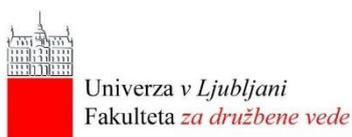


Joint Solutions for Common Challenges in Central Europe

Cross-Border Cooperation in the Refugee Crisis



Joint Report

Supported by the Future Fund of the Republic of Austria

ZukunftsFonds
der Republik Österreich

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Executive Summary

The uncoordinated approaches of the respective governments in Central Europe in dealing with the increased arrivals of refugees during summer and autumn 2015 has put the region into the spotlight of media attention. With the closure of the Balkan route in March 2016 and the implementation of the EU-Turkey action plan the numbers of arrivals have decreased. However, those expecting these steps to be the solution of the refugee and migration question will be severely disillusioned.

Five independent institutes from Austria, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Slovakia and Slovenia have therefore come up with a series of recommendations to improve cross-border understanding and cooperation. A particular focus has thereby been laid on civil society players, which provided help to refugees in all five countries from the onset of the crisis, but find it difficult to get their narrative heard.

The recommendations cover seven areas:

1. Civil society cooperation across borders needs to be improved via the exchange of experiences and development of communication strategies that add value to NGO efforts in each country.
2. A counter-narrative has to be told offering a broader – and not only security based – perspective of the refugee and migration challenges and explaining the complexities of the issue.
3. Civil society needs to step up efforts to proactively interact with governments, local authorities and national administrations demonstrating its will to cooperate.
4. Migration literacy will be key. Media representatives should be encouraged to provide a more balanced view of developments. Joint workshops, conferences and exchanges could be of help.
5. While the number of new arrivals has decreased, the integration of refugees that have already arrived requires stronger efforts. Civil society should continue to stress that integration efforts pay off.
6. Civil society organizations should make better use of European institutions and funds. European institutions for their part need to step up efforts to support (cross-border) civil society actions.
7. Individual governmental (in)action and a lack of cooperation led to the view of a single, unsupportive Central European block, which is spilling over to other areas of European politics. It is essential to take into account the differences of Central European countries, explaining the backgrounds and countering stigmatization.

Project Background

Austria, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Slovakia and Slovenia are five countries in Central Europe, whose total size covers about half the area of France. Their capitals are in many cases located closer to each other than other major cities within their own respective countries. Their citizens do not only share parts of their history, but also many aspects of their culture and traditions. Also in economic terms, the five countries are strongly interconnected.

It comes, thus, as no surprise that these five countries are often confronted with similar regional challenges. Still, solutions are in most cases drafted on the national level only and proximity does not prevent misunderstandings. This became particularly obvious in the late summer of 2015, at the peak of the refugee and migration policy crisis. Some countries started to fence themselves off, while others decided to suspend the Dublin agreement or open borders. This finally led to the impression of a new split in Europe. The momentum was used for a revival of political Cold War rhetoric.

While all five countries definitely have their particularities, it has been obvious from the very first moment that things are not as black and white as media and politics liked to draw them, but reflect many different shades of grey. In all five countries there is a civil society that has provided help to refugees and has been aiming at a European solution that respects human rights, while at the same time being well aware of the fact that order and control has to be maintained. Still these players act in different political surroundings and often in an uncoordinated manner having poor access to media, public attention and financial resources. Knowledge about and contacts with like-minded NGOs in the neighbouring countries are still limited.

Therefore, five independent institutes from Austria, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Slovakia and Slovenia have decided to join forces to jointly tackle these challenges. Five national workshops have been held in each of the countries, bringing together representatives from various parts of civil society to share their national experiences and provide recommendations for potential joint actions regarding the refugee question. These findings have then been collected in national reports and jointly discussed in workshops among the five project partners.

This report presents a summary of the main findings of the workshops as well as brief overviews on the various country backgrounds. Parts of the recommendations are already being implemented or at least initiated by the project partners. This is in particular the case with regards to the recommendations related to cross-border cooperation, media support, the creation of a counter-narrative and the cultivation of the image of Central European countries. Furthermore, public events are currently being organized in all five countries to spread the message and the recommendations, and to show the public that the depiction of the “good” and “bad” ones in (Central) Europe is not as black and white as often perceived.

The project partners intend to step up their cooperation also in other fields of European integration beyond the refugee and migration question. It is evident that common challenges in the region can only be solved through cross-border collaboration on all levels.

Recommendations

In the course of the various national and joint workshops, a broad range of recommendations for civil society action has evolved. Those can broadly be summarized under the following seven key points:

1) Cooperating across borders

Differences in the domestic political context in Central European countries call for different responses to specific needs. But there is also common ground and space for cross-border cooperation of NGOs. More can be done to facilitate a better understanding, deepen the exchange of experiences and develop communication strategies that would add value to the efforts of NGOs in each country. The focus should be placed hereby on those groups that are already contributing or show willingness to cooperate across borders. Grassroots movements should also be supported.

In detail:

- Mapping the networks and actors of NGOs, charity organizations, grassroots as well as individual and church related initiatives for future cooperation and coordination. At a second stage, these networks should be brought together under an umbrella, whereby a transnational “steering group” could provide overarching directions to reach key nodes of influence.
- Regular exchange of information regarding political, legal and societal developments between the Central European countries. With timely information NGOs could be better prepared for future developments.
- Exchange of best and worst practices and transfer of already tested solutions to assist the NGOs response to urgent challenges and develop better longer-term strategies. Cross-border toolboxes / manuals for an exchange of information for the civil society but also for mayors and district authorities could thereby be helpful.
- The organization of cross-border citizens’ dialogues and events together with “integration ambassadors” and other key stakeholders can further strengthen the cross-border dimension.

