FOUNDATION FOR EUROPEAN PROGRESSIVE STUDIES
FONDATION EUROPÉENNE D'ÉTUDES PROGRESSISTES

# "THE FLEXIBLE SOLIDARITY"


## *HOW PROGRESSIVE PARTIES HANDLED THE MIGRATION CRISIS IN CENTRAL EUROPE*

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# “The Flexible Solidarity”

## How Progressive Parties Handled the Migration Crisis in Central Europe

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# INTRODUCTION

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In 2016, the Foundation for European Progressive Studies and Policy Solutions carried out research on the approach and response to the so-called refugee crisis of the Central European countries. The results of this research were gathered and published in the book "*The political communication of the refugee crisis in Central and Eastern Europe*"[1] at the very moment when the crisis reached its climax, and the debate over how to better handle the crisis, and on the lack of mutual solidarity, seemed to have driven a wedge between Eastern and Western European countries.

The Eastern European member states presented a *nearly united front against a planned EU policy, and [...] have thus far played an instrumental role in foiling joint European action on the refugee crisis*.[2] And, as this previous research has already exposed, social democratic parties in many Central and Eastern European member states were not exempt from an anti-refugee stance. We had already underlined back in 2016 that *the left-right distinction, weak to begin with, proved almost irrelevant [...]. Hardly any mainstream party in the region dared challenge the prevailing attitude of rejecting refugees*.[3]

[1] G. Győri, *The political communication of the refugee crisis in Central and Eastern Europe*, FEPS and Policy Solutions, Brussels 2016, http://www.feps-europe.eu/assets/3f672c37-1e17-4332-976b-ac395bc30ddd/political-communication-of-the-refugee-crisis-in-ceepdf.pdf
[2] Ibid, p. 63.
[3] Ibid. p. 9.

The refugee crisis, with its huge flows of people trying to reach the European borders, in fact put a finger on a sensitive and controversial issue for liberal democracies in general, and for social democratic parties in particular: that of how to handle migration flows and migrant integration. This issue is far from being new, but it is definitely gaining increasing relevance in an era of steadily growing international mobility, in which about 3.3% of the global population is made of migrants (244 million, including 20 million refugees) and in which the number of international migrants has grown faster than the world's population.[4]

Democratic governments, and not just those in Europe, are torn between two equally pressing imperatives. On the one hand, they feel the pressure to respect human rights, fulfil their legal obligations by ensuring protections to refugees, as well as to uphold universalistic principles of equality and non-discrimination—and, on the other hand, to ensure protection to their citizens, preserving their right to decide who is allowed to enter in the country. The latter impulse is also a key aspect of sovereignty that Central European countries have perceived as threatened by the European Union's decision to encourage a fairer share of responsibility among the member states, by means of the relocation and resettlement schemes. Thus, the attitude of democratic governments towards migration is constantly wavering between inclusionary and exclusionary policies, between openness and closure.

[4] See: United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, *244 million international migrants living abroad worldwide, new UN statistics reveal*, 2016, http://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/blog/2016/01/244-million-international-migrants-living-abroad-worldwide-new-un-statistics-reveal/

The question of migration might also become a source of division for mainstream social democratic and progressive parties, which need to find a balance between their core values and principles, particularly social solidarity, that pull them towards pro-immigration policies, and the parallel drive towards the protection of workers in the labour markets and in the access to welfare services, as well as the need to tackle identity-based concerns, that conversely can call for more restrictive immigration policies.

In representative democracies, public opinion plays an important role. As political parties respond to and depend on their electorates, they are affected by the public opinion's general stance towards migration. Central European progressive parties are of course no exceptions. Widespread scepticism, electoral considerations, party politics, the framing of the discourse on migration by the media and the persistence of cultural prejudices may therefore condition centre-left parties' approach to this extremely divisive issue.

Against this backdrop, FEPS and Policy Solutions decided to follow up the work started in 2016, and to focus the analysis on the Central European social democratic parties, in order to observe their approach to the issue at stake and their shifts in attitude and/or strategy, with the aim of identifying a common pattern, understanding motives and drives, and formulating recommendations on how to deal with the refugee question and other issues related to migration in a progressive way, consistent with the fundamental value of solidarity.

The result of this effort is this booklet, with case studies on Austria, Slovakia, the Czech Republic and Hungary. The four countries under scrutiny obviously represent different experiences and have different backgrounds. Three out of the four were previously

part of the Communist bloc, and so have very little experience of immigration, unlike the fourth, Austria, which has a longer history of immigration and the integration of migrants. Three out of four—the exception being Hungary—were governed, during the crisis, by coalitions dominated by social democratic parties. And only two out of four —Austria and Hungary—were directly affected by the crisis either as a destination or a transit country. In all the cases analysed, however, the social democratic parties have—either gradually or from the outset of the crisis—chosen to prioritize security concerns over humanitarian considerations.

In spite of their attempt to please public opinions hostile to migration, this strategy and its consequent shift towards a more right-wing approach has not repaid the left-wing parties that have adopted it so far. A reflection is, therefore, essential to understand these countries' sceptical attitude towards migration, and considering that international mobility is not going to exhaust itself but it has rather become a fact of the present, it is imperative to develop strategies concerning how European progressive parties can reconcile the need to be attractive to the electorate with the equally essential need to stand by their values, in order not to lose their soul.

# THE CENTRE-LEFT AND MIGRATION IN AUSTRIA

DR OLIVER GRUBER, UNIVERSITY OF VIENNA, AUSTRIA

The 2015 refugee climax has left a dramatic mark on Europe, especially on the Central European countries that have been the venue of large-scale refugee movements. Austria has been at the epicentre of these movements, as it served as an "entrance gate" to Western Europe. More than 90,000 requests for asylum were recorded in 2015, turning the country into the third-largest net receiver of refugees in Europe in 2015. Austria, however, is also an interesting case by which to study the political responses and consequences of these developments, in particular with regard to the governing Social Democratic Party of Austria (SPÖ).

At the peak of the refugee movements in the autumn of 2015, the Austrian government coalition responded with a welcoming approach. SPÖ party leader and Chancellor Werner Faymann closely coordinated with his German counterpart Angela Merkel in an effort to establish control over the masses of people in motion. He also distanced himself vocally from measures taken by Austria's neighbour, Hungary, comparing them with *the darkest times of our continent*[5]. However, within a couple of months this approach was replaced by one of the most restrictive asylum regimes in Western Europe, setting new precedence for the restriction of access and residence of asylum seekers. After repeated internal conflicts with its coalition partner (the centre-right Austrian People's Party), the SPÖ eventually approved a fortification of the southern Schengen

[5] Die Presse, 12 September 2015

border, an obligatory time restriction of the right to asylum, efforts to shut down the migrant routes through the Balkans and finally an emergency decree option that limits the number of asylum seekers allowed access to the asylum procedure.

The government's hesitant performance and the ongoing disagreement between the coalition parties over the right approach led to declining polls for both of them. For the centre-left social democrats, these tensions and the party leadership's eventual political U-turn culminated in the demission of Chancellor Werner Faymann. It unveiled the existing internal tensions among Austria's social democrats about the right approach to immigration and asylum policy, which the refugee climax had fuelled in a new way. Yet, it also unveiled a general dilemma for social democratic parties, if external events, critical public opinion and successful radical right opponents amalgamate into a context that pressures them to choose between opposing approaches to these issues. This paper summarizes the policy responses during the 2015 refugee climax from an Austrian perspective and tries to explain the factors that inspired the shifting approach and its consequences for social democrats.

