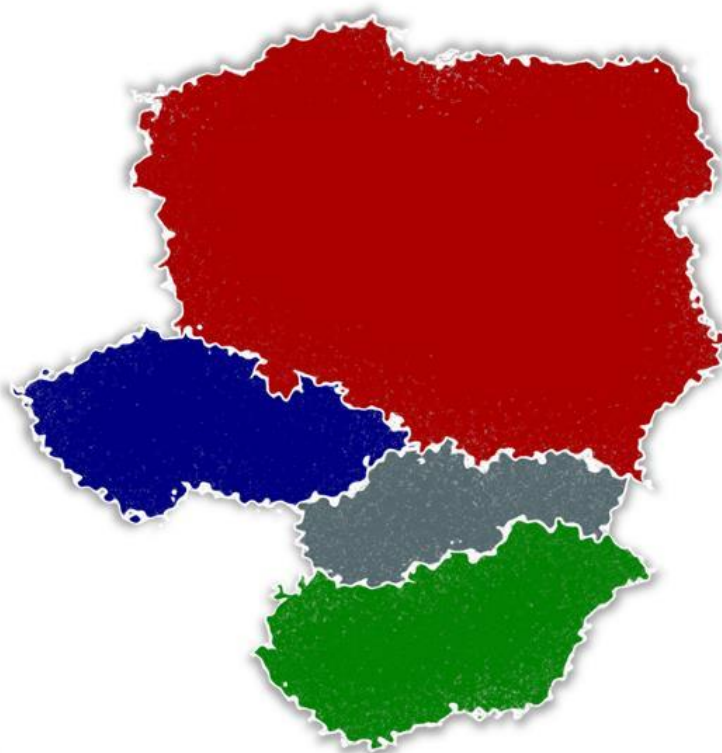




THE VISEGRAD MOSAIC

ETHNIC COMMUNITIES IN THE VISEGRAD GROUP



world-changing

words



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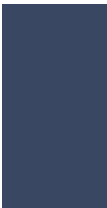
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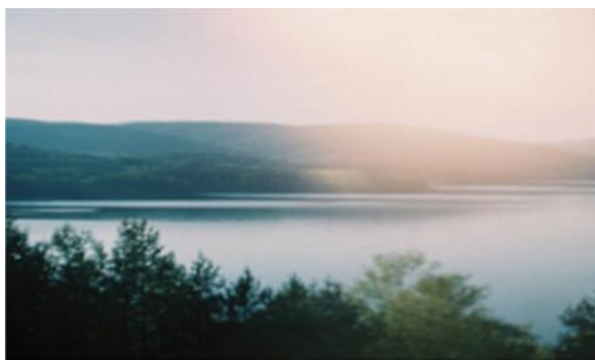


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During the last Slovak population census in 2011, 33,482 people claimed Rusyns nationality, making them the third biggest ethnic minority in Slovakia and the biggest community of Rusyns in Europe. Unlike other minority groups, we do not hear a lot about them. However, they have been living in Eastern Slovakia near the Polish-Ukrainian border roughly from the 14th century, taking care of the pastures and woods of Carpathian Mountains in a region that history knows as Zakarpattia. That is also why they often get associated with Slovak highlander community of Gorals, literally Highlanders. Without their own state and with disputable distinctiveness of their own ethnicity (mainly from the side of Ukraine), they are a neglected minority, at least from the point of view of the popular mainstream media.

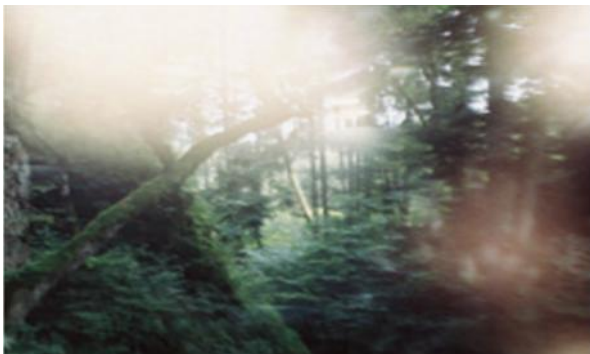


Nová Sedlica and Runina are two Slovak villages located exactly on the Polish-Ukrainian border, set in the national park Poloniny, one of the last places in Europe, where you can escape electronic smog and enjoy a starry night in the wild nature. Part of the Eastern Slovakia, Nová Sedlica and Runina, is also a region suffering heavily from the lack of job opportunities resulting in high unemployment

rate coming up to 14.66% in the Snina region in December 2016, migration of young people to cities and aging of the population. They are sometimes also called by the media the villages in the end on the world. Last summer, after three days of hiking in the mountains and sleeping in the woods, the author of this article got the opportunity to visit both these villages and get to know the situation from the local's perspective.

Getting to know the locals is not an easy thing, however. Surviving the dangers of the wild nature was, in comparison, a piece of cake because Poloniny is known for the large population of wild animals, especially wolves and bears. Locals prefer to speak in their own Rusyn language, making it hard, if not impossible, to understand them and are naturally a bit suspicious about tourists, since they are still a rare sight in this area. Life in both villages is centered around a local pub. And that is exactly the place, where we were headed, a small pub in Runina, which also functions as a bed and breakfast. It is so small that it does not even have a name, nor does it need one, there is literally no other place to go. At first it seemed we would not get lucky, but after a beer or two, locals were overtaken by curiosity and joined us in conversation. We ended up having a chat with the owner of the pub and two of his friends, regular customers, who work in the nearby wood processing factory and have just come from a shift. In the region with high unemployment rate, most of the people work in the wood processing factory or the state service, mostly as policemen due to

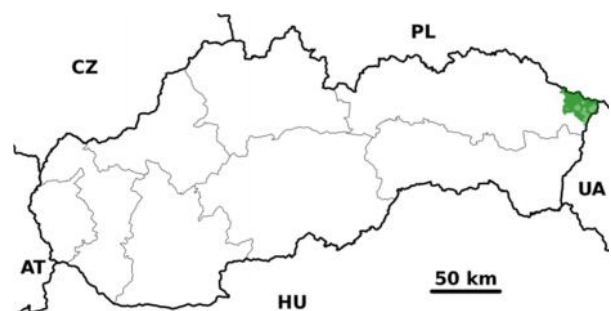
the illegal immigration from Ukraine. Crossing the border is very easy in the area, as we have experienced ourselves, when we accidentally crossed the Polish border, but it should not be taken lightly. Crossing the Ukraine border is a completely different thing and can cause problems even for us Slovaks. During the peak of the Ukraine crisis, the unemployed Rusyns were said to be smuggling Ukrainians to Slovakia through the woods. We need to be careful, just like the locals say. Rusyns are still very compassionate towards the Ukrainians, despite having problems in the past. Not to mention that there are still people living in Runina and Nová Sedlica claiming the Ukrainian nationality. They are also closely connected through common history, culture and language, resembling the relationship between Slovaks and Czechs.



It is hard to find young people around here, most of them have already left for bigger cities like nearby Snina, Prešov or Košice. Our new local friends are also older, around fifty years old, and have children living in one of the mentioned cities or even in Bratislava or abroad. They do not complain, it feels natural for them, if they were still young, they would probably have gone themselves. The only real bother, it would seem, is the fact that the government does not really give funds to the national park. It is a missed opportunity, since it can provide for new jobs and really start the tourism industry. It is already working in



Poland, and it is a real pity, that the Slovak government does not show more interest in this issue. It is obvious from our talk, that the vast majority of people living in this area are Rusyns and are proud about it. They do not claim any benefits, resulting from their situation as the ethnic minority; they are Rusyns but also Slovak citizens, which they make clear during the interview. They do not beg for help, but they feel like they can offer much more, if only they got a little more attention. Even the maintenance of the national park is mostly done by the volunteers, which on one hand makes it even more attractive for the tourists seeking authentic adventures, but on the other hand it is a wasted opportunity nevertheless.



