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## **The Slovak Attitudes towards Immigrants in the Context of the Current Refugee and Migration Crisis\***

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**Summary.** The paper focuses on the impacts that the current migration and refugee crisis has had on Slovakia. Slovakia is a country characterized by a relatively small population of immigrants and refugees. Prior to the crisis, immigration was a marginal issue in national politics. Nevertheless, Slovak reactions to the crisis were surprisingly forceful both among the general public and their political representatives. Based on available statistics and research findings, the authors try to identify the causes for the rather negative attitudes towards immigrants observed in Slovakia. The paper traces these attitudes back to historical heritage and social-psychological factors as well as to recent political developments.

**Keywords:** immigrants, ethnic minorities, attitudes, Slovakia, refugee crisis

### **1. Introduction**

Since the end of 2014, the Member States of the European Union face a new challenge in the form of migration and refugee crisis. In some Member States the number of asylum applicants is reaching the level that is difficult to handle. The massive immigration opens a wide range of questions concerning everyday

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co-existence of minorities and majority in respective societies. Furthermore, the crisis opens questions of mutual relationships of the EU Member States, as well as the EU as a whole.

In our paper we focus on the impacts of this crisis in Slovakia, and on the reflections of Slovak society – general public, as well as political representatives, concerning the crisis. The main research questions are: how has the crisis influenced the numbers of immigrants in Slovakia; what are the attitudes of Slovak citizens and Slovak politicians towards immigrants; and what are the possible causes of these attitudes?

Accordingly, in the first part we will try to briefly describe Slovakia as a country of migration; in the second part we would like to focus on the question how many immigrants reside currently in Slovakia, and what is the ethnic structure of Slovak immigrants; finally in the third part we will try to summarize possible causes of Slovak attitudes towards immigrants which became more visible in connection with the current migration and refugee crisis. To answer the research questions we analyse the statistical data and provide secondary analysis of available research data in this area.

## **2. The profile of Slovakia as the country of migration**

Generally, migration is influenced by a combination of economic, political and social factors: either in a migrant's country of origin (push factors) or in the country of destination (pull factors). Aspects influencing immigration often change in time. So it depends on many internal and external factors how many immigrants are present in Slovakia, and also what kinds of immigrants. In the first years of the independent Slovak Republic, there were almost no pull factors attracting immigrants, yet situation in Slovakia has been changing gradually. In case of Slovakia the most important milestones influencing the migration situation were the EU (2004) and Schengen (2007) accession [Bolečková 2014].

Thus Slovakia has been changing gradually from a traditional country of emigration to a country of transit, and slowly is becoming a country of destination, as well. Until 1993, residents of the Czech Republic comprised the majority of immigrants into the Slovak Republic, similarly 99% of all emigrants from the SR moved to the CR [Guličová, Bargerová 2008: 21-22]. Concerning these flows we cannot speak about international migration in fact, because Slovakia and the Czech Republic were two parts of the same state at that time. Since the creation of the independent state in 1993, migrants from Europe have accounted for 80-90% of all registered new residents in Slovakia. In subsequent years the ratio has been

declining; on the other hand, the ratio of immigrants from Asia has been growing. Since Slovakia's accession to the European Union, migrants from the EU countries regularly represented the largest group [Bolečeková 2014].

According to the Migrant Integration Policy Index<sup>1</sup> (MIPEX), Slovakia is characterized as “very small country of net immigration (mostly non-EU) only since 2000s, driven by pre-crisis economic conditions and future demographic trends”. Slovakia scored 37 points which means “slightly unfavourable” towards immigrants, and is placed on the 34 place out of 38 countries. Indeed, in 2013 Slovakia had only 2.9% of foreign population<sup>2</sup>. With this number, Slovakia was the EU Member State with the lowest number of immigrants per 1000 inhabitants [Eurostat 2015a].

Concerning statistical data on migration in Slovakia, information is collected in relation to the different types of migration and categories of migrants. Relevant state institutions responsible for data collection are as following: statistics in the field of legal migration<sup>3</sup> – the Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic, statistics on international protection – the Migration Office of the Ministry of Interior of the Slovak Republic, statistics on prevention of unlawful entry and residence (illegal migration), statistics on residence permits and residence of nationals of the third countries, statistics on returns – the Bureau of the Border and Aliens Police of the Presidium of Police Force, statistics on foreign workers – the Central Office of Labour, Social Affairs and Family. All statistics are collected in accordance with the EU legislation [Statistical Office of the SR 2016]. These institutions are also important in development and implementation of migration policy in Slovakia.