2) Creating a counter narrative

Civil society so far has mainly been reactive. Its agenda has often been determined by political events. A negative populist agenda tending to capitalize on the public fear of “unknown refugees/migrants” has complicated the situation. The migration challenge has mainly been communicated under a security aspect. Very little has been done to systematically and actively address the refugee question and explain the complexity of the issues to the general public.

Civil society therefore needs to create a broad public counter discourse and narrative by providing wider perspectives, be they historical or derived from neighbouring countries.

In detail:

- As NGO’s and even international organizations are often pigeonholed as biased, “public champions” (such as journalists, artists and viable, strong politicians) could be addressed and equipped with data, numbers and views to effectively confront populism.
- Communication with the public should rely on a combination of arguments regarding human rights complemented with economic facts.
- Migration and security threats have to be unlinked, especially by making clear that security is not only compatible with European values, but that it is a European value.

- Integration success stories have to be highlighted, treating migrants and refugees on an individual basis, not as a collective entity.
- NGOs should jointly counter the radicalization of political language and the detrimental effect terminology may have. This should include the identification and sanctioning of hate speech.

3) Interacting with governments, local authorities and national administrations

There is a need to recognize the important role independent civil society organisations play for the functioning of liberal democracies. Civil society should therefore step up efforts to proactively interact with governments, local authorities and national administrations demonstrating its will to cooperate.

In detail:

- A separate strategy of communication with governments should be developed with the objective that governments and civil society treat each other as valuable partners. Civil society should clearly define their role and explain the benefits for the respective government. Special attention needs to be placed to “windows of opportunity” in times of calm political discourse (e.g. post-elections / in the case of Slovakia during the Slovak EU presidency).
- Government authorities should use civil society organisations as a bridge to the general public, e.g. involving them into various expert groups, funding civic programmes, engaging in public-private partnerships, outsourcing individual activities.
- A “bottom-up” approach should be considered specifically targeting local government and businesses. This could potentially help facilitate a more effective paradigm change than a “top-down” approach.
- The role of the church should be emphasized – human dignity being a universal value.

4) Supporting the media

Few mainstream media provide a nuanced view of the refugee question. Many shape and exacerbate a disproportionate fear of refugees. Currently risk analysis dominates the media, while opportunity analyses are disregarded.

Civil society needs to proactively engage in the public debate to create a more balanced view.

In detail:

- Solution-oriented journalism regarding e.g. integration-initiatives needs to be supported.
- Civil society should help to contribute to higher journalistic scrutiny by intensifying contacts with media, providing experts and media training for media representatives and connecting journalists from the various countries.
- Civil society should counter the ongoing public distrust towards quality media via social media, joint commentaries, statements and op-eds in selected media.

5) Fostering integration

The successful integration of refugees and migrants into European societies is a major challenge. Due to the current narrative, fears and security issues dominate the public discourse. Civil society should engage in developing communication strategies to stress that integration efforts will pay off already in the short term and provide practical help on the ground.

In detail:

- Civil society should intensify communication with local communities where refugees are to be hosted - including media, young people, contact points for refugees, social workers, broader local public. Stakeholders from communities with experience in integrating refugees should be supported in sharing their practical knowledge. Also politicians need to be encouraged to directly exchange views with people that feel affected by the influx of refugees.
- Language courses have to be offered already before asylum is granted. Qualification checks are to be done from the earliest possible moment in order to allow for a rapid integration.
- In particular in countries that experience labour shortage and low unemployment (like e.g. the Czech Republic) it should be considered if and how refugees / migrants could fill this gap.
- Considering the current political trends and the growing harshness, it will be even more important to emphasize the reasons and motives why people flee from their homelands.
- It also needs to be made clear that successful integration has to be a two-way process (rights and obligations).

6) Making use of European Institutions and Funds

The refugee/migration question is a cross-border European challenge and can only be confronted together. Civil society organisations should therefore look for support on the European level.

In detail:

- Representatives of the civil society should get the chance to present their actions on the European stage (e.g. in the European Parliament).
- The European Commission should use its programmes and resources to finance cross-border cooperation and to cover national costs related to expenses for refugees as effectively as possible in order to incentivize active countries and regions.
- The engagement of the European Parliament and MEPs could be enhanced (e.g. at the GLOBSEC „Visegrad MEP Caucus“).
- Especially NGOs, which are usually depending on external financial sources, should be encouraged and informed by policy makers at the regional and EU level.

7) Cultivating the image of Central European countries

Last years' developments have shown different approaches regarding the reception of refugees and migrants in different EU countries. Civil society should make efforts to foster solidarity, mutual understanding and explain the different views. NGOs should work together to counter stigmatisation of Central European societies being the ones reluctant to demonstrate any solidarity or respect of human rights of those in need. Due to individual government (in)action this view is spilling over to other areas of European politics and might adversely impact other interests of Central European countries.

In detail:

- The lack of self-reflection that a country's own hostility also – negatively – impacts the desire of refugees to settle in the country, needs to be addressed.
- On the EU-level, pursuing a policy of incentives instead of one that is threatening with sanctions could be advantageous. It needs to be shown that refugees are not a burden and risk, but that their admission, apart from assuming obligation and duties under international

law, can also provide added value to our societies. The European level should explicitly support this by providing e.g. scholarships, funding of formation costs.