## Refugees and asylum policy in Austria: History on the brink of East and West

Since the Second World War, Austria's experience with refugee movements has long been shaped by its geographical location on the threshold between Eastern and Western Europe. In contrast to the systematic recruitment of so called "guest workers" from Turkey and Yugoslavia during the 1960s and 1970s, the largest influx of refugees came from a series of refugee waves from Eastern Europe, including Hungarian refugees in the wake of the Hungarian

Revolution in 1956, Czechoslovakian refugees in the course of the Prague Spring in 1968 and Polish refugees as a consequence of the declaration of martial law in 1981, but also Romanian refugees in 1988/89. Although for many of them, Austria was primarily a transit country, a number of Eastern European refugees settled in Austria.[6] While policy makers were reluctant to consider Austria a country of immigration, since the 1990s the civil wars on the Balkans, Austria's accession to the European Union and the arrival of extra-European refugees have drastically increased the number of foreign nationals from 4.4% in 1988 to 11.6% in 2012.[7]

The policy responses since the 1990s have been vast and have included major reforms of the immigration and asylum laws, of the citizenship regime as well as—in recent years—of the policies managing the integration of newcomers and of second generation immigrants.[8] To a large extent, these policy reforms over the last 30 years came with the consent of the SPÖ. Since 1986, the SPÖ has been the senior partner in the ruling government coalition with

[6] R.Bauböck, *Nach Rasse und Sprache verschieden«. Migrationspolitik in Österreich von der Monarchie bis heute Reihe Politikwissenschaft* (Vol. 31), Wien: Institut für Höhere Studien 1996, pp. 8-11

[7] See: H.Fassmann, and H.-M.Fenzl, *Asyl und Flucht*, [in:] H.Fassmann and I.Stacher (Eds.), Österreichicher Migrations- und Integrationsbericht. Demographische Entwicklungen - Sozioökonomische Strukturen - Rechtliche Rahmenbedingungen, Klagenfurt/Celovec: Drava 2003, pp. 284-304.

[8] For a synopsis, see R R.Münz and P.Zuser and J.Kytir, *Grenzüberschreitende Wanderungen und ausländische Wohnbevölkerung. Struktur und Entwicklung*, [in:] H.Fassmann & I.Stacher (Eds.), Österreichischer Migrations- und Integrationsbericht. Demographische Entwicklungen – sozio-ökonomische Strukturen – rechtliche Rahmenbedingungen, Klagenfurt/Celovec: Drava 2003, pp. 20-61 and also see A. Gächter, *Migrationspolitik in Österreich seit 1945*. Vol. 12. Arbeitspapiere Migration und soziale Mobilität Vienna: (ZSI) Centre for Social Innovation, 2008. In addition see: T. Krings, Von der „*Ausländerbeschäftigung" zur Rot-Weiß-Rot-Karte: Sozialpartnerschaft und Migrationspolitik in Österreich*. Österreichische Zeitschrift für Politikwissenschaft, 42(3) 2013, p. 263–278.; and: B.Perchinig, *Von der Fremdarbeit zur Integration? (Arbeits)migrations- und Integrationspolitik in der Zweiten Republik*, Österreich in Geschichte und Literatur, 53(3) 2009, p. 228-246.

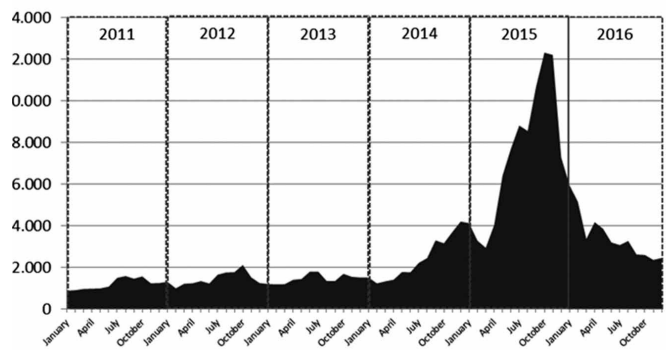
the Christian-Democratic Peoples' Party (ÖVP), interrupted only by a six-year period of a right-wing coalition formed by ÖVP and FPÖ, which existed between 2000 and 2006. The SPÖ was the government party mainly responsible for immigration and integration policy until 1999 (presiding over the Interior Ministry and the Ministry of Labour). During the years in opposition, by and large it backed the government's policy reforms (e.g., the introduction of the integration agreement in 2002 or the government's large-scale reform of immigrant and asylum laws in 2005). After the return of the Grand Coalition in 2006, the SPÖ ceded the main ministerial competences for immigration, integration and asylum to the ÖVP, which has been running the two current key ministries—the Ministry of Interior and the Ministry of Integration—ever since. As a consequence, in recent years the SPÖ had a rather responsive role, reacting to its coalition partner's proposals on immigration and integration policies instead of putting its own mark on the government's approach.[9] This constellation has become crucial in the events prior to and in the aftermath of the 2015 refugee climax.

[9] In 2010, the government coalition presented a National Action Plan for integration. It defined seven key areas of action, including language and education, labour, values and rule of law, health and social issues, intercultural dialogue, sports and leisure time, as well as housing. Since then, major policy reforms have been introduced, including the so-called point-based immigration regime (Red-White-Red-Card), additional language programs and tests to acquire German proficiency, a reform of the Islamic law regulating the external legal relationships of Islamic Religious Societies, and most recently an integration law reforming the integration measures and duties for newcomers in terms of language acquisition and job training/application. However, the ban of wearing of full-face veils has been introduced too. See: O.Gruber and S.Rosenberger, *The effects of institutional change on Austrian integration policy and the contexts that matter.* [in:] C.Bakir and D.Jarvis (Eds.), Institutional Entrepreneurship and Policy Change (pp. forthcoming). Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan 2017.

## The evolution and management of the 2015/16 refugee climax from an Austrian perspective

After a comparatively stable period of limited numbers of refugees, from autumn of 2014 the number of asylum applications had started to increase again, due to a growing influx of Syrian, Afghan and Iraqi refugees (See Fig. 1). In early 2015, the long-standing conflict between the federal government and regional authorities over the accommodation of refugees increased due to the growing demand. The country's main federal reception facility became completely over-allocated by the summer of 2015, and after freeze on new admissions the central government motioned a "right to intervention" for federal authorities in order to set up refugee shelters in the states[10]. This legislative measure was not the last in what should become a year of political turning points for Austria's refugee policy.

**FIG. 1:** MONTHLY NUMBER OF ASYLUM REQUESTS IN AUSTRIA, 2011-2016




*Source: Federal Ministry of Interior.*

[10] See: National council decision no. 237, available at: https://www.parlament.gv.at/PAKT/VHG/XXV/BNR/BNR_00237/index.shtml

The peaking influx of the autumn of 2015 not only triggered harsh political turmoil, but it also resulted in unprecedented forms of legislative and practical restrictions vis-à-vis refugees and asylum seekers. During a brief initial phase in September of 2015, government response was shaped by a welcoming approach. The Interior Minister received refugees at the central train station and the Chancellor Werner Faymann strengthened cooperation with German Chancellor Merkel to ensure safe passage for refugees while massively criticizing Viktor Orbán's mismanagement, comparing them *with the darkest times of our continent*[11] However, with each passing week this welcoming approach seemed to wane. The conservative coalition partner, the ÖVP, demanded a more restrictive approach vis-à-vis asylum seekers and neighbour countries and eventually forced the Chancellor into agreeing to a border control mission on Austria's eastern border. When the Western Balkans became the main venue of refugee movement in October, Foreign Minister Sebastian Kurz and Interior Minister Johanna Mikl-Leitner (both ÖVP) increasingly opposed the Merkel-Faymann-axis, demanded *an end to the welcoming policy*[12] and lobbied for *a Fortress Europe*[13] After weeks of heated controversy within the government coalition, the erection of temporary "structural measures" (*bauliche Maßnahmen*)[14] was announced, in effect a border fence envisaged to secure the southern border. In the end, 11 years after the EU eastern enlargement, Austria re-established the first fortified border fence separating two countries within the Schengen area.

