”.15

For many Slovaks, a cautious approach to other cultures and foreigners is generated by the country’s experience with Roma integration. According to unofficial estimates, 9-10 percent of the Slovak population is Roma, a segment of the population that is often marginalized and lags behind the general population in terms of social inclusion, employment, and integration.16

Overall, the number of refugees and foreigners in Slovakia is not high enough nor are the commonly cited threats tangible enough to vindicate anti-migration perceptions and policies. Domestic political experiences and skirmishes, the divisive election campaign with “Slovakia for Slovaks”-type slogans, European level politics, the lack of coherent strategies from governments and the EU on how to deal with migration and integration, interpretations of historical experiences, and media coverage, however, conspired to create the current situation.

**Media and public communication on migration issues**

The Slovak media have contributed to shaping the abovementioned misconceptions but also, and importantly, to providing a more nuanced picture of the migration debate and to even mobilizing the public in support of refugees. The impact and style of coverage varies from outlet to outlet. A remarkable example of the unification of the media, including tabloids, around a humanitarian narrative was the response to the death of 71 refugees who suffocated in a refrigeration truck abandoned by traffickers in Austria next to the Slovak border in August 2015.

Today, the public discourse on migration in Slovakia is to a large degree shaped by a battle between liberal media outlets and those that echo the unchallenged opinions of nationalist and extremist parties or – intentionally or unintentionally – spread misleading, unverified information.

The media faces a challenge not only because of the relativisation of facts in public life but also because the government does not have a strong enough incentive, resources, or skills to communicate the facts on a politically sensitive topic in a trustworthy and captivating manner to the public.

Furthermore, following the coverage of several corruption allegations in the government, many liberal media outlets have had strained relations with the office of Prime Minister Fico who recently called journalists covering the cases “dirty anti-Slovak prostitutes”.17 This type of open animosity has not helped journalists reach out to those who already perceived the media as biased in favour of the liberal cause, itself perceived as alien to the Slovak national interest.

Partially as a result of these factors, a significant share of the population receives information about migration-related issues and opinions from sources that do not follow traditional principles of journalism, including a hallmark focus on fact-checking and an emphasis on balance and objectivity. According to the latest GLOBSEC Trends, opinion polls conducted in April 2017, 40.4 percent of respondents are inclined to believe or totally believe in the conspiracy that the state of affairs is completely different than portrayed by the mainstream media. In 2016, 29 percent of young Slovaks between 19 and 24 expressed more confidence in “alternative” media (usually outlets supporting conspiracy theories and professing an anti-West ideology - e.g. Medzičas, Hlavné správy, the now closed Konzervatívny výber).

---

17 http://www.reuters.com/article/us-slovakia-politics-idUSKBN13I1RK
The years 2015 and 2016 witnessed the peak of the popularity of hoaxes and fake news on migration. In the past number of months, however, the attention to migration issues in the “alternative” media has declined. Still, migration typically returns to the agenda at times of important events or political developments abroad –the Hungarian migrant quota referendum in the fall of 2016, French elections, or Brexit negotiations. So far in 2017, issues connected with migration have mostly been brought up in relation to various political candidates and in promotion of those who aim to stem the flow of migrants and seal the borders. The main themes describing the domestic situation or consequences of the migration policies of the EU for Slovakia resolve around a potential Muslim invasion, the lifestyle of Muslims, the criminality of migrants, and the end of Slovak culture and its values.

**Balancing domestic and European politics: Key legislative and policy change**

Divisions aggravated by the 2016 election campaign, nationalist outbidding legitimized by Robert Fico’s election campaign and now further fuelled by nationalist parties in the Parliament, and the rugged media landscape have created many pitfalls for the Slovak government, which has attempted to cater to the domestic public, while maintaining a somewhat constructive attitude at the EU level.

The Slovak government is preparing for the scenario of a multi-speed Europe. Its goal seems to be to belong to the core group, remaining in the Eurozone and participating in other core institutions. Slovakia’s endeavours to be treated as a core member though have been impeded on account of the fact that it is constantly ostracized for its migration policy and somewhat tainted by its affiliation with Hungary and Poland through the Visegrad Group. Hence, Slovakia has sought to be a less visible member of the Visegrad Group. The public unity of the Visegrad countries on migration issues, nevertheless, is still too politically practical and vital to be openly abandoned. Slovakia might still need this regional support at the EU level or occasionally need to hide behind the much more headstrong position of its neighbours.