While statistics in the field of asylum and other forms of international protection as well as statistics on detected illegal immigration are very accurate, reliable statistics on labour migration are hardly available. Another factor which postpones objective evaluation of the immigration flows is the time factor. The respective institutions do not publish up-to-date statistics. This problem, again, touches mainly the area of legal labour migration.

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<sup>1</sup> MIPEX is a tool to measure integration policies in all EU Member States, Australia, Canada, Iceland, Japan, South Korea, New Zealand, Norway, Switzerland, Turkey and the USA. 167 policy indicators have been developed to evaluate and compare what governments are doing to promote the integration of migrants. Following fields are covered by indicators: labour market mobility, family reunion, education, health, political participation, permanent residence, access to nationality, anti-discrimination.

<sup>2</sup> 16% of foreign born were originally non-EU nationals, and 62% of foreign born were from low or medium-developed country, according Human Development Index (HDI).

<sup>3</sup> The term legal migration covers the entry of persons into the territory of the Slovak Republic, residence in, and the departure from the Slovak Republic provided all conditions from the international agreements and legal regulations are met.

With regard to the topic under consideration, we will not pay attention to the numbers in the area of illegal migration, since we do not expect long-term or permanent stays of irregular migrants in Slovakia, or that irregular immigrants will contribute to the creation of ethnic minorities. In following parts we will concentrate on current state concerning ethnic minorities in Slovakia with the focus on immigrants' ethnic minorities.

Presenting Slovakia as a country of migration, we must necessarily mention emigration, as well. In its history and also in the present, emigration flows have been connected to Slovakia more than immigration. While in the past, during the communist regime, we were talking mainly about the forced emigration, today it is mainly voluntary labour force emigration. In connection to our topic emigration flows will not attract more attention.

### **3. Facts and figures about immigrants in Slovakia**

The fall of the Iron Curtain in 1989 caused, with no doubt, the acceleration of migration flows worldwide. The current refugee and migration crisis represents new challenges for Europe. Number of non-citizens or “new people” has risen dramatically in many states. This “new people” could form new communities which differ from autochthony community in all aspects of identity.

At the beginning of 2014, the number of immigrants (i. e. persons with a place of birth outside Slovakia) was approx. 174.9 thousand (3.2% of the population), from which approx. 146.3 thousand immigrants (2.7%) were from other EU Member State, and approx. 28.6 thousand immigrants (0.5%) from the third countries [Eurostat 2015b].

Regarding the origin of regular migrants in Slovakia, we can talk about long consistent trends that have particular historical, geographical, but also political and economic reasons. Radoslav Štefančík [2012: 66-70] identified four main types of immigrants in Slovakia:

1. Immigrants who came before 1989. The immigrants from the first group came to the former Czechoslovakia from different countries of origin in Africa, the former Soviet Union, or Asia countries, to gain education or labour skills. Today, as the author states, the level of integration of immigrants included into this group is very high. It is very common that they have Slovak partner. They often occupy qualified work positions or lead own business and create work opportunities. The most immigrants included into this group already have the Slovak citizenship, and are the most active in various associations of immigrants.

2. War and political refugees. The most of them came during the war conflicts in the former Yugoslavia, later on from conflict zones in Asia, mainly Iraq and Afghanistan, but also from China and Georgia.

In 2001, the trend of a sharp increase in the number of asylum applications began in the Slovak Republic. The asylum migration was growing the fastest, compared to other types of immigration into Slovakia, and reached its peak in 2004<sup>4</sup> (11 395 individuals), when Slovakia became a Member State of the EU. [Ministry of Interior of the SR 2016] In 2005, the situation in the field of asylum has changed radically – the number of asylum seekers fell sharply (mainly due to the decrease in the number of detained irregular immigrants in Slovakia). Another important factor explaining this tendency was the application of the Dublin Regulation and the Eurodac system. Since then, the situation has been relatively stable, and the refugee crisis did not influence the situation significantly. In 2015 the number of asylum applications was nearly the same (330 applications) as in 2014 (331 applications); the asylum was granted to 8 people and the subsidiary protection was granted to 41 persons in 2015 [Ministry of Interior of the SR 2016].