[11] Die Presse, 12 September 2015
[12] Der Standard, 2 November 2015
[13] Die Presse, 22 October 2015
[14] Die Presse, 27 October 2015

The constant influx of refugees and the ongoing political conflict between the government parties had a particularly severe impact on the SPÖ, as tensions between advocates of a more sensitive approach and the party's more restrictive faction steadily increased. As a consequence, in January 2016 Chancellor Faymann nominated the former police commissioner of the eastern province of Burgenland, Hans-Peter Doskozil—a proponent of a tougher stance on asylum who had managed police operations during the refugee peak in September 2015—as new Defence Minister, calling for an official „relaunch" of the government's asylum strategy.[15] Together with Foreign Minister Kurz and Interior Minister Mikl-Leitner, Doskozil implemented the government's new strategy, to create a domino effect: Vienna took the lead in the coordination of national border control measures by Austria, Hungary and the countries on the Western Balkans in order to shut down the Balkan route and to create pressure for a common border control mission on the EU's external borders.

The next step towards restriction in the spring of 2016 was the preparation of an annual asylum cap, effectively limiting the number of refugees admitted through the asylum procedure—another suggestion made by the ÖVP with massive opposition of NGOs, legal experts and leftist opposition parties. After two legal opinions that were commissioned by the government concluded that refugee limits would be constitutional if the maintenance of public order and internal security was under threat,[16] the government coalition railroaded the respective amendment to asylum law to

[15] Der Standard, 18 January 2016
[16] W.Obwexer and B-C.Funk, *Gutachten - Völker-, unions- und verfassungsrechtliche Rahmenbedingungen für den beim Asylgipfel am 20. Jänner 2016 in Aussicht genommenen Richtwert für Flüchtlinge*, University of Innsbruck - Department of European Law and Public International Law 2016.

be passed by the Austrian parliament in April 2016.[17] It provided government with the option of passing an emergency decree to restrict further applications *if it can be plausibly substantiated that the functioning of state institution is endangered at a certain number of applicants*.[18] While the law itself does not indicate a specific number, the government coalition agreed on a limit of 37,500 applicants for 2016—another European precedent. Part of this law was also the limitation of "the timeline for asylum on time basis" for all applicants entering after November 2015. While previously, authorities were allowed to reassess the risks in the country of origin and the necessity of granting continued asylum during the first five years of residence in Austria, under the revised law they are obliged to do so for each case after three years of residence and for each country on an annual basis.

The hesitant approach and the conflicts within the government coalition left their mark on the two respective parties. Their popularity was in steady decline (see Fig. 6) and within the SPÖ this increased the internal tensions between the restrictive and the more liberal party factions. It eventually led to the resignation of the party leader, Chancellor Werner Faymann, in May 2016, who explicitly based his decision on the lack of internal support for his shift in asylum policy. His successor, Christian Kern, a political newcomer and former general manager of the Austrian Federal Railways, tried to mediate the internal conflict both by strengthening an internal working group to formulate core principles for the SPÖ but also by nominating Muna Duzdar, a member of the Viennese regional party with an immigrant background, as the

[17] See: National council decision no. 305, Available at: https://www.parlament.gv.at/PAKT/VHG/XXV/BNR/BNR_00305/index.shtml
[18] See: AsylG §36

new State Secretary for Diversity—a signal to leftist party ranks. In terms of asylum policy, however, Kern left the restrictive policy approach largely unchanged in light of the pressure coming not only from within its own restrictive ranks but also from the coalition partner. In fact, Kern might be willing to go even further than his predecessor, as demonstrated by his letter to the European Commission that Austria should be exempted from the EU's relocation program due to the country's extensive efforts during the 2015/16 refugee movements.

However, since his takeover legislative actions have rather centred on questions of the integration of refugees. In August of 2016 the SPÖ presented a position paper, confirming the implementation of the emergency decree and suggesting residence constraints for refugees within the province to which they are assigned, but which also demanded an obligatory integration year in which refugees would have to attend language courses, value courses, work training and application training. These regulations also apply to asylum seekers with a high likelihood of being granted asylum who previously had been excluded from regulations for recognized refugees. In the spring of 2017, these integration regulations became part of two new integration draft bills tabled by the government.[19]

To sum up: Since the autumn of 2015, policy developments have comprised drastic and unprecedented regulations, turning Austria's asylum regime into one of the strictest in the European Union. After the initial philosophy of adapting all available resourc-

[19] See: Ministerial proposals no. 290 (https://www.parlament.gv.at/PAKT/VHG/XXV/ME/ME_00290/index.shtml) and no. 291 (https://www.parlament.gv.at/PAKT/VHG/XXV/ME/ME_00291/index.shtml)

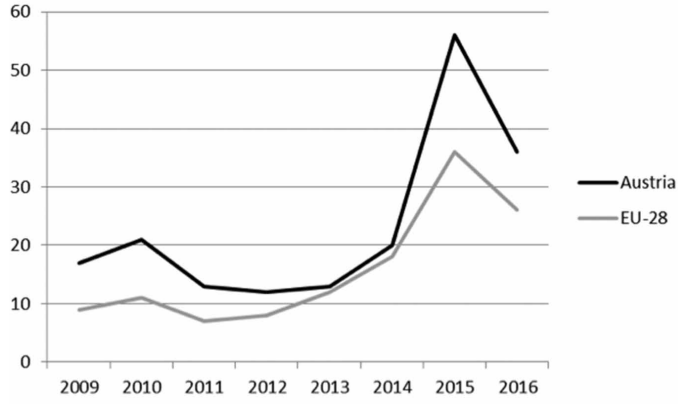
es to the reality of a major refugee influx, these new regulations sought to limit refugee influx by all available means. Much more than its conservative coalition partner, the SPÖ embodied this change of heart, shifting its stance from a welcoming policy approach to a drastically restrictive position within only a couple of months. In order to explain this shift, apart from the obvious pressure created by the continuous numbers of incoming refugees (turning Austria into the third-largest net receiver of refugees in Europe in 2015), two national context factors appear particularly important: public opinion and party political considerations.

## The political context: Public opinion and party politics

### Opinion polls

Since government parties need to operate within a framework of trends in public opinion, changes in people's perception of the refugee management highly influenced the shape of the policy solutions pursued by the government coalition since the autumn of 2015. A number of indicators document how public opinion has changed after the 2015 events. Above all, the salience of immigration- and asylum-related concerns has risen drastically. As documented by the Eurobarometer opinion poll, the number of people who named immigration among the two most important topics for Austrian politics grew from below 20% before the refugee climax to 56% in the autumn of 2015 and still 36% in the autumn of 2016 (with the Austrian population usually ranging above the EU average) (see Fig.2). However, as the trend graph demonstrates, the salience has started to decline again and a certain adaption to the new situation appears to have set in among the Austrian population.

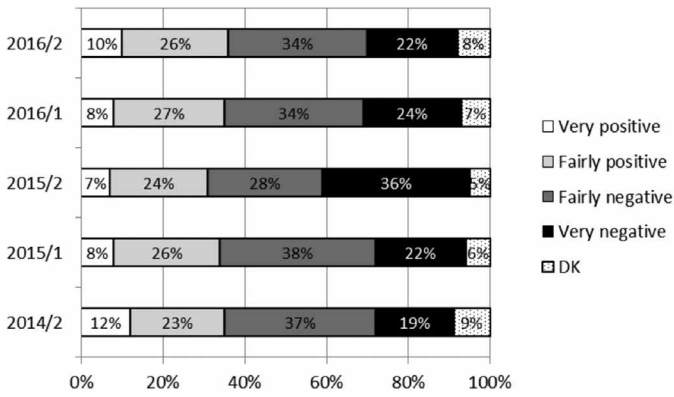
**FIG. 2:** PERCENTAGE OF RESPONDENTS NAMING IMMIGRATION AMONG OF THE TWO MOST IMPORTANT TOPICS THE COUNTRY IS FACING




*Source: Eurobarometer 2009-2016 (autumn-polls)*

This conclusion is further supported when looking at the feelings of respondents towards the immigration of third country nationals: As Fig. 3 shows, while there had already been a higher number negative than positive respondents before the peak of the refugee climax, this relationship became more single-sided in the autumn of 2015 (with 31% of positive respondents as compared to 64% of negative respondents). Since then, however, the numbers have become slightly more balanced again, with about 36% of positive respondents as compared to 56% of negative respondents in the autumn of 2016.