Poloniny National Park in Slovakia

The locals strongly believe that tourism can solve a lot, if not most of the problems they are facing right now. Tourism industry can provide for new job opportunities for the youngsters, so they would not need to move elsewhere, which would also stop the radical decline in population and generally make the area more attractive to live in. Poloniny have a rich history, dating from the 14th century highlander community to the partisan fights against the Nazis during the WWII. Beautifully decorated Pravoslavlic wooden churches and cemeteries are also one of the attractions that hint at the unique cultural background of this place.

This area is very closely connected with the Rusyns, their culture, history and ways of life. One can also call it unique and authentic. It is a pity that we do not care more about Rusyns culture, which can be truly enriching. Rusyns are really quite an unlucky minority; they are not the biggest ones or particularly problematic and they live in the end of the world, as is often said in the media. They deserve our attention and our help nevertheless. After all they have lived alongside the Slovaks for several centuries and even though their problems are not sensational news, their lives and struggles are definitely newsworthy.



*Wild nature of the Poloniny national park and Starina, the biggest drinking water reservoir in Europe
(Photos by Michal Majerník and the author of the article)*

Białystok is a city located in the north-eastern Poland. Population of the city was estimated by the Central Statistical Office of Poland in 2014 as 295,459. Nowadays in Białystok there is a big and noticeable society of people coming from Belarus. International atmosphere of Białystok has its roots in the past. The city is known as a place where Ludwik Lejzer Zamenhof was born in 1859. He believed that a new interlanguage could facilitate the process of making world free from wars and conflicts. There is a story about Ludwik Zamenhof growing up in the intercultural and multinational society of Białystok and its impact on his ideas. Zamenhof created the new language called “Esperanto” which was thought to be an effective way of communication between different nations. The language has



very simple grammar and contains words mostly borrowed from the European languages. Some users say it sounds similar to Portuguese. In Białystok nowadays there are organised courses of Esperanto. They are free and available for everybody. Esperanto community organises a lot of social events and increases the good attitude towards users of foreign languages.

The history of Esperanto gives an interesting perspective towards the multiculturalism of Białystok. The coexistence of different cultures helped the city to build the unique identity. Articles and books about pre-war Białystok claim that a lot of different languages could have been heard in the streets and it was obvious to meet people of different origin in everyday life.

In the end of the 19th century in Białystok there was around 63% of Jews. After the World War II the population is smaller. Currently in the city there is 97% Polish people, 2,5% Belarusian and 0,5% of minorities including Russians, Lipka Tatars, Ukrainians and Romani. Białystok is not that international as it was in the past but the Belarusian minority is still visible. There are a lot of Belarusian students. While visiting the dormitory of Białystok University of Technology it's highly possible to hear the Belarusian language. There is a lot of examples showing the regular collaboration between Poland and Belarus. University of Białystok in cooperation with Yanka Kupala State University of Grodno and also Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin had organised the School of German Law. In the first term students had the course of German

legal language. While in the second term there were seminars about the German law organised by professors coming from Humboldt-Universität in Berlin. In the recent edition there were four seminars. Moreover on 4–7 May 2017 the trip to Berlin took place. Students prepared presentations about Polish and Belarusian penal law connected with the topic of environment and compared it with the German law. They visited also the Ministry of Justice where they had lectures. On the next day participants of the trip went to Deutsches Historisches Museum (the German Museum of History) and to Bundestag. Such initiatives make integration during nations easier. Polish and Belarusian students came together to the foreign university and fulfilled the project

together. Cooperation is not only a matter of politicians but also the projects made by citizens. The Belarusian minority is one of the largest in Poland. Most of Belarusian people live exactly in Podlaskie Voivodeship in Białystok.

Poland is rather a homogenic society. The inhabitants mostly have a Polish citizenship while the minorities are almost invisible. They are assimilating with Polish society and they also speak Polish. In Poland exists for example the community of Vietnamese people but they live usually in their small groups. The situation of Belarusians in Białystok is interesting because they live as a part of Polish society, they speak both Polish and Belarusians languages and they participate in the numerous events.



Not talking about Hungarians living in Hungary there are Hungarians communities with significant population living outside the borders of Hungary. It basically started with the tragic event that every Hungarian recalls as a trauma: the Trianon Peace Treaty. Lots of people think it was the most unfair peace treaty ever signed and they might be right. A single treaty, that dramatically changed the life of millions, according to which Hungary lost exactly 2/3 of its territory (72%) was signed on the 4th of June, 1920 ending World War I.

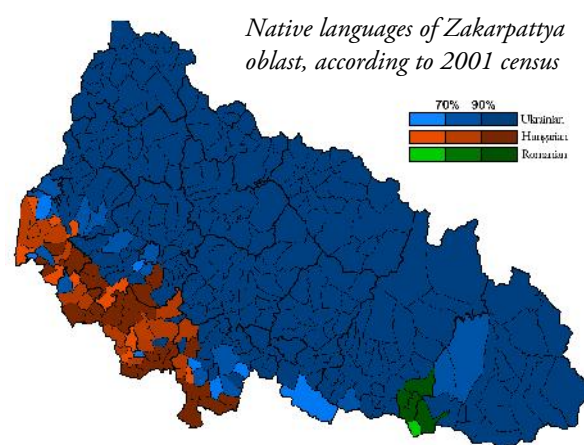
Neighbouring countries benefited a lot from the tragedy of Hungary. Romania took the lead as it got 102,000 km² and 5,265,000 people out of which there were a huge Hungarian population and also a Romanian one. Yugoslavia received 4,122,000 people in 63,000 km². Czechoslovakia received the same amount of land with a bit less residents, precisely 3,576,000. At last but not least Austria was given “only” 400 km² and 358,000 people.

Officially the new borders were about to create a one-nation state from the previous ethnically mixed one but the borders eventually were not set according to the original aim. It is true that Hungarians got absolute majority status but there were loads of Hungarians separated from their kin-state and suddenly they had to face with a totally new language, culture and a government that instantly wanted to assimilate them. Roughly 3.5 million Hungarians got into minority status sometimes even blocked from their families.

In September, 2016 I had the chance to visit one of the separated parts under a project called

InBetween financed by the Visegrad Fund. I had the opportunity to meet some representatives of the Hungarian minority living in Transcarpathia which is now part of Ukraine (firstly added to Czechoslovakia). I was even allowed to conduct four interviews with elderly people who were born there and could provide me interesting life stories.

I assume that Transcarpathia is a very interesting place for researchers of the same interest as I have. During the 20th century this territory belonged to six different states due to political reasons and the status of the region was changed eight times between 1867 and 1991. Each and every time the peoples living there faced a new authority. They had to adapt to the new governing system and accept the nation-in-power's culture.



The region has mixed population concerning linguistic, ethnical and denominational points of view. Today Rusyns/Ukrainians make up the absolute majority. The biggest minority group is the Hungarian mainly settled in the southern parts, whereas there are some Slovaks in the western parts of the region. Romanians mainly dwell along the Romanian-Ukrainian border.

Germans were considered to be a significant minority group only till the 18th century only. The Roma population has been constantly increasing just like in every country in the region. Censuses did not indicate Jews as a separate ethnic group but they were added to the one whose language they were speaking – mainly to Hungarians or Germans.

Regarding religion there are five denominations living side-by-side in the region. Ukrainians mainly belong to the Orthodox Church but there are some Greek Catholics as well. Hungarians are scattered belonging to the Protestant, Roman Catholic or Greek Catholic Church. Russians and Romanians are Orthodox while Slovaks outstandingly are Evangelists. Roma people are Protestants too as they live mainly next to Hungarians. The last one is the Jewish community having been present in huge numbers till 1944. This year carries disastrous events. The Nazi Germany obliged Hungarian authorities to create and close the Jews to ghettos and then deport them to concentration camps. Three-fourths of the Subcarpathian Jewish community disappeared. Due to the constantly changing ruling authorities in the past 110 years the official language was modified six times. Four languages were introduced, some more than just once. The original one was Hungarian until 1918; then it was set again between 1938 and 1944. Slovak was spoken between 1918 and 1938, Ukrainian from 1991 until now. Russian was taught for the longest time (1945–1991).