3. Labour migrants. The labour immigrants can be divided in two basic groups – immigrants coming from other Member States of the EU, and immigrants coming from the third countries. Traditionally, among nationals of other EU Member States Czech nationals have been on the top, followed by nationals of neighbouring countries, including nationals of Ukraine, who, in turn, traditionally occupy the first place among non-EU, so called third countries (see Table 1). The occupations of labour immigrants in Slovakia vary significantly, from high qualified managers (e.g. representatives of South Korean automotive industry), doctors, entrepreneurs, to ordinary workers.

4. Immigrants due to family reasons. Concerning this heterogeneous group, the original motivation to come to Slovakia could be not only permanent immigration, but e.g. study or work. It does not exclude immigrants who primary immigrated to marry Slovak partner. Immigrants from this group have usually better conditions for integration, compared with other immigrants (tab. 1).

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<sup>4</sup> This “boom” was caused by several factors. A link between the increase of asylum applications and developments in the field of illegal migration can be pointed out. According to Boris Divinský illegal migrants increasingly used (or abused) “*the liberal spirit of the asylum law*”, while their primary intention was not at all to apply for asylum [Divinský 2009: 74]. Foreigners who were detained or the administrative or judicial decision was issued on their expulsion tried to avoid the deportation by applying for some form of international protection. In this way they tried to legalize residence in Slovakia, in most cases only temporarily. It often happened that they left the territory of the SR before the final decision on asylum granting or refusal. In our opinion, this was the main reason why, despite a considerable number of applications, asylum was granted only to a small number of applicants.



In case of the EU Member States nationals, the figure in the table shows the number of registrations for residence; in case of the third country nationals, this figure is the sum of granted temporary, permanent, and tolerated residence permits, while, in our opinion, the number of permanent residence permits in this table gives the best information on numbers of immigrants (without immigrants with

Table 1. Home countries of regular immigrants in 2011-2015  
and the number of residence permits valid for 31 December 2015 (the first 15 States)

2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	Residence permits	Temporary	Permanent	Tolerated
CZ	CZ	CZ	CZ	UA	10 706	7297	3365	44
RO	HU	HU	UA	CZ	9927			
UA	UA	UA	HU	HU	7593			
HU	RO	RO	RO	RO	6573			
PL	PL	PL	PL	RS	5528	4988	522	18
RS	RS	DE	RS	PL	5333			
DE	DE	RS	DE	DE	4255			
RU	RU	RU	RU	RU	3532	1814	1711	7
VN	VN	AT	IT	IT	2458			
AT	AT	IT	AT	VN	2307	626	1641	40
BG	IT	VN	VN	AT	2257			
CN	CN	CN	GB	CN	2134	798	1334	2
IT	BG	GB	BG	GB	1835			
KR	KR	BG	FR	BG	1757			
FR	GB	KR	KR	FR	1328			

Source: Statistical yearbooks of the Bureau of the Border and Aliens Police [Ministry of Interior of the SR 2011-2015].

Slovak citizenship). Recent statistical data show, that the most numerous foreigners from the third countries in the Slovak Republic according their nationality include Ukrainians, Russians, Vietnamese, Chinese, and Serbs, and the most numerous foreigners from other EU Member States are the Czechs, Hungarians, Romanians, Poles and Germans.

It is clear that the “group” of immigrants residing in Slovakia is very heterogeneous. Prevailing notion about society sees communities as coherent homogeneous groups with specific characteristics which make the community unique. These imaginations introducing migrants as substantially different and extraneous come from the idea of cohesive society where “we all know each other”. According to

Christian Joppke and Ewa Morawska [2003: 3] this idea “rests on the premise of an already integrated, bounded society, which faces the risk of disintegration and unbinding due to immigration.” The underlying picture is that of a society composed of domestic individuals and groups (as the antipode to “immigrants”), which are “integrated” (normatively by a consensus and organizationally by a state). Postclassical sociology, even before the arrival of globalization, has shown that such a society does nowhere exist, except in the imagination of some (especially political) actors. This is not to deny, invoking William I. Thomas, that this imagination is real in its consequences. However, an academically more adequate picture of modern society is that of a multiplicity of autonomous and interdependent “fields” (Pierre Bourdieu) or “systems” (Niklas Luhmann), which engage actors only in specific respects, never in their totality. Culture is not uniform, is formed as different subcultures.