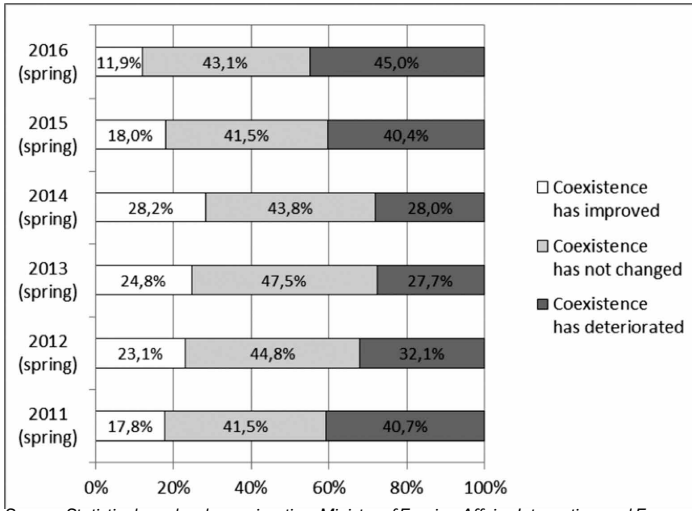
**FIG. 3:** PERCENTAGE OF RESPONDENTS WITH EITHER A POSITIVE OR NEGATIVE FEELING TOWARDS THE IMMIGRATION OF PEOPLE FROM OUTSIDE THE EU




*Source: Eurobarometer 2014-2016 (Spring & Autumn polls).*

Not only the general stance vis-à-vis immigration, but also the evaluation of immigrant integration by citizens without a migrant background clearly suffered from the 2015 events. Since 2011, the government's annual statistical yearbook on migration includes polls about the judgement of citizens vis-à-vis their coexistence with immigrant population (see Fig. 4). While there had been an obvious improvement of this assessment between 2011 and 2014, since 2015 the number of respondents judging that coexistence with the immigrant population had deteriorated increased again to about 45% in the spring of 2016, while only 12% observed an improvement and 43% saw no change at all. Back in 2014, only 28% of the respondents had observed a deterioration while, conversely, the same percentage of respondents (28%) had observed an improvement.

**FIG. 4:** CITIZENS' ATTITUDES VIS-À-VIS THE IMPROVEMENT OR DETERIORATION OF THEIR COEXISTENCE WITH THE IMMIGRANT POPULATION




*Source: Statistical yearbook on migration, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Integration and Europe.*

Thus, a rather sceptical and highly alert public opinion provided constant pressure for policy makers to come up with tight regulations in order to re-establish control over the management of refugee influx and the asylum procedure. In February of 2016, an internal SPÖ party member survey showed that 65% of the respondents welcomed an annual asylum cap. A majority of respondents demanded quicker asylum procedures (96%), cuts in EU funding for member states that refuse to accept refugees (92%), more repatriation agreements with third countries (89%) or the set-up of hot spots at the EU external border as the only legitimate entry gates for asylum requests (79%).[20] These pressures were closely tied to a media landscape in which prominent tabloid

[20] Der Standard, 4 February 2016

newspapers with wide coverage, most prominently the leading Kronen Zeitung, massively enforced these popular opinions and further forced the government's hand.

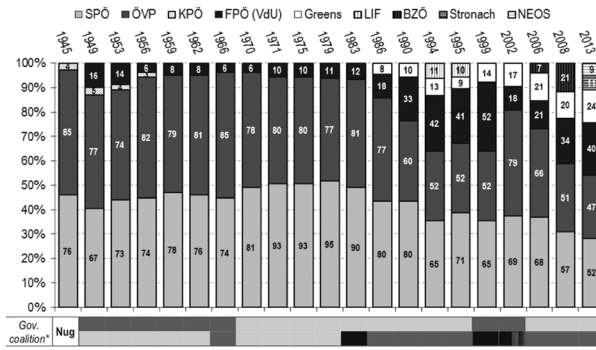
However, the translation of popular opinions into political action also depends on whether or not there are party political forces able to translate these opinions into actual legislative pressure. With the Austrian Freedom Party, FPÖ, Austrian politics features a highly successful party when it comes to mobilizing popular opinion on immigration and asylum, which is why the party context needs consideration too.

## Party politics

The conditions for the SPÖ in the Austrian party spectrum are somewhat peculiar when it comes to the question of immigration and asylum. Austria is a party dominated democracy; thus, parties are the central hinge between electoral platforms, parliamentary legislators and the executive branch, and they structure political conflict in Austria.[21] For decades, the mainstream centre-left (SPÖ) and centre-right (ÖVP) parties have been the dominant players, closely entangled with the major economic interest groups (Chamber of Business, Chamber of Agriculture, Chamber of Labour, Trade Union Federation and Federation of Industrialists).[22] As a consequence, for about five decades since World War II, SPÖ and ÖVP either governed together in a Grand Coalition (1955-1966; 1986-1999) or alone in a single-party government (1966-1983) (see Fig. 5).

[21] W. C. Müller, *After the 'Golden Age': Research into Austrian political parties since the 1980s*, European Journal of Political Research, 23, 1993, p. 439-463.
[22] P.Gerlich, *A Farewell to Corporatism*, [in:] K. R. Luther & W. C. Müller (Eds.), Politics in Austria. Still a case of consociatonalism?, London: Frank Cass 1992, p. 132-146.

**FIG. 5:** PARLIAMENTARY SEATS AND GOVERNMENT COALITIONS, 1945-2013




*Source: Gruber (2014)* [23]

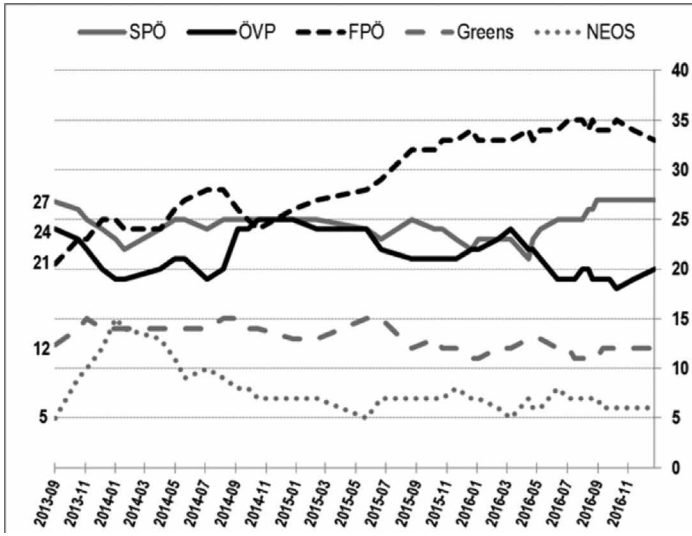
Yet, the increasing relevance of immigration and asylum topics since the 1990s coincided with a period in which both mainstream parties began to decline at the cost of fringe parties, the most durable challengers being the FPÖ on the far right and the Greens on the left-libertarian end of the party spectrum. From an SPÖ perspective, these changes had significant strategic implications. Because of the growing strength of the FPÖ, since the 1980s there has been no majority option on the left available for the SPÖ (neither with the Greens nor the Liberals), despite being the strongest parliamentary party on the federal level. As a consequence, due to the party's so-called "Vranitzky doctrine" (a cordon sanitaire vis-à-vis the FPÖ, enacted by party leader and Chancellor Franz Vranitzky in 1986), the SPÖ was effectively forced into Grand Coalitions with the centre-right ÖVP to stay in power. At the same time, though, both mainstream parties continuously lost voters, in