Hungarians live mainly in the Western part of the region. In 1910, before the Trianon Peace Treaty, the census counted 185,000 Hungarians. The last census was held in 2001 according to which the number of Hungarians in the region dropped to 151,533 and it is

constantly decreasing. There are 114 settlements with Hungarian residents out of which 78 gather them as a majority there. They created “islands” for themselves and the main centres are Ungvár, Munkács and Beregszász.

The region had two attempts to gain independence and receive autonomy with Beregszász as the proposed centre. For the first time in 1939 did they declare it was an independent state and later in 1944 as well. Neither of these attempts was recognised by the international public.

From the 1990s Ukraine faced several economic problems which lead to a crisis in the region. Due to the worsening living conditions and lack of workplaces people of Ukraine, even Transcarpathians, have started to migrate. Target countries are mainly Germany, Czech Republic, Slovakia, USA and most commonly Hungary. 85% of Hungarians (30,000) who decided to leave the country chose to settle down in Hungary. Most of them are youngsters as the higher educational opportunities for Hungarians in Transcarpathia are very few. There is only one institution which offers only courses in Hungarian: Ferenc Rákóczi II. Transcarpathian Hungarian College in Beregszász.

While there, I met several old-aged Hungarians and they kept telling me about their children or grandchildren who had already left the country and find a better life in Hungary. As I experienced it, none of the Hungarians there have lost nor denied their identity. Even if they face discrimination sometimes, because of their nationality, they strictly insist on their roots, traditions and mother language. They are also very enthusiastic about gaining back their Hungarian citizenship but it is a difficult issue as the Ukrainian government does not recognises dual citizenship.

The fact, that the Hungarian governances intervene – or at least try to affect its neighbours – for the protection of the Hungarian minorities in the Carpathian Basin, is based on that after Treaty of Trianon of 1920, 3.5 million people with Hungarian nationality were forced to live under the sovereignty of other states, and this number – despite of the constant decrease, what is due to constellation of various causes – was not lesser than 2.5 million in 2005. So these Hungarian communities of Central Europe were not formed by their natural development, or as a result of a social process, but by a political decision, what makes them a “forced community”. Since 1920, there were several answers in Hungary to manage this social trauma caused by the Treaty of Trianon. The first one was based on the revisionist and irredentist attitude of the shocked society (as well as of the political elite, taking advantage of this). Revisionism is a political aspiration, what aims to renegotiate an international agreement in a legal, peaceful way, so it is diplomatic and ready to compromise – while irredentism is a trend using more emotional and arbitrary arguments, and does not excludes the chance of using violence, in order to regain the lost territories. And although – as the times go by, for today – they became regional national minority communities with their own institutions and identity, this question is yet a sensitive part of the Hungarian identity, therefore the political life has to adjust with it. Thus, on certain issues, today’s Hungarian political life, regardless of party status, officially on one side.

Although before the democratic transformation the question of the Hungarian communities living beyond the Hungarian borders was suppressed by the dominant internationalist ideology, its relief and fall brings the chance to stand for their rights. Nándor Bárdi Hungarian academician separates three different kinds of strategies since the democratic transition followed by the different political parties. The concept of minority protection says that the key is the successful neighbour policy subordinated to the foreign policy, but beyond this it does not want to affect the internal issues of the Hungarian communities abroad, because – as it is an antinationalist idea – it does not want them to connect to or depend on the institutes of Hungarian state. The concept of unification of the nation is looking at the Hungarians as an integrated nation divided by artificial political boundaries, so its goal is to reinterpret them – not physically or by a revision of the boundaries, but in a qualitative way (e.g. the Schengen Area in the European Union). The third way is the concept of regionalisation, what would develop the particular Hungarian community as an autonomous unit or region, hoping that it helps to prepare them for the autonomy in a long term. At this point it worth to see that how the neighbouring majorities look at the Hungarian minorities is mostly depends on the ratio of the Hungarians. So in the case of Slovenia, Austria, Croatia and Ukraine the “Hungarian issue” is not a significant one, while in Serbia, Romania or Slovakia it is a question appears in the home affairs.

These are pointing at the fact, that after the Treaty of Trianon and the democratic transition of the region, the life of the Hungarian minorities belongs to two different national community: to Hungary “by heart”, and to the adjacent nation “by law”, so they are affected by the Hungarian national policy and the ethnic policy of the neighbours. Based on this, Nándor Bárdi points three different types of Hungarian communities in the region. He names the Hungarians of Austria and Slovenia as a diaspora, while in Ukraine and Serbia – because of the weakening of the local Hungarian intelligentsia – they are operating as a rural agricultural community. In Romania and Slovakia we can find a layered Hungarian community with an established system of institutions, so it can be called a fragment society – although between the two latter Hungarian minority, there is an important difference: the Hungarians in Slovakia became culturally and economically more integrated in the society of the majority, than the Hungarians of Transylvania.

And this is why it is hard to develop a uniform policy for the Hungarian communities abroad. Because of these facts, the Hungarian identity policy has to face the problem of “separate development”: there is no way to look at the Hungarian nation as a homogeneous. Although they were formed by a forced political decision instead of a natural social progress, for today it has been changed for them what it means “to be Hungarian”. As they live in different countries, subordinated by different policies, they had different (either good or bad) experiences, survival techniques, and visions of the future (or rather the lack of it). But there can be long-term solutions according to Nándor Bárdi and Balázs Ablonczy: for example the institutionalisation of the polycentric view of Hungary, a dense network of the regional NGOs, or disseminating the cultural knowledge between the societies of the region can lead to a future where it is not as hard disadvantage to belong to a Hungarian minority as today.



The state, which had liberals, conservatives, and nationalists was controlled by the Communist regime after the World War 2. Czechoslovakia entered the Warsaw Pact quickly and became part of the Eastern Bloc countries, under the influence of the Soviet Union. The severe economic troubles that began in the Eastern Bloc countries in 1953 also influenced the Czechoslovakia, and the government's harsh measures were reacted by the public. There were nationwide protests against the administration and the Soviet Union. However, protest demonstrations were suppressed by the Czechoslovakian Communist Party, which was supported by the USSR. As a consequence of the economic troubles, significant changes were made in the functioning of the Socialist Regime since 1963. Some of the trades such as tailoring, carpentry, barber, which is in the hands of the state, were left to the people by not registering anyone else. The censorship was lifted as a consequence of demonstrations and protests. Czechoslovak writers have begun to demand full freedom of press and elections. Reactions and requests have begun to increase.

On the 20th anniversary of Jan Masaryk, who is the founders of the country, the state experienced great student demonstrations. The students wanted academic freedom and were in demand for reform. Demonstrations across the country have begun to show the separation in the Communist Party and the pro-reform communist leader Alexander Duke was backed. Dubcek and his team came up with a program of action called "The Way of Socialisation of Czechoslovakia", which gives priority to human

rights and freedoms. The "operation program" was aimed at merging Socialism with democratic principles and creating a new political system. It was stated in the program that instead of a one-party socialist state administration, a new order would be set up by basic human rights and freedoms, such as the passing of multi-party political life, freedom of thought and expression, assembly and the right to form associations. While a completely different socialist state was founded in Czechoslovakia, the Soviet Union thought it could prevent these developments through negotiations. However, the suggestions and subsequent pressures on the negotiations were not enough to stop the change initiated by Czechoslovakia. After that, the Soviet Union began to accuse the Czechoslovakian government by being liberal and counter-revolutionary, which it could not convince through negotiations.