Likewise, Slovak monolithic culture does not exist. The Slovak society consists of variety of microcultures and different lifestyles. Slovakia is not exclusively the country of Slovaks. We can hardly talk about pure Slovak culture because over the centuries this territory was influenced by different cultures, while facing various migratory flows. But there is a lack of objective information and deep knowledge about cultural diversity and migration in Slovakia. The public discussion on this topic is missing or the discussions are simplistic, often full of prejudices [Hlinčíková, Filadelfiová 2010].

In the Central and Eastern Europe region we can also hardly talk about second or third generations of immigrants. This is particularly true for the immigrants from Asia and Africa. Consequently, the communities and networks of migrants are not highly developed by now, compared to the Western Europe countries. Only recently, on 28 May 2016, the first official association of Vietnamese from the province Nghe was established in Slovakia<sup>5</sup>. Associations of civil society are important actors by integration of immigrants [Gallová Kriglerová and Kadlečíková 2009]. To reinforce the presentation of ethnic and also religious minorities International Organisation for Migration (IOM) in Slovakia created the “Atlas of migrants’ communities”. In this case the term “community” describes the group of migrants who are divided by, or better said, who are allied according to their common country or region of origin or other common attribute specific for this group, such as the language, religion, etc. The most numerous communities of migrants from the third countries in this atlas comprise Thai, Ukrainian, Cuban, Korean, Chinese, Serbian, and Vietnamese communities as national communities,

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<sup>5</sup> From approx. 5000 Vietnamese in Slovakia, 200-300 come from this province, [www.aktuality.sk/clanok/342238/ziju-medzi-nami-slovaci-z-vietnamu-zakladaju-prvy-krajansky-spolok](http://www.aktuality.sk/clanok/342238/ziju-medzi-nami-slovaci-z-vietnamu-zakladaju-prvy-krajansky-spolok) [accessed 29.05.2016].

African and Latino communities as regional communities, and Islamic community representing the only religious community among immigrants, so far.

With respect to the numbers of immigrants, ethnic groups of immigrants would not probably be the first to mention when talking about ethnic minorities in Slovakia. The first to mention would be traditional or “old” national minorities. Let’s not forget the fact that all discussions about migrants are directly tied to, or at least influenced by the status of traditional or “old” minorities in Slovakia, first of all by the level of integration of Roma minority. We will deal with this issue closer in the third part.

#### **4. The causes of anti-immigrant attitudes in Slovakia**

Each particular state has its own approach to immigration which varies throughout the history and reflects individual experiences. Richard W. Mansbach and Edward Rhodes [2007] point out three factors that are important in determining the capacity and the inclination of states to tolerate multiple identities and to deal with them non-violently. These three factors are historical timing, regime type, and basis for institutional legitimacy. Concerning the first factor the authors say that states whose institutional capacity developed ahead of national identity seem to have had less difficulty accommodating identity politics peacefully. In their opinion, one of the reasons is that such states have source of legitimacy that predates and co-exists with national identity – for example, a historic or emotional tie to particular state institutions or symbols not explicitly linked to national membership. In connection with the second factor authors claim that national states based on liberal democracy promote tolerance and allow considerable autonomy to multiple identity groups, on the other hand the situation in authoritarian states is very different. One of the effects of “relaxed” attitude toward identity in liberal democratic states, so long as loyalty to the state was not undermined, were lower demands on the ability of states to control the population and also the ability to attract talents from abroad. The third factor influences the attitude towards identities in dependence on the basis for its internal legitimacy, which can be different to nationalism, for example it can be based on representation of particular class or religion. The authors claim that for such states the politicisation of national identity may represent a challenge to state authority.