[23] O.Gruber, *Campaigning in Radical Right Heartland. The electoral politicization of immigration and ethnic relations in Austrian general elections, 1971-2013*, Münster: LIT Verlag 2014.

particular to the FPÖ. After the ÖVP entered a coalition with the radical right on the federal level (2000-2006), voices within the SPÖ have become ever louder to abandon the cordon sanitaire and to regain former voters by adopting tougher stances on topics such as immigration and asylum. Despite the return of a Grand Coalition government since 2006, for the SPÖ this intra-party conflict between the leftist party branch (led by the strong Viennese provincial party faction, home of former party leader and Chancellor Werner Faymann) and the rightist party branch (at the moment most prominently represented by the provincial party faction of Burgenland) has grown and been fuelled by a declining voter support that was diminishing particularly in the wake of the 2015 refugee movements (see Fig. 6).

In the first ballot of Austria's presidential election in April 2016, neither candidate of the two governing mainstream parties made it into the second ballot, as they were overwhelmed by candidates from the radical right, the libertarian left as well as the liberal spectrum—another indication of the waning support for the government coalition in the spring of 2016. However, in the second ballot's decisive run (the second ballot had to be repeated in October 2016 after a successful appeal against the first run by the FPÖ) the voters of the two mainstream party candidates largely supported the more leftist candidate, former party leader of the Austrian Greens, Mr. Alexander Van der Bellen, over the FPÖ's candidate, Mr. Norbert Hofer—in case of the SPÖ, this support amounted to more than three times as many votes, and in case of the ÖVP twice as many.

**FIG. 6:** OPINION POLLS—PARTY PREFERENCE AT AN UPCOMING ELECTION, 2013-2017




*Source: Periodic Gallup polls. Sample size between Nov. 2013 and Apr. 2016 (n=400, confidence interval 4.9%), between May and Sept. 2016 (n=600, confidence interval 4%) and from October onwards (n=800, confidence interval 3,4%). Entry scores report parties' vote share in last general election (September 2013).*

This political context further explains the party's shift towards one of the most restrictive asylum regimes in Western Europe. It shows a tension in which many social democratic parties in Western Europe find themselves when it comes to the issues of immigration and asylum. In contrast to their fringe party opponents, on these "cultural" conflict matters they do not necessarily possess a traditional ideological core position as they do on the economic left-right cleavage. Both the SPÖ electorates and its officials can feature quite opposite opinions, creating significant centrifugal forces in times of external stress (such as the 2015 refugee influx and the pertaining Islamic fundamentalist terror attacks in

Europe). While general social democratic values such as solidarity or social justice are important to most party voters, there is significant disagreement between those who would prefer to restrain these values to the national political context and those who consider these values in a global perspective, even in the light of refugee movements to Europe.

Beyond these considerations, if the centre-left finds itself confronted with a generally rather sceptical public opinion on immigration and without many options with respect to left wing majority coalitions, the appeal of a restrictive policy approach on these issues will grow even stronger—as can be observed by the continuation of the restrictive approach by Faymann's successor, Christian Kern. His personal appeal linked to the restrictive approach might even lead to a short-term recovery in the polls (see Fig. 6). However, whether it will work as a consistently winning formula in what is already a highly crowded restrictive segment of the Austrian party spectrum remains doubtful. In fact, once Kern's appeal might start to wane, the internal tensions that have already led to the demission of the former Chancellor could be refuelled once again—indications of which are already looming on the horizon.

## Conclusions

Austria has been at the epicentre of the 2015 refugee climax. Considered the first safe haven on the route to Western Europe, the country turned into the third largest net receiver of refugees in Europe in 2015. At the peak of the refugee movements in the autumn of 2015, Austrian policy-makers responded with a welcoming approach that was closely coordinated with German authorities and designed to re-establish control over the masses

of people in motion but also to distance itself from the measures taken by its Hungarian neighbour. However, within a couple of months this approach was replaced by one of the most restrictive asylum regimes in Western Europe, setting new precedence for the restriction of access and residence of asylum seekers. The new policies led to a fortification of the southern Schengen border, a time restriction of the right to asylum, efforts to shut down the migrant routes through the Balkans and finally an emergency decree option that limits the number of asylum seekers allowed access to the asylum procedure. It also led to declining polls for both government parties, SPÖ and ÖVP, and to a polarized political culture and it culminated in the demission of SPÖ party leader and Chancellor Werner Faymann.

From the perspective of social democrats, the political outcomes unveiled the existing internal tensions about immigration and asylum policy, which the refugee climax had fuelled in a new way. Yet, they also unveiled the general dilemma for social democratic parties if external events, critical public opinion and successful radical right opponents amalgamate into a context that pressures them to choose between opposing approaches to these issues. The Austrian case demonstrates that without an alternative for a left-wing coalition, social democratic parties might eventually join in the right-wing claims for the further restriction of immigration and the asylum regime, thereby pushing the party system centre as a whole further rightwards. Moreover, rightist party flanks within social democracy might be increasingly open to form coalitions with radical right populist parties, thereby normalizing their status as serious political partners.

However, in pursuing this strategy social democrats might be playing with fire. In terms of votes, there is little evidence that this approach is bringing back more voters from the radical right than

it is alienating leftist party supporters who might try other alternatives. On the contrary, with the presence of a successful radical right opponent and a centre-right coalition partner willing to push the asylum regime to an ever more restrictive edge, it is unlikely that social democrats can establish a convincing and unique viable proposition that is as tough as that of its counterparts. Simply speaking: If voters base their decision on a preference for tough policies on immigration and asylum, they find more convincing alternatives on the right.

In terms of ideology, the refugee climax of 2015 once more has demonstrated that social democracy is struggling with its core concept of solidarity. In light of changing global conditions there is an urgent need for re-conceptualization. What can solidarity mean in a globalized context, and can it go beyond solidarity between classes within a national framework? If social democratic parties fail to establish at least a cross-national agenda of European solidarity—in cultural as well as in economic and social terms—and rather join the nationalist relapse instead, not only are they laying further ground for radical right populist success across the EU, they might even be endangering the cornerstones of their party identity as a whole.

It appears the strategic and ideological challenges of social democracy in the 21st century have much in common with those of its early 20st century predecessors.

# THE LEFT AND MIGRATION IN SLOVAKIA

RADOVAN GEIST, EURACTIV.SK, SLOVAKIA

Slovakia was one of the countries that refused to support the EU refugee relocation scheme. Centre-left Prime Minister Robert Fico strongly criticized the "dictate from Brussels", stating (in)famously that he wanted to prevent the creation of a coherent Muslim community in his country—and openly defied the EU on relocation of refugees.

The sharp rhetoric was toned down after the elections in March 2016, and during the Slovak Presidency of the EU Council in the second half of 2016. However, basic positions have hardly moved. When it comes to migration and asylum rules, Slovak centre-left party SMER-SD is not far from the Hungarian conservative-nationalist party Fidesz. How can one conceptualize this position of a political party (and government) that likes to wave its pro-European credentials?

The following text draws on number of public opinion polls, analysis of media discourse, communication of political actors, and official documents. Conceptually, the text builds on the assumption that while structural factors shape positions and actors of subjects, these factors are themselves (re)interpreted by meanings that are ascribed to them by acting subjects.