On August 20, 1968, the Soviet Union invaded Czechoslovakia with an army of 300,000, claiming it had endangered the Communist bloc. During the occupation of Czechoslovakia, Leonid Brezhnev, the First Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, tried to legitimise the occupation by putting forward a doctrine called by his own name, which is Brezhnev Doctrine. Accordingly, every communist party was not only responsible for its own people but for all socialist countries and for the whole world communist movement. Every socialist regime that forgot it was unilateral and counter-revolutionary. After the occupation of USSR, the people of

Czechoslovakia poured into the streets to protest the occupation but there was no significant armed resistance. Because, more recently, thousands of Hungarians were killed in the Soviet suppression movement in Hungary and many were deported because of such event, there was not much that the Czechoslovakian could do either.

As a conclusion, Alexander Dubcek and the prime minister of the reform government were arrested after the occupation and taken to Moscow and there, they were forced to sign a contract. After 6 days, Dubcek had to accept the occupation. Thus, the “humanistic communism” that started in Czechoslovakia was crushed under the pallets of Soviet tanks without being put into practice, killed 72 Czechs, Slovaks, and hundreds of wounded and many Czechs immigrated to another country. The Soviets did not immediately take Dubcek from the duty. First, the pro-reform communists are removed from the party and finally, Dubcek was disposed of. Thus, Czechoslovakia was literally turned into a “socialist republic” affiliated to the Soviet Union.



Regarding the ethnic driving force of the Prague Spring, the minirevolution was instituted by mostly Czech intellectuals and politicians leaving Slovaks seemingly not



interested in the reforms. The Soviets however had to introduce some reforms after the invasion in order to continue to control the country with minimum costs. The core of these reforms involved courting the Slovaks by reconstructing the country along federalist lines, creating a Slovak regional government in Bratislava and regularly appointing Slovak ministers in the federal government in Prague. As a consequence, the Czechs still held key political positions, but Slovaks were apparently becoming more loyal to their Communist rulers in return for their economic and political gains. During and after the Prague Spring, Slovak political aspirations were determined by the desire for larger autonomy and economic development in the Slovakian territories instead of driven by the desire to achieve more freedom and ensuring universal human right in Czechoslovakia. In this sense the Czechs had a vision of a reformed state having a focus on the rehumanisation of Marxism on a universalistic way, while they regarded Slovak preoccupation with national autonomy as provincial and anachronistic.

Due to these differences in political standpoints, Prague Spring was an important stepping stone in the slow but irreversible process in which the integrated economic and political system was gradually reconstructed to parallel Czech and Slovak national economic and political organisations.

Citizenship represents a bond between us and the state. The state gives us protection, it gives us a sense of security. And in return for that, we need to follow the rules and we have some duties towards the state.

We gain the citizenship right after birth; it is the first gift which we receive. And this present stays with us for the rest of our life. With citizenship, we are a part of some group and that signifies bigger chance of survival. And longing for surviving was with human creatures from the ancient times.

First signs

Ancient Greeks were first people who gave to this desire some kind of system because we can find in their construction of society some precursors of citizenship. All citizens could vote and participate in the public meetings, and all citizens were equals in front of the law. But the term “citizen” was created during the Enlightenment. If we wanted to know more about the history of the citizenship in the Czech Republic, we would go to the year 1918.

Citizen Czech in the History

The Czechoslovak Republic was created in 1918 and with this year the history of citizenship in Czech countries starts. After the disintegration of the Austro-Hungarian Empire there were a masses of foreigners, who were former citizens of this big state territory. Because of that everyone who had a right of domicile in Czechoslovakia to the 28.10.1918, could become a citizen. During the Second World War, the only valid citizenship was the

Reichs, which was the problem for many people after the war.

Because if they accepted this citizenship and it was not under pressure, they lost their Czechoslovak citizenship. Many Germans and Hungarians had to leave the country.

Czech or Slovak?

The situation around the citizenship became much more interesting during the communist domination. The fundamental law from 1968 created the two citizenships: Czech and Slovak. The inhabitants were either Czech or Slovak citizens and in addition, they were also Czechoslovak citizens. If they were confused with this situation they could choose their citizenship to 31.12.1969.

However, this state of affairs meant a problem after the division of the Czechoslovakian Federation to the Czech and Slovak Republics in 1993.

People were excited, freedom was everywhere and the wild nineties had just started. But people who were living in the Czech Republic before the division but were not born there started to lose their Czech citizenship. The number of these people was quite high. According to Věra Jirásková, around 350,000.

If someone wanted to become a Czech citizen, they had to pay a charge for annulment the Slovak citizenship. This was a problem for poor people, especially for the Roma who came from Slovakia but their children were born in the Czech Republic. And they could not have two citizenships.

More than one

The first of January, 2014 was an important date. Latvia accepted Eurozone, Sándor Petőfi would celebrate his 141st birthday. And there was also one thing: the new Czech Civil Code came into force. This meant that from this date, it is possible to have dual citizenship. Or – according to the Ministry of Interior – multiple ones.

Becoming a citizen

There are many ways how to become a Czech citizen nowadays. Either you born there, somebody who is a Czech citizen adopts you. Or you can apply for it. According to Czech statistical institution, the Czech Republic belongs to those countries which are not very willing in granting a citizenship. Despite this fact, the number of the applicants is increasing from year to year. According to the Ministry of Interior, the number of applicants in 2013 was 2,470 and 2,048 succeeded. And in the next year 5,888 persons wanted a Czech citizenship and 5,037 were granted.

To become or not to become

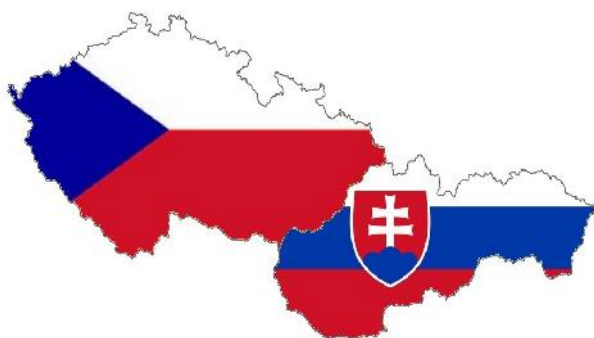
Being a Czech citizen can be attractive: this country is politically stable and the applicants do not have to lose their original citizenship. And also there are a lot of working opportunities. This is the case of the Ukrainians who go there to work and who are one the biggest minority in the Czech Republic. The way to citizenship, however, can be long.

Typical applicant for citizenship, we can call him Denys, can wait for the citizenship for several years. Applicants need to have a permanent residence in the Czech Republic for minimum five years or if they are from an EU member state, three years. Denys is from Lviv, he lives in Prague for seven years and his family has just arrived from Ukraine. He has a stable work in the country. The first thing that he needs to do is gathering a lot of documents. The most important is the statement of criminal records. If Denys writes a CV in Czech and finds his lost marriage certificate, he can go to the municipality where he can apply for the citizenship.

And after that, the most difficult part can start. Denys has to prove that he knows perfectly the Czech culture and society. He must pass the test from Czech language and the exams from the general knowledge of Czech Republic. Language test verifies that the applicant has at least level B1. During the test about the societal issues in the Czech Republic, they can be asked – for example – if they know what will happen if they are caught by a ticket inspector with an invalid ticket.

After attending the exams, Denys has to wait for the decision of the Ministry of Interior. If he does not pass, he will wait two years for another application. Fortunately Denys is successful and he solemnly takes a civic oath on the municipality: *“I promise upon my honour loyalty to the Czech Republic. I promise that I will observe its Constitution and other laws of Czech Republic.”*

What made you come to Czech Republic? This one simple question sparked my thoughts on what brings a Slovak to Czech Republic. And I started thinking. For me personally, there was a specific reason – I was born in Prague and I have always had a feeling of homecoming when travelling there. But for the other 147,152 Slovaks, who have lived in Czechia according the Czech Statistical Office during the last census in 2011, there is a whole variety of reasons.



Slovakia and the Czech Republic share a brotherhood. There has been so much common history for these two little Central European countries. Similarities are significant in terms of culture, language and it just peaked during the last century, when they were two halves of one country. This has provided the opportunity for the Slovak minority to adapt well in the Czech Republic. Slovaks have become an ethnic minority in Czech Republic only recently. It was on 1 January 1993 when the two countries parted from each other after the famous Velvet Revolution took place in 1989.