Prevailing factor, cultural, political or psychological described above, can also determine the attitude toward immigrants and willingness to their acceptance. In other words, the tolerance for different identity or the performance of identity politics depends on the manner in which nation is constructed. Nations which are



historically most homogenous and which base their citizenship on blood principle often tend to a very strict and conservative approach toward immigrants. Linguistically, culturally or religiously based nations are able to accept others more easily. Different approach can be seen in states ethnically heterogeneous where principle of citizenship allows its members wide freedom of language, religion and culture. Therefore acceptance of foreigners in such nations is obvious until it threatens the state itself. In the political nation the citizenship has more significant political role than the ethnical identity. In this sense, political nations often include several ethnical groups and such nations are characterized by higher level of cultural heterogeneity [Mansbach, Rhodes 2007: 443]. As it seems, Slovakia will be situated on a different pole of the spectrum. Although ethno-cultural diversity of the Slovakia is one of the highest within the Central European region [Filadelfiová, Hlinčíková 2010: 141], Slovak Constitution, as well as many of the policies, laws and institutions are considerably ethnocentric. In this place we would like to quote from the basic strategic document of the Slovak migration policy<sup>6</sup>: “The basic criterion applicable to the acceptance of foreigners within the controlled economic migration is their potential for the development of the Slovak economy and society while preferring those migrants who have the qualifications and competencies necessary to satisfy the lasting demand for shortage professions on the national labour market with an emphasis on culturally related countries” [Migration policy... 2011: 6]. Also Michal Vašečka [2008] claims that the process of national self-determination in Central and Eastern European (CEE) countries has been more ethnic and culturally driven than civic and territorial: “The salience of ethnic component in constructing nationhood among CEE is, seemingly, the critical factor why these states are not ready to fully accept the cultural other as equal members – the other may be national minorities or new immigrant groups” [Vašečka 2008: 7]. The author expresses the view that the post-modern CEE nations should re-define their ethnicized identities to identities shaped by constitutional patriotism, democratic values, human rights, and the rule of law. This situation in Slovakia and in other post-socialist countries is according to Kymlicka [2007: 192] specific compared to Western countries. The Western countries, according to him, had better cope with the challenges of ethnic diversity of their indigenous minorities and rarely use securitization strategies to their demands. They do not justify a restriction of normal negotiations and ordinary democratic processes and procedures. They are part of “normal politics”, even in those cases when these minorities question the legitimacy of the state (as in the case of the Catalans in

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<sup>6</sup> The Slovak Government adopted the Migration policy of the Slovak Republic with the perspective until the year 2020 in 2011; in 2014, the new Integration Policy of the Slovak Republic was adopted, and in 2015 the National strategy for human rights protection and promotion in the Slovak Republic.

Spain and Scots in the UK). Kymlicka claims that the main reason is that these minorities do not have the strong protectionist home state posing a potential threat to the majority. The opposite is true in post-communist countries, where (“old”) ethnic minorities can be understood as “minoritized majorities”, having in the past the status of majority (e.g. Hungarians in Slovakia) and they were inscribed in historical memory with their hegemonic practices (e.g. magyarization of the Slovaks) [Kymlicka 2007: 187; Rouet, Rošteková 2013: 36].

Though the overall number of foreigners in Slovakia is increasing, the country is generally described as the state with relatively low share of immigrants within population. Despite this fact Slovakia is the country with more anti-immigrant sentiment than on average in the EU [MIPEX 2015]. The results of existing research in this area showed a rather negative image of Slovakia as the country with rather restrictive, non-inclusive policies, hostile and xenophobic attitudes towards immigrants among the public, generally too conservative society, and intolerant towards “otherness” [e.g. Vašečka 2009, Hlinčíková, Filadelfiová 2010]. We could identify following areas of possible origins of this situation: psychological, historical, and socio-political. It needs to be stressed that all causes of the situation are interconnected and that the current situation in Slovakia is very likely “predestined” by a combination of all three factors mentioned above. Also, we do not exclude there is even wider range of impacts.

Firstly, social psychologists claim, that the recognition of the specific characteristics of the own (ethnic) group, and the perception of differences in characteristics of other (ethnic) groups is natural, it is not negative itself. It turns to be negative in the moment, when the perception of differences develops into unwelcomed acts based on this perception of “otherness”, in form of hostility, discrimination or even aggressive behaviour towards members of other ethnic groups<sup>7</sup>.