- European consent would have a positive influence to implement and adhere to decisions. Putting pressure on individual countries proves to be counter-productive. Alternative approaches such as voluntary schemes and positive examples (e.g. in terms of taking larger than minimum shares) should be considered.
- To antagonize the mindset “we are the good ones, you are the bad ones”, it also needs to be communicated what NGOs and the civil society are already doing on the ground to proactively deal with the refugee and migration question. The story of EU integration should be reframed both in “old” as well as “new” EU-countries to foster mutual understanding and recreate a common perspective.

Country Background

Austria

(Results based on the country workshop of 17 March 2016)

Public opinion in Austria concerning the influx of refugees is strongly divided. Still, a high number of individuals as well as civil society organisations are helping refugees – often voluntarily. After an “initial euphoric phase” public opinion shifted. The reasons are manifold. The events in Cologne are often considered as the main turning point. However, a backlash to the so-called “Willkommenskultur” had already emerged before that. Initially, it could not find ground to hold on to. Following the Cologne incidents public perception changed and mistrust towards politicians and the media, suspected of not communicating the whole truth, peaked. Uncertainty was fuelled by TV reports showing the helplessness of public institutions at the national borders and the lack of strategies regarding the overall refugee-challenge. Contradictory and often populist and alarmistic statements by politicians, selective reporting of criminal acts by refugees and asylum seekers in the yellow press, as well as the growing criticism regarding the refugee strategy of the German chancellor and concerns about the effectiveness of a pan-European strategy also boosted mistrust. Moreover, the permanent focus on refugees in the media led to the impression that politicians stopped paying attention to their “own” citizens’ problems. Increasing anti-globalization tendencies and scepticism towards “foreigners” in general as well as a weak economic outlook complemented the list.

As a consequence, many people felt justified in rejecting further admission of refugees, questioned the lack of solidarity of other EU partners and stressed that it was right to be worried. Still, 90.000 refugees have applied for asylum in Austria in 2015. Up to 37.500 might follow in 2016. In comparison to other EU countries and per capita quite a high number of people. A successful integration of these people is crucial to make coexistence work.

Other parts of the Austrian society do not fully agree with the more restrictive policy line of the government. Admitting though that order and control of handling the flow of refugees is essential, these groups believe that a stronger European as well as national commitment must be possible. Furthermore, many, who provided help to the refugees at train stations, in refugee camps, at borders and other locations, continue committing themselves.

However, this part of society as well as their views have also continuously been pushed to the margins of the discussion and media coverage – deriding them as “do-gooders”.

Politics and media have played a central role in this development. From the onset, the government was not in favour of the “Willkommenskultur”. Without the pressure from parts of the civil society, the discussion regarding the admission of refugees would have been different from the very beginning. However, in the end civil society could only press the pause-button for a short moment until a counter-movement set in. The ruling parties adopted populists’ notions not taking into account that in the end citizens tend to elect those who came up with these ideas in the first place. The government transmitted a message of overburdening to the public. Thus, not only the normative power of facts determined their action but also psychological limits were drawn – transforming a common challenge into a massive threat, while still dealing with the same issue. Moreover, experts from various NGOs and the scientific field were/are increasingly ignored.

In the meantime, further elements such as the discussion on access to social benefits put the refugee question under additional financial pressure. The momentum developed and negatively influenced public opinion. In particular, the discussion about the needs-based minimum benefit system and further social benefits has led to a situation, in which a socioeconomically disadvantaged part of the

population is used as “political puppet”. Thus, issues of distribution and problems of inequality – in the global but also national context – are pushed into the background. Due to labour market pressure, mixing up EU migrants and refugees has also developed a strong momentum.

The current official position of Austria is transmitted as a close to zero admission rate for arriving refugees in order to send out the most restrictive signals possible. However, Austria currently is doing much more than it actually wants others to believe. There is a clear mismatch between political rhetoric and actual political decisions, which negatively influenced the international image of the country.

Austrian public opinion towards attitudes, government positions and political actions in the neighbouring countries is rather undifferentiated. Actions by civil society supporting refugees are scarcely noticed. The same accounts for cross-border actions. A recent survey by the Austrian Society for European Politics shows that the majority of the Austrian population has little understanding for the “refusing attitude of some neighbouring countries regarding the admission of asylum seekers”. 36 per cent agreed to the restrictive position of the neighbouring countries, whereas 60 per cent did not support this practice (4 per cent “don’t know/not specified”).¹ The lack of solidarity is spilling over to other European issues.

At the same time, it is perceived that neighbouring countries – among others – have not been sufficiently consulted ex ante. At the beginning of the crisis a clear differentiation between economic migrants and refugees covered by the Geneva Convention would have been important. Furthermore, it is widely believed that most refugees would want to move to Germany, Sweden or Austria and could therefore only be forced by means of “confinement” to stay in other countries. In this context, the diverging social benefit systems in the various European countries – not only in total numbers, but also with relation to living costs – are further aggravating the problem. Pressure on the labour market is increasing.

From a pan-European view the adoption of more restrictive measures by the Austrian government has led to the impression that the Visegrad-4 countries, plus Austria, Slovenia and other countries in South East Europe form a “dark block” of Europe. The lack of differentiation regarding different approaches to the same challenge leads to further misperception. It also bears the risk of entering a competition of toughness, which can easily escalate.