According to the data, the Slovak minority is the biggest of all in Czech Republic. There are familiar feelings in many aspects of life for Slovaks in this Slovak-friendly country. So,

what exactly attracts Slovaks so much about Czech Republic? To uncover the other dimension of this migration routine I must also ask what is forcing them to leave Slovakia. One of the reasons why we choose Czech Republic as our home is the Czech language. We can understand it very well. We owe this ability to the mentioned common history of the two nations. The common TV programmes and daily contact with the language made us understand it just as good as it would be our own. The only little problem is that young Czechs do not understand Slovak language as naturally as their parents do. They are simply not used to it so much. I experienced situations, when I had to start talking in Czech with youngsters, otherwise they would not understand. On the other hand, the older Czechs understand us without any problem. This makes it so easy for a Slovak to live in the Czech Republic, because in fact he can use his mother tongue even though he is in a foreign country. What is more, Czechs love the sound of Slovak language! Every Slovak living there had to hear this at least few times in his life. Czechs claim that Slovak language sounds softly and attractive and they often try to copy it and are more or less successful.

Another similarity is culture. Slovaks are free to maintain their own and really like the one of Czechs. What is more, the two also overlap in so many aspects. Czechs always say that Slovak music just sounds better and it is clear from listening to a Czech radio. There are always few Slovak songs, which you can hear in a short period of time. For Slovak citizen, it is just a

familiar sound of home. Also at festivals like Studentský Majáles, Colors of Ostrava or others, many Slovak interpreters are performing as headliners. Regarding the theatre or movies, you can spot many Slovak actors who act in the Czech language and sometimes even in Slovak! Slovaks like the cultural opportunities they have while living in Czech Republic. There are a lot of interesting activities to do or events to attend. That is a big plus when considering life in this country. In terms of religion, there is a slight difference. The majority of Slovaks are Christians and yes, this is also the number one Czech religion. Although, most Czechs are not religious at all. However, it seems that Czechs understand and accept this situation. There are several churches across Czechia where you can attend traditional worship held in Slovak language. The traditions during feasts are very similar – Christmas, name-days, Easter, summer holidays, etc. Many Slovaks are active folklorists in the Czech Republic and are doing very well regarding preserving their traditional folklore. The most well-known Slovak folklore group in Prague is called Limbora. You can practise folklore with them at any age or occasionally see them in the streets of Prague at the folklore event, which they help to organise – Prague, The Heart of Nations.

The next one may be a small thing, but makes the Czech Republic even more preferred for Slovaks. Both countries have very close geographical location, weather conditions and nature. The big advantage for Slovaks is that they are always close to their home country and the family they possibly left there. Also, they do not need to experience any sudden change in weather patterns and adapt to it. A funny fact is that the two nations argue about the middle of Europe and claim it is in their country. And they are both right, because apparently, there

are more middles of Europe across the old continent.

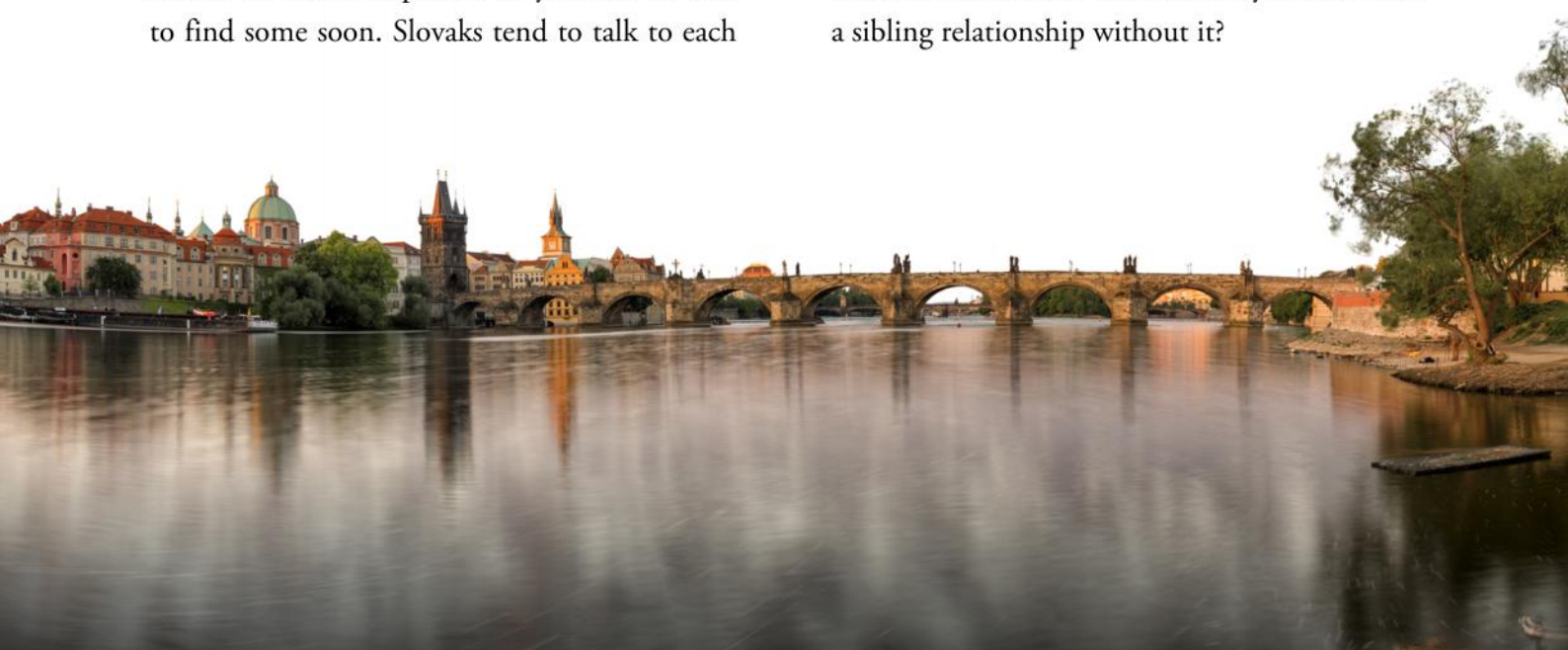
Now let us focus on what is different for Slovaks after coming to Czech Republic. There were 22 thousand students studying in Czech universities in 2014. Slovak education is known for its poor quality; therefore, Slovaks choose to leave the country for studies. Czech schools have better positions in international university rankings, so it is expected from them to provide a better-quality education. And they deliver the quality indeed. Most of the Slovak students are studying either in Prague or Brno, because of the presence of the best Czech universities in these cities. In 2001, it was agreed between the two states that Slovaks will be granted the right to speak and write in Slovak language and university professors cannot demand writing a thesis or homework in Czech language. There are no quotas for Slovak students at the Czech universities and the education in public schools is free for them. The one who pays education for Slovaks is in that case the Czech Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports. In this issue, few Czech voices raise and claim that Slovaks are just taking free spots at the universities from Czech youngsters. The overall mood is still friendly and even though few Czechs are angry because of Slovak students, the majority is unimpressed or even welcoming.

The economic situation in Slovakia is quite good, with the foreign capital inflows and steady economic growth. Although, there are still better job and life perspectives in Czech Republic than in Slovakia. In February 2017, the unemployment rate in Slovakia was at 8.6%, slightly higher than the EU average at 8%. On the other hand, the unemployment rate in the Czech Republic is one of the lowest in the European Union, at 3.4% also in February 2017. Therefore, there are more job

opportunities because of a lack of Czech employees. What is more, qualification of Czechs, who are willing to work is often insufficient. As a result, the salaries are higher in Czech Republic and the cost of living comparable in both countries, but slightly lower also in Czech Republic. Czech companies often intentionally hire Slovaks because of their qualification or similar culture and work ethics as Czechs have. Overall, there is a pretty good economic situation for Slovaks in the Czech Republic. According to Czech Statistical Journal, Slovaks who come to work in Czech Republic are either highly qualified specialists earning above Czech average, or manual workers coming to find at least poorly paid jobs. Also, many international and domestic companies are looking for an employee, who will take care of both markets at once, because of its similarities. And they simply do not care from which country the person will be. Lastly, when you come to mainly bigger cities in Czech Republic, you can always find a Slovak community. You never feel like you are alone, because you already have a lot of Slovak friends in Czech Republic, or you can be sure to find some soon. Slovaks tend to talk to each

other and be fiends when living in foreign country, it is natural for them. The paradox is that it is much more natural than being friendly in our own country.