Most likely we cannot find an individual without any prejudices, prejudices towards ethnic groups including<sup>8</sup>. On the other side, individuals rarely admit their prejudices. We can disclose prejudices of other people very easily, but we see our prejudices towards other people as “views” and “objective evaluation”. Hostile attitudes towards ethnic groups and stereotypes are very generally explained by the

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<sup>7</sup> Negative attitudes expand into hostile behaviour of individuals or groups mostly when social climate is beneficiary for such a behaviour. If there is hostile attitude, based on ethnic or racial stereotypes, prevailing in majority of the society, then hostile acts of individuals or groups probably will not be condemned, punished or eliminated.

<sup>8</sup> There is the same principle for the formation of attitudes towards ethnic groups as in case of attitudes in general: the attitudes towards ethnic groups are created in the process of socialization of an individual, influenced by individual experience, social learning, and also by institutions [Oravcová 2012: 155-156]. According to several authors, for the formation of the attitude towards ethnic groups it is necessary to achieve a certain level of ethnic self-awareness, to distinguish own ethnic community from others.

fact that in new situations, when meeting somebody new, different and unknown, an individual feels insecure, distressed, and in danger. Individuals have the tendency to reduce these negative feelings by using given schemes and patterns for behaviour, e.g. using images of members of ethnic group [Oravcová 2012: 155]. In this connection it is necessary to stress that the majority of autochthonous population in Slovakia lacks personal experience with immigration and immigrants. Various surveys confirm a better attitude towards migrants among individuals who meet immigrants on regular basis (e.g. at work or as neighbours) than by those who can see immigrants only on TV.

Negative attitudes towards “different” can be connected with the desire for a clear definition of the community – defining of who is “inside” and who is “outside”. Several authors consider this principle as a fundamental moment of integration of the community and on the other hand, exclusion of those who do not belong to the community. Petr Mareš and Tomáš Sirovátka [2004: 58] state that “the process of social exclusion can be seen almost as a universal cultural mechanism”. “Excluded and marginalized were not only those who endangered the order and identity of the collectivity directly by their action (direct intrusion into their norms and taboos) or by thought (by questioning its values and standards), but also those who as ‘foreigners’ questioned and even threatened the collectivity by the very otherness of their existence: heretics, apostates, and marginals. Social exclusion has always constituted for human collectivities one of the possible mechanisms of formation, renewal and strengthening of their identity and mechanism of reducing social and even existential uncertainty of their members. Especially in times of crisis, when the key social institutions were weakened” [Mareš, Sirovátka 2004].

Secondly, from historical point of view the territory of today’s Slovakia and people living here are marked by developments where migration has played an important role. Even the ancient Slavs, from whom the Slovak nationality is deduced, were immigrants. According to Mária Holubová and Radovan Gura [2011], the location of settlements was crucial by shaping Slovak identity, since during the Great migrations of people<sup>9</sup> they were located directly at the crossroads. These authors also point out that later on this space was “hermetically sealed”, so Slovak ancestors did not have many chances to meet the “otherness”, and thus had no opportunity to accept it. In connection to historical immigration flows influencing the territory of today’s Slovakia we would like to add that not all of the incoming ethnic groups and nations were peaceful. On the contrary, many of them were conquerors who robbed the property, raped the women and stole the children,

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<sup>9</sup> The period between the fourth and seventh Century when the ethnic migrations in Europe were conducted.

and this image is still alive for example through Slovak literature which children learn at schools<sup>10</sup>.

In modern history, there are various very important waves of emigration – to Americas, Western Europe or to the neighbouring Czech Republic. Nevertheless, it seems that what prevails currently is rather ahistorical perception based on essentialization of “Slovak nation” and such a view of history that reconstructs the ethnical history of a nation even before the nation actually existed. This enforces the static definition of the nation – the view in which the formation of the Slovak nation has been completed and the new contributions are no longer desirable. On the other hand, the Slovak citizens in recent years are increasingly (although unevenly) confronted with cultural and ethnic diversity and, as research shows [e.g. Vašečka 2009; EC 2014], they are not only negative towards it. Also, after the outbreak of the crisis we could have witnessed many activities among general public in Slovakia to help refugees and migrants, e.g. collections of clothes or non-governmental organisations sending volunteers to crisis areas.