## Short historical background

The sharp position towards the migration crisis, and towards the solutions proposed on the EU level, taken by the SMER-SD government in the autumn of 2015 to the spring of 2016 were sur-

prising—and paradoxical—in a threefold manner. First, SMER-SD had positioned itself, at least since 2006, as a pro-European party. While remaining cold to deeper integration in some areas (i.e., tax or social policies), both SMER-led governments were keen to avoid any open conflict with the European political mainstream.

Second, migration did not typically play an important role in the Slovak public discourse. Media coverage of the migration crisis in the spring and summer of 2015 raised the salience of that issue, but Slovakia was not directly affected by the migration wave, neither as a transit country nor as the desired destination of the migrants. The originally proposed relocation mechanism of the EU required acceptance of a relatively small number of asylum-seekers, a number that could have been managed both technically and politically.

Last but not least, the insistence on the need to preserve the "cultural homogeneity" of the country is paradoxical from the historical point of view. That part of Central Europe where Slovakia is located has a rich multi-ethnic history; its history and culture has been formed by successive waves of migrations.

However, despite its history and sizable ethnic minorities, Slovakia has not had much experience with mass immigration in modern history. According to the 2001 census, the "immigrant community" in Slovakia was fairly small: out of approximately 5.4 million inhabitants, only 168 had Greek nationality, 1,179 were Bulgarians, 241 Romanians, 993 Vietnamese, and 3,765 identified themselves as "others".[24]

[24] Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic: SODB 2001, TAB. B. Available at: http://www.statistics.sk/webdata/scitanie/def_sr/Data/100000/Z155B_100000.pdf

Since 1993, independent Slovakia has adopted a strict migration and asylum policy. From 1993 to 2014, Slovak authorities had only granted asylum in 645 cases and other forms of international protection in 631 (out of nearly 58,000 asylum applications). Most successful applicants were from Afghanistan, ex-Yugoslavia (Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia/Montenegro), and Iraq. In a majority of cases (a large majority, at least until 2006), the asylum procedure had been closed without any decision. Many asylum claimants left for another EU country.[25]

## Policy killer at the EU level

EU membership did not lead to more open and liberal immigration and asylum policies—quite to the contrary. While the number of asylum claims peaked in 2004 (more than 11,000), and remained relatively high in the next three years (falling from 3,500 to 2,600 applications), Slovak authorities were granting a maximum of 25 asylum protections per year—less than a third of the numbers granted in mid 1990s[26]. The trend might be related to the changing composition of asylum seekers (in the 1990s, many refugees were fleeing war in Yugoslavia and ex-Soviet republics), it does show a restrictive nature of the Slovak asylum policy.

[25] For general data on asylum, see for example the overview by the Ministry of Interior, SR: http://www.minv.sk/?statistiky-20. Updated data are provided in monthly statistical reviews. The latest one for April 2017 is available at: http://www.minv.sk/?statistiky-20&subor=267302

[26] Based on data from Ministry of Interior, SR: http://www.minv.sk/?statistiky-20 and updated data in monthly statistical reviews; the latest one for April 2017 available at: http://www.minv.sk/?statistiky-20&subor=267302

A preference for a restrictive approach was openly declared by all three interior ministers who have formed the Slovak migration and asylum policy since the accession of the country to the EU, Vladimir Palko and Daniel Lipsic (both from the conservative Christian-Democratic Movement) and Robert Kalinak (centre-left SMER-SD). Asylum protection decisions have been based strictly on the wording of the Geneva Convention. Slovakia only grants asylum to persons who have been able to prove that they face a targeted personal persecution based on their race, ethnicity, religion, political views, etc. Other EU countries may consider also wider threats to individual security and humanitarian considerations that exist, but which are not necessarily aimed at the respective individual.

Since its accession to the EU in 2004, Slovakia has also acted as a "policy killer" towards any attempts at more coordinated or harmonized approaches to the migration and asylum policies in the EU.

With its accession to the EU, Slovakia accepted the common migration and asylum framework with reservations. It advocated the veto right with respect to asylum policy and expressed disappointment when the unanimity principle was abandoned. The ambition to keep control of asylum issues at the national level as much as possible has been constant throughout the last decade. Already in 2004, Slovakia was one of the countries that blocked the original proposal of The Hague Programme, arguing against (inter alia) further integration of the asylum policies.

The cross-party consensus and for a long time conservative-affiliated leadership in the respective ministries of interior and justice implicitly sought to protect the traditional areas of national sovereignty (border management, internal affairs, prosecution) and imposed their beliefs on policymaking (migration).

Despite a slight shift towards greater pragmatism with respect to EU cooperation in these areas over time—especially in common border management—some positions have hardly evolved since 2004. Slovakia opposed any attempts at refugee burden sharing initiatives, claiming that under the Geneva Convention the asylum seeker cannot be made to ask for asylum in another country than the one he or she prefers.

## Public opinion & media: from non-issue to public concern

Until 2015, immigration was not prominent in the Slovak public and political discourse. Events such as terrorist attacks in Madrid and London, or suburban riots in some European cities, and the way they were portrayed in media (the discursive construct of "we vs. others, foreign and potentially hostile") fed xenophobia, but it was politically latent.

While the migration flows from Turkey to Greece were already increasing substantially in the first months of 2015,[27] in May 2015 only 4% of Slovaks believed that immigration was one of the two most important issues the country was facing, and 35% considered it to be the most important issue for the EU as a whole (compared

[27] According to data from Frontex and the Greek Police, number of 'illegal border crossings' into the EU via the Turkey-Greece border increased from 45,400 in 2014 to 246,000 in January-August 2015. See the European Stability Initiative: The 2015 Refugee Crisis Through Statistics (published in 17 October 2015), p. 9. Available at: http://www.esiweb.org/pdf/ESI%20-%20Refugee%20Statistics%20Compilation%20-%2017%20Oct%202015.pdf

to the EU average of 38%).[28] This data suggests that while public opinion was aware of the mounting crisis, it did not consider it to be a "Slovak problem".

Over the summer of 2015, the situation changed. In the autumn of 2015, 20% of Slovaks already considered immigration to be one of the two most important issues that Slovakia was facing—a five-fold increase, while the change elsewhere in Europe had been only by one percentage point on average (from 35 to 36%). At the same time (Autumn 2015), 72% of Slovaks considered immigration to be the most important problem for the EU—compared to the EU average of 58%.

Later, that trend was slightly reversed. In the spring of 2016, 17% of Slovaks said that immigration was one of the most pressing issues for the country and 59% said that it was one of the biggest challenges for the EU (which was still above the EU average of 48%).

What contributed to those changing public attitudes, at least in terms of the salience of the issue? Event at the height of the migration crisis, Slovakia did not play the role of a transition country. Steps taken by the Hungarian government (sealing off the southern border) removed even the theoretical possibility that the migration flows would affect Slovakia. Obviously, it was not a preferred country of destination as well.

This increase of the prominence of the issue went hand in hand with a reluctance to accept refugees. A September 2015 poll by the

[28] Data on public opinion on immigration and other priorities are extracted from Standard Eurobarometer series EB83-EB86. Documents are available at: http://ec.europa.eu/commfrontoffice/publicopinion/index.cfm/Survey/index#p=1&instruments=STANDARD

2muse agency[29] showed that more than half of the respondents were opposed to the acceptance of asylum seekers altogether. Less than 20% were in favour and 26% had no opinion on the matter. This translated to a refusal of the European refugee quota system: two thirds of the respondents refused it, with only 20% in favour.

Excluding the fringe and extremist parties, the refusal to accept refugees was the strongest among supporters of the SMER-SD electorate, with 65% replying "no" to the question "Do you agree with Slovakia accepting the refugees and becoming their home country?", while 12% responded "yes". The acceptance of refugees was highest among the voters of the liberal-conservative Sieť (40% for; 40% against).