In conclusion, Slovak minority is quite happy to live in Czech Republic, because it is similar or better in important areas in comparison to Slovakia. The areas of similarities are common history, culture, language, geographical location and personality of inhabitants. The areas of difference are the amount of cultural and job opportunities, better schools, salaries and cost of living. As you could have noticed, the similarities are factors removing “why nots” when thinking about moving to Czech Republic. The differences create the decision-shaping “why yeses”. Slovaks, have you noticed what connects all the “why yes” factors? It is just something what could be changed by us or our state authorities. How about we work on problems instead of running away from them? Maybe then we could leave our country just for a vacation and not for life. Czech Republic is very kind to us, and we thank you for that. And even if there is a small rivalry and teasing between Czechs and Slovaks, can you show me a sibling relationship without it?



Hungary is an Central European cross-cultural country within ward and outward migration process. With the move to majority rule government in 1989, the fringes opened and monetary collapse occurred over the entire socialist bloc, which importantly affected relocation. Be that as it may, Hungary experienced a moderately smooth move and it was viewed as an island of solidness in the district amid the vexed locale decade of the 1990s, turn into an alluring goal for subjects of neighbouring nations, the greater part of them are ethnic Hungarians. Since the end of Second World War the Hungarian governments were gradually developed policies regarding minority protection. Being sensitive for ethnic relations, Hungary also launched programmes concerning the support for Roma minority in Hungary.

For almost 600 years, citizens of Hungary have battled with the incorporation of its Roma minority. Efforts for resolving ethnic and intercultural issues originating from unsuccessful endeavours and imperfect arrangements later prompted a genuine thought of training as a method for accomplishing this objective. As indicated by one report created by World Directory of Minority and Indigenous People and nation report of Hungary on Roma Minority, *“amid the 1980s, the comrade experts in Hungary established strategy to support Roma exercises and culture that was very extraordinary at the time in Central and Eastern Europe. Once the communist economy begun to decrease in the 1980s and significant state undertakings and development activities were ended, industrial facilities began rejecting labourers. Roma was hardest hit by this subsidence. In spite of the just*

change and foundation of a sacred state after 1989, the minimization of the Roma populace expanded.”

Roma was among those who were most influenced by Hungary’s difficult transition period from communism to a market-based economy and many lost their work after financial decay and privatization of state ventures. These reasons added to their powerless conditions in the general public and above all their way of life began changing soon after the collapse of the communist regime. In addition to that, a researcher from Hungary Dr. Lidia. H. Balogh contributes the research on the minority cases of Roma in Hungarian Society and stated that *“Roma constitute the largest minority group in Hungary (and at the same time, the Roma of Hungary is one of the largest Roma populations in Central and Eastern Europe). The estimated number of the Roma in Hungary is at least 400,000–600,000 according to the Open Society Institute, which is approximately 5 to 6 percent of Hungary’s total population, while the last population census in Hungary in 2001, based on self-declaration of ethnic affiliation, showed only 108,407 Roma”*.

Dr. Balogh mentioned that, “the situation of the Roma minority is clearly different from the other minorities living in Hungary. In Hungary, Roma constitutes the only <<visible>> minority and the majority of the Roma population face serious social disadvantages and suffers from discrimination, while the members of the other minorities are considered as socially integrated. Additionally, the Roma lack features normally possessed by national minorities, such as an established

common culture”. This suggests that the Roma has been one of those groups that have been the victims of different types of segregation in Hungary, yet in the meantime it their main aim was to stay united and be solidary to present themselves as a unified strong community in order to successfully claim their rights from the state.

Segregation in education of

Roma minority in hungary:

On the 27th May 2016 the European Commission announced that it will be launching an infringement procedure against Hungary for on-going discrimination against Roma children’s education. In a press release they stated that *“the European Commission is requesting Hungary to ensure that Roma children enjoy access to quality education on the same terms as all other children and urges the government to bring its national laws on equal treatment as well as on education and the practical implementation of its educational policies into line with the Racial Equality Directive”*. According to the report of Country Assessment and the Roma Education Fund’s Strategic Directions, “segregation, in different forms, represents another major issue Roma children have to face in today’s education system in Hungary”.

They further state that the problems can manifest themselves in these ways and “segregation among schools can be caused by school maintainers who are in favour of keeping separate schools just for Roma children. Spontaneous migration of non-Roma out of an area results in the rise of the proportion of Roma students. Segregation within schools can emerge due to the per-student financing system

of education. School administrators are interested in having as many students as possible. Therefore, to prevent the <<emigration>> of non-Roma children which usually happens as a consequence of the rising proportion of Roma students, some schools set up segregated classes for Roma students. These segregated classes can, in most cases, be found in separate and lower quality buildings, students face low expectations, low-level teaching and lower curricula. The proportion of Roma students in special schools is extremely high. Segregation through exemption from school attendance is a relatively new method of separating Roma children”. According to this assessment, numerous Hungarian and international reports bring up the shortcomings of here and now for professional education. These schools are the final resorts for socially and scholastically rejected huge numbers of Roma youngsters. The framework is detached from businesses’ needs, with few apprenticeship openings and high drop-out rates.

It can be concluded that discrimination and segregation in different sectors such as in education are unavoidable, yet it does not imply that these issues cannot be settled. The issue of Roma communities can be solved with mutual cooperation by giving them legal security and some representation at key levels where they can find practical solutions for their issues. The problems identified with segregation in education ought not to go on without serious consequences at any level since education comes in one of the essential human rights to anyone and only education can improve the life quality of the Roma community in the long term.

Roma people in the Czech Republic are not just uneducated people from ruined houses. Many of them study high schools or universities or work. Despite these facts, according to the surveys, Czech people are negative towards them. This problem can be caused by the minimum of discussions and the lack of politicians, who would open this case and openly talk about the real situation in Czechia. However, luckily there are some organisations which are trying to open this taboo and shed light on the situation.

Each four of five Czechs, which is about 83 percent of the population, perceive the Roma people as a non-adaptive ethnicity. And according to the survey of STEM organisation in the Czech Republic, approximately the same percent of people think that they are causing crimes and destroy their neighbourhoods. But only 5 percent of the Czechs think that these answers are connected to discrimination in their society.

It is sad that when we look at the facts, there is no survey that would come up with the question how it is with the connection of Roma people and criminality. That is the real problem when it comes to the discrimination or stereotypes connected with Roma minority. What is more, there is no discussion about how people feel about Roma people and what do they know about them – none of the politicians want to open this burning theme.

Guilty state system

When the designers of the survey asked the people, what their opinion is based on, they

mostly blamed the state system. People think that Roma people are not punished when they commit a crime and they do not have to face a consistent law system. What is worse, they think that regime in the Czech Republic is supporting this kind of acting.

Even though politics do not want to face this society problem, luckily there are some organisations that do. One of them is Romea.cz, mostly a news website connected with some activities, such as teaching the Roma kids, etc. Also it works as a watchdog: Romea searches for fake news about the Roma minority and tries to correct them. This relates to the growing impact of internet media: if someone – for example – wants to write an article about what Roma people did, it is very easy. But not every reader will be searching for the true background of the whole situation – or the sources that the “journalist” used. So Romea is searching for this news and warns people about the quality or the truth in it.