In our opinion, the socio-political factors are the most important factors influencing the current situation concerning attitudes towards immigrants in Slovakia. Before the outbreak of the current migration and refugee crisis, “the overall migration domain is rather a marginal theme for Slovak politicians and public. This is reflected in rather short and vague parts on migration policy in electoral programs of main political parties” [Kodaj, Dubová 2013]; with the crises the situation has changed significantly. Nevertheless, the frames for the discussion about migration were not established and thus the sudden interest in the topic marked by dominance of alarming and anti-immigrant rhetoric by politicians could have had stronger influence on citizens. The popular prejudices such as “migrants take our jobs” and “migrants spread diseases” were refuted in western immigration countries many times, but not in Slovakia.

Another important occasion was the parliamentary election campaign or generally the pre-election period. The refugee crisis started less than one year before the parliamentary elections in Slovakia. In that period, the government was formed by one party Smer – social democracy. Its leader, Prime Minister Robert Fico did not previously make a comment about the topic of migration at all, with the exception of Slovakia entering Schengen in 2007, but during the refugee crisis he intensively commented on everything connected with migration and refugees<sup>11</sup>. Similarly, the leader of opposition liberal party SaS and member of European parliament Richard Sulík intensively commented on the subject. Of course, the

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<sup>10</sup> The good example is the poem by Samo Chalupka “Turčín Poničan” which describes the raids of the Turks.

<sup>11</sup> During the celebration of 71<sup>st</sup> anniversary of Slovak national uprising he dedicated more than a half of the time to the topic of migration.



difference is that Prime Minister had more space in the media, Richard Sulík, on the other hand, used alternative media space (blogs), and participated in different public discussions. The topic of migration was actively used in the campaign also by parties we would expect it from. Firstly, it was the nationalist party SNS whose leader Andrej Danko spoke about islamization already in 2011, and secondly, the extremist Kotleba – ĽSNS whose leader Marian Kotleba (former neo-nazi leader) used, according to the expectations, far more radical rhetoric. The main difference between him and other “standard” politicians was in the fact that Kotleba spoke openly about zero migration. The difference was also in forums – he preferred to speak “in the street” on anti-immigration demonstrations. We can see that the anti-immigrant rhetoric was adopted by the majority of politicians (different ideological positions and different government position and voters’ preferences).

The truth is, the Slovak political scene in general agreed with the basic attitudes of Slovakia towards the problem and its solution. In September 2015, the Slovak parliament adopted the resolution refusing the quotas proposed by the European commission. The resolution was supported almost unanimously: by 115 out of 119 members of parliament. The voices emphasizing different than only a security view were much weaker, represented mainly by Slovak president Andrej Kiska, by the leader of party Most-Híd Béla Bugár, or by Monika Flašíková Beňová – member of European parliament for the party Smer-SD.

Generally, the political dynamics is significantly created by the interaction of politicians and citizens (better said voters). Politicians respond to real or pre-supposed preferences of their voters in order to gain votes. On the other hand, politicians can influence those preferences and attitudes. This second choice is of course more risky, as the politicians may never be sure about their success. Slovak politicians, mainly the Prime Minister Robert Fico and his party colleagues, have chosen the first and easier way to respond to current refugee crisis. Anti-immigrant rhetoric as a politics of governing by fear and enemy building has been proved to be a successful political strategy in the past (concerning autochthonous minorities of Roma and Hungarians) and shortly before (in 2013) the success of this political strategy was shown on regional level where Marian Kotleba (leader of extreme right party Kotleba-ĽSNS) has won the chair of leader in regional government in Banská Bystrica region. We can guess that this has led to a far more radical rhetoric used by Fico and other politicians towards the refugees and immigrants in general. It is to be said that if there had not been the success of extreme right, the basic opinions and attitudes of Fico would have probably been the same, however, maybe they would not have been expressed in such a radical, populist, and emotional way. The kind of rhetoric he used was close to invoking the “moral panics”. He used many exaggerations, metaphors and emotionally coloured terms.



He was closer to the concept of “threat” than to the technocratic concept of possible “risk” connected with migration.