The fact that Slovakia was holding its first rotating presidency of the EU Council from July to December 2016 played an important role in defining the government’s position on migration and specifically refugee policy. It was already clear before the Presidency started that there would be no consensus and no revamped EU-wide asylum policy any time soon. This created space for manoeuvre both at the EU and at the domestic level.

The desire to appear as a constructive negotiator implied that Slovakia needed to re-define the then mainstream European approach of accepting refugees or make concessions and participate in the EU relocation scheme.

With the Brexit earthquake overshadowing the agenda and other countries being sluggish on relocations, by the end of its Presidency, Slovakia both relished the changed EU-wide discourse on migration and somewhat increased its own contributions towards EU wide solutions. The Slovak Presidency rightly sensed an area where finding common EU ground was possible, focusing on external measures and compacts with third countries. In accordance with the political mood in Europe, the internal asylum reform was shifted into the long-term agenda.

This success in scoring some points with minimal domestic effort left many disappointed, and for the opposite reasons. Refugee and migration-cautious actors from Slovakia felt somewhat vindicated by the EU-wide acceptance of the focus on external solutions. They are, nonetheless, upset with being ostracized despite the concessions they had to make. The groups supportive of refugees, meanwhile, expected much more progress and opening up as a result of the Presidency and the international pressure and attention associated with it.

---

18 For example, during the Slovak Presidency, Slovakia together with other Visegrad countries issued a Joint Statement that also expressed the Group’s position on migration https://www.vlada.cz/assets/media-centrum/aktualne/Bratislava-V4-Joint-Statement-final-15h30.pdf.
a. From flexible to effective to adjective-free solidarity

To offer something in the short-run and prove its national commitment, Slovakia has been advocating for what it believes is a more comprehensive approach towards Europe-wide cooperation on the migration crisis. While protesting against the mandatory refugee relocation quotas, the government argued that quotas are only one of the ways that a country can contribute. Moreover, a pure mathematical calculation of quotas, they argued, is counterproductive as it does not take into consideration different countries’ experience with migration and “perspective and capacity of each Member State”.

Countries should be able to contribute by different means, all equally valuable for the EU’s aims to solve the migration crisis, hence the concept of “flexible solidarity”. Criticized for the lack of operational clarity of this concept, Slovakia later transformed the notion from “flexible” to “effective” solidarity and eventually decided to drop the adjective altogether. Still, adjective wars aside, the central argument remained the same: it is not only about quotas.

Consequently, an important, if not central, component of the European migration approach advocated by Slovakia is the focus on external solutions instead of quotas – external management of migration and eradicating the root causes of migration. This includes providing better protection of borders and management of the flows at the border, the creation of hotspots, working with countries of origin and transit countries, cooperating with refugee camps in areas of conflict (e.g. Lebanon, Turkey), improving implementation of returns, and finally ameliorating the situation in sending countries, which would in turn decrease the push factor.

b. National contributions to European solutions

Although failing to design a grand operational EU-wide scheme based on the concept of “flexible solidarity”, Slovakia nonetheless sought to enhance its own contributions or carry on with some of already existing schemes. Given the backdrop of some countries in the region on commitments towards hosting refugees, the lack of any significant changes and the fact that Slovakia carried on with its previous activities might already be a consoling sign.

Two features stand out. First, Slovakia prefers and believes it is better suited to offer contributions that are related to the area of external migration management. Second, when offering to host refugees, Slovakia often builds its policy around the idea that protection status is a temporary phenomenon and refugees will most likely return to their home countries when the original cause of the dislocation is eradicated.

Vehemently opposed to mandatory relocation quotas, Slovakia, nonetheless, offered spots for relocation, emphasizing the voluntary nature of its contributions. It offered 100+100 (only 40 formally pledged; 902 assigned to Slovakia within the EU Emergency Relocation Mechanism from 2015) spots for relocation from Greece and Italy and from camps in Lebanon, Jordan, and Iraq. Only 16 asylum seekers from Greece have been relocated so far under the scheme. The lack of progress is, however, in line with the majority of other European countries, which have been equally slow on relocations.

Furthermore, Slovakia committed to offering 550 university scholarships to refugees by 2021 (they will not be granted asylum). A university degree is seen as a more sustainable and long term investment into the future of people in need of international protection and their home countries as educated people will be better able to help rebuild their home countries upon their return home. This approach emphasizes the Slovak view that international protection is a temporary phenomenon and refugees will return back home.

Slovakia continues operating the Emergency Transit Centre in Humenné in Eastern Slovakia.