No discussion

“One of the stories that showed up in one of the fake news media outlets in Czechia was about a new Roma EU party. They came up with an article where they claimed that Roma people founded an EU party in the north Bohemian city of Ústí nad Labem. And the <<juicy news>> was evolving: the Roma man, who should watch the money, stole everything according to that article. But in the same moment, we knew that this would be impossible. But in that days every daily newspaper had it on the first page like shocking



and big news,” said the founder of Romea.cz, Zdeněk Ryšavý.

One of the bright sides of this story is that nowadays there are serious newspapers and websites focusing very carefully about this

shocking news. But today we are in a totally different situation. This whole problem with Roma people seems to be a kind of taboo topic for a public discussion. Organisations like Romea.cz apparently do not have the power to suddenly make it better for the whole society. But there is no effort or help offered for them from politicians or political institutes. It just seems like nobody wants to talk about it. And moreover, even if the people in the STEM survey do not think that this is discrimination, there is a missing piece of some power which would open this topic and stop the people having closed eyes on the problems of their very own society.



Hungary's right-wing prime minister Viktor Orbán has described the arrival of migrants in Europe as "a poison" claiming no necessity of "a single migrant" for the country to have a future. Hungary is one of the Visegrad Group (V4) countries indeed heavily feeling the wave of migrants and refugees trekking through the country especially from 2015 on. Hence, the focus is usually put on the period of 2015-17 years. Orbán government's tough stance and unwelcoming attitude has explicitly been articulated with carrying out anti-migrant laws, building fences along the borders and spreading relevant messages through diverse speeches. According Eurostat, Hungary was at the top of the chart unifying asylum applications per 100,000 local population in 2015 and leading with the number of 1799 followed by Sweden and Austria.

It was on September 14, 2015, when the country closed the last remaining hole in the 175-kilometer (109 mile) fence, that has been built along the southern border to Serbia, one of the final stations on the Western Balkan route to Europe representing the focal point for tens of thousands of refugees making their way from Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan and North Africa. In terms of the anti-migrant laws, one of the initial was a law making illegal border crossings an offense punishable by up to three years in jail. It is also essential to mention that Hungary's closure of its border with Serbia has led to confusion and desperation among refugees who had hoped to cross into Europe there. Following the abovementioned law, 60 people were arrested for damaging the border

fence or attempting to cross. Moreover, there was an explicit caution for refugee arrival in the town of Röszke, on the Hungarian border to Serbia, where police were wearing face masks and rubber gloves as they herded together thousands of new arrivals into registration camps. The facilities had tents without rain protection, a lack of blankets, little food and medicines as a result of unawareness of the number of people expected.

Unlike lack of support on the EU level, Orbán has enjoyed backing at home as well as on V4 level. In September, 2–15 in the context of a "national consultation," Orbán sent a questionnaire out to Hungarian citizens addressing the issue of "foreigners". Around 1 million Hungarians responded, which was interpreted as support for the hard-line course. As of the following step, the signs were put up aimed at refugees with slogans like, "If you come to Hungary, you cannot take away Hungarians' jobs." The signs were all in Hungarian, making it clear that the message was directed domestically. Another equally important step was construction of the razor-wire fence along the Serbian border as it has already been indicated. Comments and ambiguity followed Orbán's meeting with his colleagues from V4 countries: Poland, Slovakia and the Czech Republic. Nationalistic comments were followed by Gergely Gulyás, a Fidesz parliamentarian: "We believe in values like patriotism, country, family, nation, I know we get bad press outside the country," Gulyás says. "In the media landscape, the left-wing and liberals dominate. They have zeroed in on us."

2016 represented just another year of the refugee struggle and Hungary's effort pushing forward stricter regulations. In July 2016, Human Rights Watch report manifested and accused Hungarian security forces of beating refugees before sending them back across the border to Serbia. It was since July 5, 2016, from when refugees and migrants caught within 8km of the 175-kilometre border with Serbia were being returned to the Serbian side of the razor-wire fence on the border. The report claims that a group of 30 to 40 refugees and migrants – among them women and children – were beaten by soldiers for two hours after being held in Hungary. According to one of the interviews held by the US-based rights group, the refugees reported that “five or six soldiers took us one by one to beat us. They tied our hands with plastic handcuffs on our backs. They beat us with everything, with fists, kicks and batons.” In addition, another equally important interview occurred with refugees and migrants by The Associated Press news agency in Horgos, Serbia, near one of the Hungarian transit zones. It described similar treatment by Hungarian officers. “I went to Hungary three times. It is very difficult, they beat me up,” said Wahed Khan, a 24-year-old from Afghanistan. Besides abovementioned interviews, the organisation manifested Hungary's failure to comply with international standards regarding asylum-seekers, by practices such as quickly dismissing most asylum claims from single men, while accepting only 15 claims daily at each of the two transit zones on the Serbian border. This has led to hundreds of refugees being stranded at the border in precarious conditions. The response of György Bakondi, chief adviser on homeland security to Hungarian Prime Minister was formulated as “The goal of the new border protection system

introduced along the Hungarian-Serbian and Hungarian-Croatian borders ... is to prevent illegal immigrants from being in Hungary, but to allow those who wish to submit requests for asylum.” Last but not least, between January and May in 2016, there were only 76 people given refugee status out of 18,000 asylum applications in Hungary as provided by Nóra Köves, a human rights expert at the Budapest-based Eötvös Károly Policy Institute. If we try to explain the country's aforesaid step, it could possibly be the way of ensuring that refugees, whose asylum claims are rejected in the transit zones, do not try to stay in Hungary or pass through the country, as nearly 400,000 people did in 2015, on their way to Western Europe. Moving onto the current year, Hungary has been seeking for more freedom of choice and decision on national level, independently from the EU, which happen to be occurring in line with the Brexit talks. Hungary's long-standing position of reinforcing the protection of Europe's external borders and restoring law and order along the EU's border zones, according government spokesperson Zoltán Kovács, has gradually become the general consensus position among those present at the EU summit in Malta in February this year. *“The Hungarian opinion, which was previously branded as utopian, and according to which the direct defence of Europe's borders is in itself not sufficient, but migration should instead be stopped further away from the borders and as close as possible to the conflict zones that are the source of migration, is now starting to become the prevailing element of talks,”* Dr. Kovács said during a press conference in February at the Hungarian Embassy in London. Kovács said the Hungarian government welcomes this recognition and regards it as extremely timely, but in its opinion, this recognition is not equal

to the completion of the task at hand: the declarations made thus far are still very far from actual, effective measures. He also underlined that “Although the Hungarian government doesn’t like the border security fence either”, it has proven to be effective, because it is capable of stopping, or at least slowing illegal immigration. There is also a planned new measure that was presented by Kovács saying that in the future, migrants who submit official requests for asylum will also not be able to move freely within the territory of Hungary

until a decision is made on whether they are eligible for political asylum or refugee status. Proven above, Hungary’s stance on the topic of minorities, specifically migrants and refugees, has been strict and pessimistic during these years. Based on the regulations, actions carried out and speeches given, social inclusion and softer politics are less likely predictable in near future as the Visegrad Group countries share similar attitude towards the topic. And yet, EU is not able to succeed in proving “poison, not needed” stance wrong to V4.



The European Union is facing critical challenges nowadays. One of the most difficult issues is the asylum crisis, which started in 2015. The migrant crisis was triggered by the Syrian Civil War, which has been going on for nearly five years. More than 4 million people have been forced to flee the war-torn country and have sought asylum in Turkey and recently in the EU. As a consequence, the irregular migration to Europe is described the biggest crisis the region has seen, since 1945. This is an extremely complex, complicated and also politically sensitive issue. As a result of this, the member states' responses, solutions and ideas are quite varied.