¹ [Tel SWS 240, March 2016, N=519 respondents throughout Austria]

Czech Republic

(Results mainly based on the country workshop of 12 May 2016)

The Czech Republic and the Refugee Crisis

Much as it has been the case in the rest of Europe, the refugee crisis and the questions of how to cope with it has polarized Czech society into two distinct camps, one based in the capital and, to a lesser extent, larger cities, and the rest of the country, with the latter being the larger and more predominant. The discourse towards refugees and the refugee crisis in the Czech Republic is predominantly anti-immigrant, although windows of opportunities to mold this discourse remain strong, in part due to a growing economy with an acute demand for labor and the lowest unemployment rate in Europe, in part because the Czech Republic has little to no experience with refugees, being a transit country. However, several obstacles remain; a schizophrenic political struggle between the moderate Prime Minister Sobotka and the rabidly populist triumvirate of President Zeman, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance Babis, and Minister of the Interior Milan Chovanec, all anti-immigrant. Media outlets ordering their staff to report critically of refugees.² Lastly, an incident of 89 repatriated Iraqi Christian refugees arriving in the Czech Republic, of which 25 subsequently fled to Germany to apply for German asylum after withdrawing their asylum applications in the Czech Republic, have further compounded the prevailing view in Czech society that refugees are economic migrants first and fleeing war second, which has exacerbated the strong anti-immigration bias.

Fear & Loathing towards the Non-Existent

As mentioned above, the Czech Republic has little to no experience with refugees. The Czech government has agreed to take in 400 refugees in 2015, 700 refugees in 2016 and an additional 400 in 2017, measly numbers compared to those of most of the rest of Europe. The actual numbers of refugees being granted protection in the Czech Republic are also remarkably lower than most of Europe; out of 1335, a mere 460 – 34 % - were recognized as having right to asylum, of which only 55 were granted refugee status, 15 were granted it for humanitarian reasons. The remaining 390 were granted subsidiary protection³, an outrageously high number compared to most of Western Europe. Additionally, the Czech Republic has 0 % positive final decisions on appeal rate.⁴

In short, there are very, very few refugees in the country, with no prospects of a noticeable increase in numbers within the foreseeable future. Of those refugees arriving in the country, the most dominant group are Ukrainians⁵, who blend in much more easily than refugees from the MENA countries. Thus, it is important to note that the Czech resistance to migration primarily revolves around Muslim immigrants rather than any type of immigrants, although resistance to migration in general has increased as a corollary to the former. To illustrate this deteriorating public attitude towards refugees, compare the numbers from July 2015 to March 2016:

In July 2015, 72% of the population were against taking refugees from North Africa, 71% were against taking refugees from Syria, 44% against Ukrainian refugees. However, 24% would take some refugees from North Africa, 26% would take some Syrians, and 53% would take some Ukrainians.⁶

Come March 2016, the numbers look drastically different: 61% are against taking refugees altogether, 32% would take refugees only for a limited time, and a mere 3% would allow them to settle. Only 17% would take any MENA refugees at all, while 79% would do so under no circumstances. Only 37% would take Ukrainians, while 55% would not.⁷ While resistance to migration has overall increased, it is particularly the MENA refugees suffering the brunt of the bias.

² <http://www.imediaethics.org/czech-tv-news-told-staff-negatively-cover-refugees-leaked-audio-anonymous-sources-tell-czech-news-site/>

³ <http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/documents/2995521/7233417/3-20042016-AP-EN.pdf/34c4f5af-eb93-4ecd-984c-577a5271c8c5>

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ <http://domaci.ihned.cz/c1-64371570-uprchliky-ze-syrie-a-severni-afriky-v-cesku-nehce-70-procent-lidi-ukazuje-pruzkum>

⁷ http://cvvm.soc.cas.cz/media/com_form2content/documents/c1/a7549/f3/pm160422a.pdf

Root Causes of Czech Resistance to Migration

There are several root causes amalgamating into a highly toxic bias towards refugees. The increased frequency – real or perceived – in terrorist activity on European soil plays a major part, as do incidents such as the Cologne affair, because it compounds the prevailing discourse within the country that Muslims fundamentally do not belong to Europe. This discourse has gained traction and attained mainstream status primarily through the efforts of the aforementioned triumvirate of anti-immigrant politicians, Zeman, Babis, and Chovanec. The popularity of all three have risen, in Zeman's case dramatically in large part due to outrageously stating that Muslims are a veritable invading force and cannot be integrated into Europe⁸, since they started promulgating anti-immigrant sentiments, while Prime Minister Sobotka's has fallen as a result of his more moderate stance.⁹

Additionally, the aforementioned media bias extends beyond just Prima TV station, which was recently incriminated in a scandal. The anti-immigrant voices receive far more air-time than the pro-migrant ones¹⁰, which shapes public opinion immensely as a survey has shown that 75% of the Czech population follows the refugee crisis actively.¹¹ The prevalence of risk analysis as opposed to opportunity analysis, the latter of which only a few civil society actors are responsible for, is thus all-encompassing.