---


Since the Centre opened in 2009, over 1,000 refugees have been resettled via Slovakia to other countries, primarily the US, Canada, and Norway. With the capacity to host up to 250 persons, the Centre provides temporary shelter – up to six months - for the most vulnerable refugees under the UNHCR's protection. The refugees undergo medical examinations and cultural and social trainings in preparation for their relocation to their destination country. The centre is run and financed by the UNHCR and IOM with the latter responsible for training and international transport of refugees.

- Slovakia continues to operate the Gabčíkovo center. Based upon an agreement between Slovak and Austrian governments, the small Slovak border town Gabčíkovo has been hosting, on a rotating basis, up to 500 Syrian asylum seekers that are officially registered in Austria and are waiting for their applications to be processed. Over the past year, however, Austria has had little need for additional facilities as the numbers of asylum seekers coming to Austria has declined.

- Slovakia has ensured notable participation of its officers in Frontex missions (41 in Triton in Greece, 27 in Poseidon in Italy, 50 in Foa Land in Bulgaria, 46 – “other” individual deployments), a disproportionately high number,22 and is training officers to be sent to EASO (numbers and timing unclear).

- Slovakia contributes funds to the EU Regional Trust in Response to the Syrian Crisis, the EU Emergency Fund for Africa, UNHCR, IOM, and other mechanisms and provides development assistance. In 2016, Syria was included on the list of countries with extraordinary humanitarian and development needs. Miroslav Lajčák stated that Slovakia will provide €19 million by 2021 to various EU and UN agencies dealing with migration.23

### c. Politically convenient emphasis on external solutions

In the view of the Slovak government, due to different historical and societal circumstances, Slovakia is not positioned to permanently host large numbers of refugees, particularly those who come from different societies and cultures (read Muslims and people from Africa). Consequently, the government, supported by public opinion, has not been willing to take political risks and experiment with bringing in foreigners. As a result, most of the effort has been oriented towards contributing to external solutions or providing assistance not involving the acceptance a fixed number of people.

Although Slovakia offered spots for relocation, only 1624 of these spots have been filled so far. Slovak uneasiness with relocations is not only conditioned by the simple reluctance of the government to take political risks. Slovakia is not an attractive destination country for asylum seekers. It does not have developed expat networks that can function to smoothen the cultural integration of newcomers and provide additional employment options. Sufficient state support to refugees is also lacking in Slovakia. The country’s complicated, often incoherent legal system makes it even harder for asylum seekers to receive legal status, appeal decisions, or understand their education, labour, health care and other rights and obligations.

Furthermore, asylum seekers lack information about Slovakia and the European asylum system in general while residing in Greece or Italy. This leads to their unwillingness to seek asylum in a country where they see no future or to a traumatic mismatch of their expectations and reality on the ground. As a result of these factors, Slovakia is unlikely to be able to fill the offered relocation spots.

That said, the government is not making sufficient or visible efforts to change the public and domestic perception of the country as a transit country. The lack of interest in and knowledge of Slovakia among asylum seekers is a rather convenient situation: it helps reduce the responsibility for introducing domestic changes that would involve political risks and long-term commitment.

There are, however, easy and rather safe steps that are currently lacking but could help the government.

---


The inclusion and engagement of NGOs throughout the entire process, from the matching of asylum seekers with their host country to their actual relocation to the first months and years of the integration process, is particularly crucial in countries like Slovakia. Slovakia lacks a public sector with the capacities or know-how to integrate refugees or work with communities. NGOs are consequently there to fill the gap. Nevertheless, the government has yet to fully accept these offers of assistance from civil society.

Another area where the effort has slowed down and stagnated is in the adoption of the integration strategy for refugees. After a hectic attempt to develop the strategy during the Presidency, the migration office has yet again postponed the adoption of the strategy, reasoning that the number of refugees is too low to justify a broad state-supported systematic strategy.

Migrant workers: labour market needs and perceptions

The increased attention to refugees also brought back to the spotlight the issue of labour migration. For many Slovaks, the inflow of migrants to the EU is associated not just with people fleeing conflict but also and primarily with people who are seeking better life and employment opportunities. The aversion towards migrants among some segments of the population is also fuelled by the Slovak domestic unemployment rate. In March 2017, the official unemployment rate was registered at 8 percent\(^2\), which is a noticeable decline from the 9.9 percent rate registered a year earlier.

Despite comparatively high domestic unemployment rates, employers often complain that there is a shortage of labour. The reasons for this vary from low level of formal employment participation among the Roma population to Slovaks not possessing the right skills for the labour market.

This situation creates an incentive for businesses to lobby for the increased participation of foreign workers in the domestic market. The main problems with recruiting foreign workers are lengthy administrative procedures and the requirement that employers prove that there is no Slovak who would qualify for the opening or be willing to take the job.