There was an extremely debated question among the reactions of the EU-members: Hungary protested the legislation that was more commonly known by the general public as a "compulsory relocation quota". The quota was a result of the decision of the Council on 22 September 2015, adopted by qualified majority. Hungary did not accept this regulation and approached the European Court of Justice to abolish it. Hungary found itself in a difficult situation in connection with the regulation. Firstly, Slovakia made a similar action to the Court, a few days later Hungary did the same. The two actions have several similarities. In the action made by Hungary, the applicant is Hungary, and the defendant is the Council of the European Union. The debated EU act, is the set-up of a quota system for the distribution of asylum seekers and migrants among the EU

member states. Under the most controversial provision, 120,000 applicants from the two member states should be transferred to the so-called "member states of relocation". The member state of the transfer destination is the member state that will be responsible for examining an application for international protection after the transfer of the applicant to that territory. So, according to this EU regulation, 120,000 applicants should be relocated from Italy and from Greece.

However, according to the Hungarian government's view, the decision did not take into account the special situation of our country. As a result of this, the Hungarian Parliament has not voted for its adoption either. The Council finally approved the legislation by a qualified majority.

Hungary claims that the Court should annul the Council Decision 2015/1601 of 22 September 2015 establishing provisional measures in the area of international protection for the benefit of Italy and Greece ("the contested decision"). In the alternative, in the event that the first head of claim is not upheld, annul the contested decision in so far as it refers to Hungary, order the Council to pay the costs. One of the central elements of the Hungarian claim is the question of the legal basis of the decision.

Finally, it needs to be mentioned that this regulation will be in effect until 26 of September 2017. So we will see what is going to be the result of the lawsuit.

Lodz, Friday evening, block of flats not far from the city centre, you can listen pretty noisy music, then when you are coming to the balcony to understand what is happening there you listen dialogs and jokes in French. What is happening there? Knowing a bit of French you are asking – what is this noise? The answer you got is – “who is speaking French?” – “Your neighbour, what is that party”? Answer: “Oh, we are very sorry, we forgot to tell you, but feel more than invited, flat no 5”. Well, what to do? – “Okay, why not”. In few minutes you are entering the flat no 5, where the music is playing and you see the group of 15-20 Africans dancing, drinking beer, joking, enjoying life – so you introduce yourself in French (listening that they are speaking French) and then one of them is looking at you and very seriously asking you, without any foreign accent, “a Ty skąd tak dobrze znasz Francuski”? (how do you know French language so well). Sounds like scenario of the film or maybe video clip of creative African musician living in Europe. None of this – it is a real story that has happened few years ago. It just happened that by chance I was living in one block with group of young men coming from Cameroon.

Who are they?

That was the question that was occurring in my mind for a while, but of course then they started introducing themselves, and almost all of them were speaking pretty nicely Polish. They were men, age 25-65, most of them around 30. One of them was visibly the senior of the group, treated with respect but also with

buddy attitude – happened to be professor of theology working at Jagiellonian University in Cracow. Another two guys came from Warsaw to visit their friends. Two of them were hosts living everyday in the flat – Wilson and Arthur. One of them was coming from Congo and was the son of important politician and retired general of the National Army in Congo. What you can see, very various group, but at this same time very united group because of being foreigners coming from this same area, speaking this same language, having this same colour of the skin and this same traditions. All of them were amazing dancers. They served food – cooked eggs with specific extremely spicy sauce – at least for my European taste. Then at some point one of them is asking me if I remember him. I was a bit puzzled but not sure. Then he told me that we had met together with his friend and talking about business some one year ago or more. It happened that I work in the field of entrepreneurship so I am having lot of meetings every day and I am meeting many different people. But suddenly I realised that I met with Joshua who decided to take part in one of the international project for entrepreneurs and he invited his friends to join. Some of them are working in big international companies that are hiring different nationalities and speakers of different languages, for example French. One of them is running his own international company giving transportation services, another one is working with the company organising huge concerts for the most popular and recognised stars. This is how they are. Immigrants from central Africa to Poland –

active, using their skills in mother tongue which is French, putting a lot of effort into learning how to speak Polish, very supportive to each other, enjoying live.



Nigerians

Another group of Africans that it is also easy to meet and recognise in Poland is Nigerians. I happen to know some of them. Everything started some four years ago when my college that I am working with invited his friends from studies to discuss about some group work that they had to do, and then to have also some common time for relaxing. My luck was that I could join this meeting and that how I met Samuel. His wide smile, friendly attitude and huge work on Polish language made him quickly becoming my friend. It occurred that he is in Poland studies Business Administration mainly because of his father who is big entrepreneur in Nigeria, but he is doing most of his transactions in Europe, especially with Germany. His son was perfect support for him, and we found common language as entrepreneurs. In a short period of time I met his friend, then his roommate from dormitory and I happen to know already four Nigerians

studying in Poland, one of them was here already 6 years and started his family with Polish girl, and he was visibly very well settled in Poland and fluently speaking this language. It seems that even recognised as one of the most difficult languages in the world – Polish language – can be spoken pretty fluently by immigrants after few years of staying here. It happens also that I recognised that Nigerian people are also enjoying their company, organising from time to time meeting of their national group. But usually every day they spend among Polish people feeling pretty integrated.

Statistics

This is my personal experience with minorities in Poland, and in my city, but what we can find in researches gives a bit wider context. According to all sorts of data – Poland is one of the countries in Europe and European Union, where the percentage of foreigners is the smallest – around 2%. Africans are relatively small group, because among 120 thousands of foreigners out of EU, they are around 5400 (which is around 5% of all immigrants to Poland). Among Africans – the biggest groups are – Egyptians (957), Nigerians (899) Tunisians (837), Algerians (586) and Moroccans (411). The amount of representatives of others countries of African continent is around 200 people.

Stereotypes

Africans, even though they are just 5% of all population of immigrants, are the most visible and easy group to recognise, because of different physical appearance. It is one of the sources of most controversial situations among Poles, starting from discussion about naming these newcomers in a specific way like:

“Czarnoskóry”, “Murzyn”, which are pretty problematic and tending to be perceived by around 40% of Polish population as offensive. Research among Africans brings the results of some difficulties, especially in the beginning with assimilation with Polish society, and some incidents of racist behaviours and treatments. All of the situations were taking place in everyday life, in the streets, but were far from officials. That is the part of reality, that formally Poland is open and prepared of different sort of foreigners, even from totally different cultures, but real life is showing that society is not always so much open to them. The surveys among Polish people about knowledge of foreign countries and cultures is, in most of the cases, low or rather low, only knowledge about European continent looks a bit better. The most open and interested about Africa and the world in general, are men in the age of 20-30, with higher education, living in big cities.

There are also stereotypes about religion of African continents. Most of the citizens of Poland are thinking that dominating religion in Africa is Islam, what is not exactly the real story, according to the World Factbook – amount of Muslims and Christians in Africa is approximately equal. We perceive Africa as continent with specific characteristics divided in four main areas:

- difficult live conditions (poverty, low level of hygiene and medical care, low level of education),
- dangers and threats (civil wars, terrorism)
- beautiful, wild nature
- original and interesting culture (traditiona-

lism, strong family bonds, different lifestyle than Europe – more relaxed)

Polish people perceive Africans as people with very different culture and most of the People in Poland are seeing not possible full assimilation of Africans in our country.

Light in the tunnel

According to the research from 2015, comparing to 2012 level of people positively looking on the possibility of integration Africans in Poland increased to 29%, which is showing that this friendly attitude is becoming more and more popular in our country. I can tell from my own experience, that I met really nice and friendly people coming from African continent and I see a lot of chance to learn about their culture and develop better attitude in the society. I have found some institutions working in this field as Foundation Africa, or people working of developing Polish-African Chamber of Commerce and Industry, which is helping to cooperate economically and also learn more and more about cultures. Nowadays in the world of internet and globalisation, developed technologies, we should be more aware that world is becoming smaller and people are travelling more and easier than at any time in the history. According to these facts, we should be more open to other cultures, treat them with more respect, and remember that cooperation is always better than competition, and the biggest source of stereotypes and fears is lack of knowledge. So let us keep our hearts warm and minds open for immigrants that are also serving to contribute to our country and economy.

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