Arne Niemann and Natalie Schmidhäussler [2012: 16-17] emphasize that the threat is more concrete and needs the specification of its origin and to adopt measures aimed at immediate removal of the threat due to its uncontrollability, while risk does not have to be concretized that much and usually it is defined as manageable. In addition, the risk is only predicted while threat presupposes the former real evidence of its existence. This evidence was mostly taken from abroad – from bad experiences with marginal immigrant communities as sources of radicalisation and violence, but mostly the concurrent incidents – like terrorist attacks in Paris and Brussels, and with violent attacks on women in Cologne in Germany. Using the concept of threat with a need for an urgent action is in “normal” situation typical for far right parties and politicians who see the current state as alarming. The label of current state as “crisis” (not only by Slovak politicians) enabled easily to adopt such rhetoric also for mainstream politicians. The anti-immigration attitudes has been defined as “rational”, politicians referred to themselves as those “telling the truth and not obscuring it” on the other hand the expressions of solidarity were marked as something irresponsible, even dangerous. The Prime Minister Fico said during the TV discussion: “Mr. President is not responsible for anything, thus it is easy for him to talk like that. If something happens, he will be the first who will criticise the government that we did not handle the problem”<sup>12</sup>. This way the anti-immigrant attitudes have been legitimized as something natural and rational.

## 5. Conclusions

Two years ago, hardly someone would have assumed that immigration would be one of the most important topics during Slovak presidency in the Council of the European Union. Before the outbreak of the migration and refugee crisis, immigration had not been “a big issue” in Slovakia. Slovakia is not a traditional country of immigration; it is the country with very low share of immigrants within population, in fact. The Slovak public has become aware of the crisis more or less from the media, because migrants and refugees were using the routes outside the Slovak territory, heading to the other EU Member States.

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<sup>12</sup> <https://dennikn.sk/344942/fico-strasi-getami-ina-vlada-by-sem-navozila-tisicky-migrantov> [accessed 29.05.2016].

The number of detected irregular immigrants in Slovakia increased in 2015<sup>13</sup>, though in Slovakia we definitely cannot speak about real crisis due to migration flows, in contrast to its neighbours Hungary or Austria. The more surprising is the way the Slovak public has responded to the crisis, and even more striking are the reactions of political representatives in Slovakia. We would probably find hidden or open forms of intolerance, discrimination, and hostility towards immigrants in every country, but in Slovakia the situation is quite controversial, in our opinion. On one hand Slovakia is proud of being democratic state and the member of the EU. This membership includes the respect for human rights and, of course, to observe international commitments. In accordance with this it should be no problem to accept immigrants of distinct cultures or religions. But the reality looks very different. Slovakia welcomes, according to its official documents and representatives, only immigrants from “culturally related countries”. For this approach, Slovakia has been criticized by the majority of the EU Member States, likewise as for the rejection of the compulsory refugee quotas that was interpreted as a lack of solidarity.

We were trying to identify the causes of these long-term trends, and we could find the roots in history, psychology, as well as in the current political situation. Soon after the outbreak of the crisis, the parliamentary elections took place in Slovakia. As it seems, some politicians have tried to use this sensitive issue to win additional votes. Nevertheless, we see the real cause of the prevailing negative attitudes towards immigrants in the perception of own nationhood which is ethnocentric. In the face of the reality of demographic situation this approach will probably be untenable in close future.

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<sup>13</sup> In 2015, the number of detained irregular immigrants was 2535; in 2014 1304 persons; in 2013 1091 persons [Ministry of Interior of the SR 2011-2015].

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## **Słowackie postawy wobec imigrantów w kontekście trwającego kryzysu migracyjnego w Europie**

**Streszczenie.** Artykuł poświęcony jest wpływowi, jaki trwający w Europie kryzys migracyjny wywiera na Słowację. Słowacja jest krajem o niewielkim odsetku imigrantów i uchodźców. Przed wybuchem obecnego kryzysu temat imigrantów miał marginalne znaczenie polityczne. A jednak reakcje na kryzys migracyjny okazały się zadziwiająco intensywne, i to zarówno w szerokich kręgach społeczeństwa, jak i wśród jego politycznych przedstawicieli. Na podstawie danych statystycznych oraz wyników badań naukowych próbuje się ustalić przyczyny dość negatywnych postaw wobec imigrantów, jakie obserwuje się na Słowacji. Odślonięte zostaje zakorzenienie tych postaw w spuściźnie historycznej, czynnikach społeczno-psychologicznych oraz aktualnej sytuacji politycznej.

**Słowa kluczowe:** imigranci, uchodźcy, mniejszości etniczne, kryzys migracyjny, postawy, Słowacja