The government is facing a dilemma, however, between competing pressures, namely the call to improve domestic employment versus the desire to attract more foreign companies to relocate their manufacturing and service centres to Slovakia. Locals, however, are often not willing to take the relatively low-paid jobs in manufacturing or do not qualify for some higher paid jobs.

Under increasing pressure from the business sector, the Slovak Parliament passed legislation in March 2017 that would make the process of hiring non-EU citizens slightly easier. The new law primarily targets seasonal workers who will stay in Slovakia for more than 90 days and are employed as part of inter-corporate transfers. The amendments are not expected to lead to a significant surge in non-European arrivals to the labour market.

There have been suggestions from NGOs for the government to cooperate with businesses and create employment schemes for refugees. However, also due to the political sensitivity of the issue, there has not been much public advocacy on behalf of businesses in favour of these suggestions.

Until recently, migrant workers have not been a media target. In the winter of 2017, however, Serbian workers came to the spotlight. Several companies in Slovakia employ Serbians temporarily for low-skilled, low-paid jobs. However, the provision of cheap housing for the workers in residential areas and occasional conflicts that have occurred in bars has spurred dissatisfaction among local populations. Contacts with the local population generally remain low, owing to the migrants’ work schedule, limited resources, housing in the dormitories provided by the company, and lack of free time for integration opportunities. Furthermore, due to the temporary nature of employment, few Serbs have an incentive to integrate or deliberately seek more profound relations with local populations. Despite the relative proximity of the language and culture, Serbs hence often face a consequent communication gap and associated prejudices.

Overall, however, migrant workers do not constitute a noticeable enough group to lead to protracted tensions with the local population. Furthermore, many migrant workers are, in fact, well-integrated. The relatively high level of unemployment and the occasional media coverage of negative incidents related to migrants, however, contribute to the aversion towards migrants and refugees whom the public does not often properly distinguish from other types of foreigners.

The continuous role of civil society

The year 2015 witnessed a mobilization of civil society and a spike of activism and volunteering among various segments of the population. By the end of 2016, the involvement of the broader public returned to its usual level though.

NGOs that have traditionally worked with migrants and refugees continue their activities and remain vehement advocates for a more open migration policy of the country. Their activities range from providing legal and integration support to mitigating stereotypes about refugees, working with municipalities that have the potential to host refugees, and assisting asylum seekers in Greece.

Several NGOs have repeatedly offered support to the government in drafting and evaluating the integration strategy, selecting the refugees for relocation, implementing integration activities, and reforming the migration strategy of the government in general. In response to the 2015 crisis, the government established a coordination mechanism with NGOs. The mechanism is rather dysfunctional at the moment, however, and many NGOs complain that the government largely ignores their recommendations.

Prospective dynamics

With no domestic elections or significant EU-wide migration-related decisions expected this year, Slovakia is likely to continue on its current track: lukewarm consent to the voluntary acceptance of a certain number of refugees (without any accompanying efforts to attract them), occasional domestic employment of the migration topic for political purposes (primarily driven by the nationalist parties), opportunistic but cautious support of the Visegrad Group in opposing mandatory relocations, and a more careful and diplomatic game at the EU level. With the Slovak Nationalist Party being part of the governing coalition and the far-right LSNS holding seats in Parliament, it is hardly conceivable to foresee major breakthroughs for government members like Most-Hid who are more open toward migration. There is also a danger of the main governing party SMER further sliding into nationalist rhetoric with the goal of distracting attention from re-emerging corruption scandals and compensating for a loss in popularity. The goal in such a case might be to attain increased support from the voters currently favouring nationalist parties.

At the EU level, Slovakia is likely to, or at least should be concerned with its prospects of becoming part of the core of a multi-speed Europe and the upcoming EU budget negotiations. A continuously obstructionist position would endanger the country’s prospects of participating in the most influential institutions or guaranteeing access to desired structural funds or other investments from the EU.

Slovakia is likely to do the minimum that can be claimed as a contribution to EU-wide solutions. With no clear recent comprehensive migration strategy of its own and many uncertainties at the EU level, Slovakia will have to improvise with its responses to migration-related challenges and adjust them to the new developments.

With many Western countries reversing their open-doors policies and with the emphasis on external migration management now being a legitimate European-wide approach, Slovakia might very well be able to retain or build up its relevance in the EU and secure budgetary benefits with significantly smaller concessions on migration issues than originally expected.

Alena Kudzko is Deputy Research Director at the GLOBSEC Policy Institute.