Lastly, the V4-dimension cannot be ignored. Although the Czech Republic itself has close to no experience with refugees, making its resistance to it even more puzzling, the situation in Hungary – real or perceived – has to some extent been appropriated by the Czech populist politicians. The V4 countries increasingly cooperate on political issues and speak as a bloc. In this context, Hungary has been extremely successful in dominating the bloc's agenda and pitting the V4 against the EU on a wide range of issues, such as the quota system. The quota system's apparent failure has further vindicated the bloc's perception that it, not the EU, has the proper approach to the refugee crisis, which largely puts human rights second to concerns such as national sovereignty and European isolationism – something that resonates well with the Czech public, who for the first time feels truly relevant in a European context.

Conclusion

The Czech Republic fears the known unknown. Known in the sense that terrible headlines increasingly dominate the Czech media and paints a picture of dire consequences of Muslim migration, unknown in the sense that it has little actual experience with refugees of any sorts, but especially Muslim. The populist Czech politicians tap into this fear and exacerbate it, promulgating a view that the very fabric of not only Czech but indeed European civilization is threatened, more so than by a resurgent Russia.¹² Ever the country of paradoxes, the Czech Republic is in acute need of labor, having a healthy, growing economy but a shortage of workers, which refugees, with proper integration efforts, could help fill. However, the absence of an effective integration program, as well as a lack of political will to integrate refugees due to public resistance towards migration, makes for an inhospitable refugee and integration environment.

⁸ <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/jan/18/integrating-muslims-into-europe-is-impossible-says-czech-president>

⁹ <http://zpravy.aktualne.cz/domaci/prezident-zeman-je-mezilidmi-stale-popularnejsi-predbeh-i/r~80344c84cb5911e58a2b0025900fea04/>

¹⁰ <http://manipulatori.cz/analiza-medialniho-pokryti-uprchlicke-krize/>

¹¹ http://cvvm.soc.cas.cz/media/com_form2content/documents/c1/a7549/f3/pm160422a.pdf

¹² http://zpravy.idnes.cz/babis-uprchlici-istou-nejvetsi-ohrozeni-evropy-vetsi-nez-konflikt-s-ruskem-1u9-domaci.aspx?c=A150701_152946_domaci_kop

Hungary

(Results based on the country workshops of 09 May 2016 and 30 May 2016)

From very early on during the 2015 refugee crisis, Hungary – the first entry point for the Balkans migration route into the EU – has received increased media attention internationally, and was often accused of misconduct with regards of the treatment of migrants. Prime Minister Viktor Orbán first mentioned his plans of regulating migration into Hungary after the Charlie Hebdo attacks in January 2015, following which the government launched a coordinated media campaign that demonized migrants as a threat to national security. The Hungarian government’s strong anti-immigration rhetoric and policies that followed – most importantly the construction of a border fence along the Southern border, the criminalization of irregular migration, and a proposed constitutional amendment that is supposed to give the government far-reaching emergency powers – have surprised many European onlookers. This campaign is still going on, and is now targeting the EU’s supposed quota system for the relocation of refugees, which the government seeks to conflate with terrorism. With the new exclusivity of a security frame vis-à-vis migration, Hungary now represents a “pure case” within the European Union for securitized migration, i.e. the framing of migration as a security threat.

Domestic Politics and Migration

What makes the Hungarian political discourse on migration special is not its language used to depict migrants and refugees, as this language borrows heavily from pre-existing Western European discourses, which have long been depicting migration as a many-faced threat along three main axes: a threat to our economy (job loss and welfare tourism), a threat to our lives (terrorism), and a threat to our culture/identity (Islam). These three axes for the message that was conveyed by the Hungarian campaign’s initial billboards, were distributed country-wide. Instead, we maintain that the specificities of the Hungarian case have more to do with underlying socio-political conditions, most notably pre-existing xenophobia in Hungary, the institutional context, and the politics of the FIDESZ government, which frequently relies on a master frame of “true Hungarians” (i.e. supporters of the government) under threat.

Our investigation suggests that the campaign was originally launched – long before the refugee crisis hit the country – to introduce yet another politically constructed crisis in order to draw attention away from a series of scandals and mismanaged policies that lead to an all-time low in government support by the end of 2014. This loss in support necessitated new action to mobilize the core electorate and draw back voters lost to FIDESZ’ extreme right opposition, Jobbik by coopting the party’s rhetoric (including anti-immigration) and symbolic goals. Since migration during the first few months of 2015 was limited when compared to current numbers, and not directed at Hungary as a destination, migrants represented an “easy tool” for political manipulation. The preexisting institutional structures could then be used to take over public discourse with the government’s frame and crowd out alternative views, eventually forcing pro-migrant groups in civil society (see later in this analysis) to adopt novel approaches.

Relying on FIDESZ’s hold on the media, independent institutions like the constitutional court, its lack of opposition, and the population’s general xenophobia; the government elite constructed a media campaign against migrants/refugees that keeps communicating an atmosphere of danger and fear through public speeches, press releases, biased media reporting, “national consultations” (pseudo-referenda), and the aforementioned billboard campaign. In addition, the government relies on politically reliable experts and talking heads, and symbolic non-discursive tools like the border fence – which underlines the image of a country under threat – and the transit zones – which force refugees into populated areas without state assistance, thereby fueling tensions with locals. This campaign is now in its next phase, with a billboard campaign urging Hungarians to vote against the EU’s quota system at a referendum that raises issues of constitutionality. Even if the referendum does not take

place, it will still be an effective tool for maintaining a sense of urgency and threat until the foreseeable future.