Other results of the same survey pointed to a less universal refusal of more open asylum policy. Sometimes, it is more important how you ask than what you ask; a majority of people were willing to support a temporary protection to those in need (49%, compared to 38% of those that disagreed). Respondents were also more open to helping specific groups of people. There was a majority in favour of helping women (48% to 21%), children (69% to 13%), elderly refugees (48% to 23%), families (52% to 20%), "those who pass a health check" (47% to 22%), and Christians (47% to 18%). Some of this might have been influenced by prevailing concerns (passing the "health check"), while some reflect cultural prejudices (readiness to help Christians, as opposed to Muslims, whom only 18% accepted with 50% against).

[29] The following data are extracted from 2muse, Vyzva k ludskosti: Postoje slovenskej verejnosti k utečencom. Data available at: https://drive.google.com/file/d/0B2kAegaaKi3DTTJBWkRCSVUxTlU/view

These and other polls indicated the significant role of security concerns, either the prospect of increased criminality or the elevated threat of Islamic terrorism, which is in line with the way the issue has been framed by the government and tabloid media. Among those who were less afraid of the refugees coming to Slovakia there was a slightly higher concern over the financial implications of accepting them. More educated people were more likely to be concerned of the refugees "not being able to adjust to "our way of life".

Public preferences and shifts in opinion polls were partly formed by the prevailing media discourse. The quoted 2muse poll indicated that the media were the main source of information (before personal, informal networks, or online social media), and respondents identified them as policy actors (second most important, right after the Prime Minister and the Slovak government).

Slovak media started to cover this topic extensively in May 2015.[30] The media presence of migration was steadily increasing until September 2015 when it peaked, and remained relatively high for the rest of the year. Migration again dominated in January-February 2016, which correlated with the peak of the election campaign.

Media coverage of the migration crisis in Slovakia was more negative than in most Western European countries (this trend is evident

[30] Analysis of media discourse is based on: V.Žúborová and I.Borárosová, *Migrácia v médiách: utečenci verzus migranti. Chápanie migrantov a utečencov v mediálnom priestore v kontexte pozitívnej a negatívnej mediatizácie*, [in:] Central European Journal of Politics, Vol. 2, 2016, Issue 1, p. 1-15. Available at: http://www.cejop.cz/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/2016_Vol-02_No-01_Art-01_%C5%BD%C3%BAborov%C3%A1-Bor%C3%A1rosov%C3%A1.-Migr%C3%A1cia-v-m%C3%A9di%C3%A1ch.pdf

also in the rest of Central and South-East Europe). For example, Slovak media tended to use the term "migrant" more often (compared to "refugee") than media in Germany or Sweden. Positive connotations concentrated mostly at individual cases, involving stories of individual migrants/refugees' lives, citizens or NGOs helping refugees, etc. On a more general level, the issue was presented rather with negative connotations, including security concerns (mostly an increased threat of terrorism) and economic issues (direct and indirect costs of a more open asylum policy). At the same time, this negative presentation coincided with growing Eurosceptic and anti-Brussels sentiments, especially around the quota system.

## SMER-SD: Not so progressive on immigration/refugees

Since the accession of Slovakia to the EU, European issues have rarely shaped domestic political debate in Slovakia, and they usually do not play a role in the election campaigns. In fact, there were only two exceptions to this rule, the first being a discussion over the Greek bailout and creation of the bailout mechanisms for the monetary union in 2010/2011. The second case came with the escalation of the migration pressure on the EU in 2015/2016, and subsequent chaotic attempts to formulate a common European response.

The topic of the migration was first seized by the then-ruling party SMER-SD in August-September 2015. Originally, the communication centred at the refusal to accept the EU refugee relocation scheme (commonly known as the "refugee quota"). To support their argument, party representatives (and government officials)

started to link refugee/migration issues with potential security-related threats, and identity-based arguments. The main argument ran: "we are ready to accept refugees strictly on a voluntary basis, we want to retain the right to choose who would come to the country, and we will be preferring refugees that are culturally closer to the majority population (i.e., Christians)".

A few days after the Cologne attacks, Robert Fico organized a press conference titled "*The new approach of the government to migration after the events in Koln am Rhein*". His words might have raised some eyebrows elsewhere in Europe: *The only way how to minimise risks of events such as in Paris and in Germany, is to prevent the creation of a compact Muslim community in Slovakia. The idea of a multicultural Europe has failed, and there is no possibility of a natural integration of people, who have a different way of life, different way of thinking, different cultural background, and most of all different religion*.

With the run-up to the general elections in March 2016, and after the EU Council approved the temporary relocation scheme against the voices of Visegrád countries (in fact, Polish government decided to change their position in the end, and the Czech government preferred to tone down its opposition), SMER-SD took up the migration issue as one of the central messages of the campaign, even changing its central election motto from "Working for Slovakia" to "Protecting Slovakia". Party representatives, including the party chairman and the Prime Minister Robert Fico, have openly derided the "EU dictate" that is forcing Slovakia to accept people who could become a security threat.

SMER-SD may have been the most vocal in this position, given that the Prime Minister and the Minister of the Interior are those who participate in the EU meetings on this matter, but they were not the

only ones with anti-migrant attitudes in the domestic arena. Based on the analysis of the election manifestos and in-depth interviews with party representatives on EU-related policy options, basically two types of approaches can be found among the Slovak political parties on the migration issue. On one hand, there are those who use the issue selectively with negative connotations—apart from SMER-SD, this also includes the Slovak National Party (nationalists, member of the European Freedom and Direct Democracy group in the European Parliament), SaS (liberal, member of European Conservatives Reformists), Sme Rodina (populists, no affiliation) and LS-Kotleba–Ludova strana Nase Slovensko (right-wing extremists).

On the other hand, there were parties that preferred not to talk about migration in their campaign, basically supporting the status quo but highlighting the need to strengthen the EU's external border management. These parties may have criticized SMER-SD for the strong anti-refugee narrative, claiming that it had been used for election purposes, but none of them supported the "quota system".

## Shift of emphasis

After the general elections of March 2016, the new government, which was formed relatively swiftly by SMER-SD (PES/S&D), the Slovak National Party (nationalists, EFD Group), Most-Hid (Hungarian minority, EPP) and #Siet (centre-conservative; since March 2016, this political party has practically disappeared and most of its MPs joined Most-Hid), tried to tone down the anti-migrant rhetoric. Although official positions with respect to migration have not changed, the topic was less present in the statements of polit-

ical actors and mainstream parties and politicians mostly refrained from using negative connotations. Rather than focusing on security aspects or "cultural incompatibility", they have criticized the relocation system on basis of its impracticality. From September 2016, the communication focused on the alternative solution based on "flexible" (later described as "effective") solidarity.

SMER-SD earned criticism for their positions and rhetoric during the migration crisis. However, the gradual re-positioning (one might rather say "a shift of emphasis") had little to do with this critique. When PES strongly refuted Fico's statements about Islam and Muslims in the summer of 2016, SMER-SD adopted a conciliatory stance, without changing the substance of its positions. Party representatives (for example, MP Milan Číž, a member of the SMER presidency) interpreted the criticism as a divergence of views, declaring that should be simply discussed "within the family".

Probably the most important reason for (partial) re-positioning was the approaching Slovak Presidency of the EU. As the Presidency country, Slovakia had to act as an "honest broker". Moreover, the new government, the political parties that formed it, and some individual politicians have invested a considerable amount of political capital in a "successful Slovak Presidency".

With very few exceptions (for example, MEPs Monika Flasikova Benova and Boris Zala), the party remains practically monolithic in its position towards the refugee relocation scheme, and in its hostile position towards refugees/immigrants in general. The party congress in December 2016 side-lined any programmatic discussion and attention turned to other political issues, such as corruption. This has been made easier by a partial (and probably temporary) recess of the migration flows.