Hungarian Civil Society and Migration

FIDESZ's hold over Hungarian politics effectively negates the power of traditional actors that can resist an anti-migration rhetorics and policies: the judiciary, the parliamentary opposition, and the media. Since most of the media is either government controlled or engages in self-censorship; the political opposition is weak and fragmented; and the judiciary is under government control; civil society is left to counteract government actions and to promote a pro-refugee frame. Though NGOs can also question securitization claims, they often do not possess enough social capital to be effective on their own and require the assistance of one of the three main actors, or, in the Hungarian case, nonconventional methods.

Indeed, due to FIDESZ's dominance in the media, competing interpretations offered by the opposition and civil society received little to no visibility. These asymmetrical power relations forced pro-refugee groups to adopt new approaches. The centerpiece of these efforts were efforts of local civil society to assist migrants along the border and in Budapest's transit zones, established during the summer of 2015. Here, civil society effectively had to take over the state's responsibilities and showed never before seen activism and resolve. Both issues were highly symbolic, therefore they caught the attention of the Western, and Hungarian tabloid media, offering increased visibility to the pro-refugee frame. Within this frame, Hungarians were depicted as a solidaristic people with a xenophobic government, a people that is willing to help refugees in need. In fact, this shift could even temporarily halt the rise of xenophobic tendencies until transit zones were closed down.

Slovakia¹³

(Results mainly based on the country workshop of 13 May 2016)

Slovakia has had an unusual experience with the current migration crisis, with almost no irregular migrant ever setting foot in the country. Several factors in particular have defined Slovakia's relationship with the migration crisis, including the 2016 *election campaign*, the *lack of historical engagement in the country with migration and Islam* in general, a *public sector inadequately prepared* to cope with the strategic and practical challenges arising from the situation, and the *Slovak Presidency of the EU Council* in the second half of 2016.

Following the parliamentary elections, Slovakia entered a new phase in its domestic debate regarding migration. The new coalition government, which includes both the previously ruling SMER party and the more moderate Most-Hid party, has essentially ended the practice of using the issue as a political ploy. Due to the fact that Slovakia is currently holding the EU presidency (July 2016 – December 2016), the country is also under pressure to contribute constructively to discussions on this issue. Slovak participation in voluntary resettlement under the EU-Turkey agreement has now become an option, with the first 100 people for resettlement planned before the end of 2017.

The March 5th elections, and the campaign preceding it, were the primary driving forces shaping public discourse on migration. Political actors seeking an appealing campaign issue that could displace concerns about unsolved structural problems, were able to push the issue of migration to the top of the agenda.

While the issue was especially salient with the Slovak public, in general, there was a wide *consensus* among almost all political parties *on rejecting European proposals for mandatory resettlement and relocation*. It was thought that the EU's response should be focused on solving the root causes of the crisis and providing stronger border protection. What varied was the rhetoric and the use of *ethnicized populist* arguments.

Furthermore, the government followed up on its promise to challenge the EU in court regarding the mandatory relocation scheme. The file was submitted a day before Hungary did the same, making the countries *the only two member states to bring this issue before the European Court of Justice*.

From the perspective of governance, the policy of the Slovak government reflected the wider public discourse on the issue and was particularly reactive to outside events and forces. The government, in other words, was not especially proactive in seeking to outline its own policy. In light of the aforementioned constraints, the Fico government's position before March 2016 included several core components: *rejection of any mandatory European redistribution mechanism, strong border protection, and the prioritization of solutions aimed at addressing the root causes of migration*.

Heated statements of Slovak political leaders making international headlines and the country's vehement rejection of the mandatory quotas earned Slovakia a notorious reputation of quota-refusing Muslim-cautious country.

However this perception is not entirely objective. Not only the Slovak government has done more than it is being publicly credited for, the civil society has demonstrated unprecedented mobilization and solidarity with the asylum seekers as well.

Based upon an agreement between Slovak and Austrian governments, a small Slovak border town, Gabčíkovo, has been hosting on a rotating basis 500 Syrian asylum seekers that are officially registered in Austria and are waiting for the application to be processed. According to the Slovak Ministry of

¹³ For more background information on Slovakia, see GLOBSEC's report "Slovakia: Migration trends and political dynamics" by Martin Dubecí, <http://www.cepolicy.org/publications/slovakia-migration-trends-and-political-dynamics>

Interior present at the meeting, Slovaks are working with their Austrian counterparts to expand the deal and host a larger number of asylum seekers from different countries.

Although objective to the “mandatory” element of the quota system, Slovak government offered 200 spots for relocation to be made available by 2017. In cooperation with a private Catholic initiative, Slovakia has resettled 150 Iraqi Christians from Mosul area. Slovakia has already committed 90 Frontex officers – a disproportionately large number. Slovakia is also contributing and sending officers to EASO (European Asylum Support Office) in Greece.

Following the tragic deaths of refugees on their way to Europe in summer 2015, Slovak civil society mobilized and launched a viral online petition to “plea for humanity”. The “*Plea for Humanity*” campaign attracted support from major celebrities, athletes, corporations and the President.

Slovak government responded by distributing 500 000 euros and later earmarking another 500 000 euros installment for immediate humanitarian assistance to refugees through Slovak NGOs. The government also opened up a dialogue with the campaign, which led to the establishment of the *consulting and implementation mechanism* - a working group on the government's response to the crisis which includes representatives of civil society.

Not only established humanitarian NGOs were there to help. Hundreds of self-organized and non-institutionalized volunteers went to the Balkan route – Serbia, Croatia, and Hungary – to help refugees on the way to Europe. Thousands participated in the “*Who will help?*” campaign providing accommodation, coordinating the effort, or participating in fundraising. With the Balkan route closed, hundreds of Slovaks still regularly go to Austrian reception centers – that are only several kilometers away from Bratislava – to bring food or other necessities for refugees or assist with social work.

There are still numerous other problems plaguing Slovakia’s engagement with the issue.

There is no comprehensive package of policies - related to everything from healthcare to employment support - that clearly specifies the responsibility of different government offices. The lack of one designated migration office with overarching competencies hampers constructive policies and legal changes.

Slovak uneasiness with relocations is also a much deeper structural problem than it is understood in Brussels. Slovakia is not an attractive destination country for asylum seekers. It does not have developed expats networks that will smoothen cultural integration of the newcomers and provide additional employment options. Slovakia does not offer sufficient state support to refugees and does not have a necessary societal experience. It’s complicated, often incoherent legal system makes it even harder for asylum seekers to receive a legal status, appeal decisions, or understand their education, labor, health care and other rights and obligations. Placed in such an environment, refugees would have a natural incentive to move on to another place.

As a result, rushed relocations without proper preparations on the ground might be counterproductive to the development of a smooth European solution and harmful to refugees themselves.

The pre-election anti-immigration frenzy has calmed down. The Slovak government is now facing a challenging task to improve its negatively perceived domestic record in an environment that was previously torn apart by inflammatory rhetoric.

Slovenia

(Results based on the country workshop of 11 April 2016)

Slovenia is a small Central and East European (CEE) member state with a total population of 2 million. It is an ethnically and religiously homogenous country. The largest minorities in Slovenia are represented by nationalities from the former Yugoslav republics. The asylum policy has been restrictive with just a few successful applications per year. The experience with integration of immigrants from developing countries on a larger scale has been limited. During the period of the European migration and refugee crisis the labour market conditions were still affected by the economic crisis, which has hit Slovenia from 2009 on and put the country under substantial strain.

As the migration and refugee crisis entered the EU agenda in 2015, the humanitarian view prevailed in Slovenia. Slovenia already contributed to the search and rescue operation Mare Nostrum carried out by Italians. During the summer of 2015, the migration flow on the Western Balkans route started to grow, leading first to the decision by Hungary to close down their border with a fence and criminalize the illegal entrants. In Slovenia, both general public and government were critical towards this move. The decision by Germany to suspend unilaterally the Dublin regulation by taking in migrants directly, which triggered substantial criticism with some of the CEE countries, was not opposed by Slovenia. At the September Council of the EU deciding on the relocation quotas, Slovenia, in contrast with Hungary, Czech Republic and Slovakia, voted in favour of the objective key based relocation quotas. The total number of refugees Slovenia is supposed to take from the hot-spots in Italy and Greece was only about 560.

In September, the number of illegal entries to Slovene territory started to increase. By October, Hungary managed to close down its southern border, which led to the redirection of the migrant flow through Slovene territory. At first, Slovenia tried to implement the Schengen procedures with regard to the processing of each migrant at the border. There was an agreement between Austria and Slovenia on keeping the daily intake below 2,500 in order to distribute burdens and keep the situation under control. The plan, however, quickly turned out to be unrealistic since the immigration pressure was too strong. Furthermore, the Croatian authorities decided to pass on the migrants as quickly as possible. Their centre-left government was facing elections and did not want migrants to stay on their territory, thus potentially strengthening the right-wing political parties who saw migration flows as a security issue. In order to prevent the Slovene authorities to delay entries into Slovenia, they transported the migrants to different locations along the border, often during the late night hours, and told them to simply cross the fields (green border) to enter Slovenia.

During the first weeks, handling of the migrations was a huge challenge for the Slovene authorities. There was a lack of facilities and technical means on the ground. The small communities, located at the entry points, faced huge pressures. The civil society and charity organizations played a crucial role in providing the humanitarian aid. The immigrations also turned out as a major logistic and security challenge. At the peak of the crisis, up to 12,500 migrants entered Slovenia each day, while total police force of Slovenia numbers half of that. Furthermore, during this period, the police was on strike. The number of security incidents was, in general, low, but each time the migrants felt that they were being kept in the country for too long, tensions increased quickly.

Towards the end of October, the political tensions increased as well. The centrist government faced growing criticism at home. The centre-right opposition argued that the government was incapable of handling the security situation and proposed establishment of a national guard. The conservative forces, including part of the Catholic Church, were mobilized. The pressures were also coming from

abroad. Introduction of border controls in EU countries further north triggered fears in the government that Slovenia could become a migrant pocket, which could due to the small size of the country, quickly turn into a humanitarian and security disaster. Thus, government decided to take on the securitization of the issue and announced introduction of 'technical barriers' on the border with Croatia. Since the early November, a razor wire fence, provided by Hungary, was installed throughout the 300-kilometre border. The razor wire triggered criticism by the progressive part of civil society, but this did not help much. While in early October, humanitarian concerns were still predominant, already by late October, as many as 80% of the population supported the fence.

Austria, eventually, decided to take in all the immigrants. As cooperation with Croatia improved, train connections were re-established. The migrants now passed Slovenia in organised convoys, mostly during the night. Even though almost half a million of migrants went through Slovenia, most of Slovenes did not see a single one of them. The number of those who decided to apply for asylum in Slovenia was no more than a couple of hundreds.

As the weather conditions turned worse towards the end of the 2015, the migrant flow started to decline. Political tensions, however, grew stronger. Following the launch of the idea of 'mini-Schengen', leaving Slovenia out, the opposition pressured the government to resign. The Paris terrorist attacks and attacks on women in Cologne also affected the public opinion in Slovenia. There was also a growing discussion on costs related to the migration crisis and the integration of refugees.

As the political climate in these two countries changed, Germany and Austria first decided to only take in immigrants coming from war zones and then to introduce daily intake quotas. Through a set of coordinated actions, in the early 2016, Austria, Slovenia and other countries in the region managed to reduce the flow on the Western Balkans route and finally, by establishing effective control at the Macedonian border with Greece, closed down the route completely. Implementation of the EU-Turkey deal additionally helped to reduce the pressures on Greece.

Since the beginning of 2016, the public attitude started to change in Slovenia, with the humanitarian concerns again stepping affront. The opposition still argued that the annual quota should be set and certain individual local communities protested against hosting the immigrant centres. When the first refugees started to arrive in Slovenia based on the relocation scheme, attention had already re-focused on issues such as education and integration into the labour market. There were analyses and reports pointing out a set of new challenges such as long integration periods and certain negative experience with mass integration from abroad. The number of refugees Slovenia decided to take however is small. Focusing on the positive experiences, especially of some smaller Austrian municipalities, encouraged individual Slovene municipalities to welcome refugees and themselves become positive examples.

Project Partners

Austrian Society for European Politics (Vienna, Austria)

The Austrian Society for European Politics (OEGfE) aims to promote and support information activities on European affairs in Austria. Based in Vienna, the Society is a non-governmental and non-partisan platform mainly constituted by the Austrian Social Partners. It was founded in 1991 and has since then continuously expanded its range of activities. All central steps of the European integration process have been accompanied: Austria's EU accession, the introduction of the Euro as a common currency, enlargement towards the central and eastern European neighbours, the Austrian Council Presidencies in 1998 and 2006, the ratification process of the Lisbon Treaty and the various European elections. The guiding principle of OEGfE thereby has always been to communicate directly and maintain close contact to the citizens as central stakeholders of European integration.

Project team members: Paul Schmidt (Secretary General), Christoph Breinschmid (Research & Project Management), Stefan Schaller (Research & Project Management)

Website: <http://oegfe.at/wordpress/en/>

EUROPEUM (Prague, Czech Republic)

EUROPEUM Institute for European Policy is a non-profit, non-partisan, and independent think-tank focussing on European integration and cohesion. EUROPEUM contributes to democracy, security, stability, freedom, and solidarity across Europe as well as to active engagement of the Czech Republic in the European Union. EUROPEUM undertakes original research, organizes public events and educational activities, and formulates new ideas and recommendations to improve European and Czech policy making.

Project team members: Vladimír Bartovic (Director), Christian Kvorning Lassen (Research Fellow), Kateřina Davidová (Research Assistant)

Website: <http://www.europeum.org/en/>

Center for European Neighborhood Studies, Central European University (Budapest, Hungary)

The Center for European Neighborhood Studies (CENS) is an independent research center of the Central European University (CEU) located in Budapest, Hungary. Its main goal is to contribute to an informed international dialogue about the future of the European Union in the world, while capitalizing on its Central European perspective and regional embeddedness. The strategic focus of the center is academic and policy-oriented research on the place and role of the European Union in its rapidly changing and increasingly volatile neighborhood. Through its research, CENS seeks to contribute to the understanding of the environment where the EU, its member states and partners need to (co)operate, and it aims at supporting the constructive development of these relations by providing opportunities for discussion and exchange. The center's geographic focus areas are Central and Eastern Europe, the Western Balkans and Turkey, Eastern Europe, the South Caucasus and Russia.

Project team members: Péter Balázs (Director), Gabi Góbl (Program Coordinator), András Szalai (Research Fellow)

Website: <https://cens.ceu.edu/>

GLOBSEC Policy Institute (Bratislava, Slovakia)

The GLOBSEC Policy Institute is a regional think-tank based in Bratislava, Slovakia. Its main objective is to help decision-makers and opinion-makers in Central Europe - and in V4 countries in particular - to craft common responses to current challenges and strengthen their voice in EU and NATO debates. The Visegrad Group (Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Slovakia) will be strong only if its responses are built on shared understanding of the importance of liberal democracy, freedom and transatlantic bond. In today's changing security environment, these values are at stake and must not be taken for granted. CEPI committed itself to advocate for upholding such principles both at home and abroad.

Project team members: Milan Nič (Executive Director), Alena Kudzko (Research Fellow)

Website: <http://www.cepolicy.org/>

International Relations Research Centre, University of Ljubljana (Slovenia)

The CIR was established in 1981 as an independent institution, with no political or state affiliation. It forms an integral part of the research Institute of Social Sciences at the Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Ljubljana. In addition to conducting research as its most important activity, the CIR also carries out teaching and other assignments that fall within its fields of interest. The CIR aims to promote co-operation with other similar institutions, in publishing, organising conferences and workshops, consulting and performing other professional activities in the field of international relations. CIR research provides the basis for the graduate and undergraduate courses in International Relations at the Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Ljubljana. The research results are widely disseminated, both within Slovenia and abroad.

Project team members: Maja Bučar (Head), Marko Lovec (Research Fellow)

Website: <http://www.mednarodni-odnosi.si/cmo/>