## Future alternatives

Even though SMER-SD prefers to present itself as a strongly pro-European party, any substantive change of its positions and rhetoric on this issue is unlikely. First, one cannot expect a major shift of public opinion on migration, migrants and refugees. The issue has been firmly framed as a question of security, and willingness to help is overshadowed by cultural prejudices. Public perceptions change, and media and civil society could play an important role in such a process, but it is also a long and slow process.

It is also unlikely that the EU would be able to arrive at a compromise solution on common migration and asylum policies—at least not one that would include an effective burden-sharing mechanism. This leaves us with three possible scenarios.

Without effective burden-sharing and with national-political barriers to the adoption of a common migration policy, European actions would focus on border protection and other forms of "externalization" of the problem, including agreements with third countries based on the EU-Turkey deal from the spring of 2016. The responsibility for migrants/refugees that have already entered the EU would be left effectively to the countries at the Schengen borders. The sustainability of such "solution" would depend greatly on two factors: the continuation of the deal with Turkey, and the ability of the EU to coax the North African countries into a similar cooperation.

Without any agreement on burden-sharing, the countries at the borders will demand more substantial help, including financial assistance from the European budget. This could come from the re-location of other budget chapters, but the issue will sure-

ly come up in the coming discussion on the next EU multi-year budget. South European countries may, for example, demand the relocation of funds from regional policy to migration.

A sizable spike in the number of migrants, or an increased political pressure from the countries hosting refugees, might make the first scenario unsustainable. A smaller group of countries could then come up with an individual initiative. Such a "mini-Schengen" scenario could be legally based on enhanced cooperation, or created completely outside of the EU framework. Such an arrangement would probably include a relocation mechanism and different forms of assistance, more intensive than those provided by the EU framework.

Such closer cooperation would have influence on related EU policies. First, participating countries may invoke "temporary border protection measures" against those outside of the block; the threat of legal action would arguably be a too weak deterrent. Effective cooperation on migration and asylum may also necessitate better coordination of law enforcement agencies, and coordination of other internal affairs policies, creating in the end a kind of "mini-Schengen". Just like in a previous case, it would affect negotiations about the EU budget for 2021-2027.

If that fails, a third possibility could not be ignored: a breakdown. With no common solution in sight (either EU-wide, or on a smaller scale), countries would probably fall back to national strategies. In this case, processes like the "closing of the Balkan route" in the winter of 2015/16 or the "temporary" border measures would prove to be more than temporary. Even if the European Commission, or some member states, would probably try to salvage the "freedom of movement" principle through court actions, it would mean a *de facto* suspension of the Schengen zone.

This scenario would probably imply "sealing off" of the countries that would feel the migration pressure. This is a fate that Greece is already facing now, and Italy and Malta might be fearing for the future. These "buffer-zones" would be turned into de facto European refugee camps. Even if they are offered different forms of assistance (material assistance, asylum officers, police patrols, etc.) it could be expected that such a breakdown would adversely affect the ability of the EU to cooperate also in other areas.

The migration crisis is a critical test of European unity. It seems probable that even if the European countries manage to find common solutions, it would be in a smaller format than the EU28 (or, rather, EU27). In fact, this might be the case also with other challenges to our ability to cooperate, be it a social policy, taxation, foreign and security policy or the monetary union.

One wonders, how prepared is the Slovak left—as represented by the SMER-SD—for the difficult task of finding common European solutions, based on social democratic values. If one should judge by the last party congress in December, and the official declaration by leading party representatives—for example, Fico's address at the Party of European Socialists (PES) Congress in Prague—the party wants to combat declining public support with a mixture of redistributive policies and political populism. In some policy areas, such as minority rights, gender issues and migration, the party steers closer to Marine Le Pen (and those like her) than to modern social democracy. Freed from the (partly self-imposed) constrains of the EU Presidency, these tendencies could be amplified.

# THE CZECH CASE: SOLIDARITY, YES, BUT 12 IS ENOUGH FOR NOW

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When 'refugee crisis' (in fact, a solidarity crisis) hit the top ranks of the EU agenda in 2015, the Czech Republic (CR) was ruled by a three-party coalition of the social democratic CSSD, the centrist-populist ANO and the Christian-democratic KDU-CSL. The CSSD held the posts of the Prime Minister, Minister of Foreign Affairs and Minister of the Interior—all crucial for migration policy-making. The government mostly advocated measures that strengthen border security and keep asylum-seekers outside the CR and, preferably, outside the EU.

By April 2017, the Czech Republic had relocated only 12 people from Greece and resettled 52 from non-EU countries. While commitment to an engaged role in EU policy-making has been a hallmark of the government's 2014 programme declaration, in migration policy it has showed little understanding for fellow member states, neighbouring countries and asylum-seekers. Public opinion polls show that the Czechs, in an EU-wide comparison, rank at the bottom in readiness to accept refugees. The polls reflect the lack of responsible leadership as well as neglected debate about the rights and responsibilities of EU membership in a period which predates the current 'crisis'.

## Policy: Let them stay outside

Since 2014, the Czech Social Democratic Party (CSSD) has held the posts of the Prime Minister, Minister of the Interior and Minister of Foreign Affairs—positions of crucial importance for migration policy-making. At the time of writing the CSSD has also been the strongest party grouping in both chambers of parliament, holding quarter of mandates in both the Senate and the House of Representatives. The coalition partners, though, have not differed substantially on adopted policies, and the party representatives often explained reserved attitude to welcoming more asylum-seekers by the need to prevent voter flight.

In 2015, the government adopted a new migration policy strategy which explicitly states that the country is interested in migrants who might enrich the labour market.[31] In other words, priority is given to the needs of the CR, not to the needs of asylum-seekers. There has not been any significant domestic institutional adaptation to the growing demand for asylum in Europe and to insufficient capacities of southern member states. The response to what came to be known as the 'refugee crisis' has mostly been along the lines of strengthening the Czech borders and advocacy for better external EU border management.

Calls for a more 'European' policy, rejecting the withdrawn approach of the previous government, have resonated strongly in the CSSD 2013 campaign, and, once in power, the party took steps towards a more active Czech presence in EU policy-making.

[31] Ministry of Interior of the Czech Republic, Strategie migrační politiky ČR [Migration Policy Strategy of the CR], 2015, http://www.mvcr.cz/clanek/strategie-migracni-politiky-cr.aspx

Yet in discussion of intra-EU relocations, it opted, together with majority of the parliament, for argumentation based on national sovereignty. When the Justice and Home Affairs Council voted in September 2015 on a mechanism for the temporary relocation of asylum-seekers, the Czech Republic was one of the four states voting against.

Although the government pledged to oblige with the decision adopted by the majority vote, by April 2017, it had relocated merely 12 people from Greece and resettled 52 people from non-EU countries (under the European Resettlement Scheme adopted by the Council in July 2015).[32] In the run-up to the Council vote on the temporary relocation scheme, the Czech government argued that voluntary contributions would be a better solution than a compulsory scheme. Yet, while the country dispatched experts and development assistance, there has not been much effort to offer asylum. Minister of the Interior Chovanec (CSSD) said in an April 2017 interview: 'Until now we have accepted 12 people out of approximately 1,600 that we should accept. As we're gradually running checks on the rest, I think, it is not possible to accept anyone else. Security clearance is complicated and those people are not staying at one place.'[33]

[32] European Commission (12 April 2017) Relocation and Resettlement – State of Play, https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/sites/homeaffairs/files/what-we-do/policies/european-agenda-migration/20170412_update_of_the_factsheet_on_relocation_and_resettlement_en.pdf

[33] novinky.cz (16.4.2017) Chovanec: z kvóty 1600 migrantú jsme vzali 12, víc jich nepřijmeme, https://www.novinky.cz/domaci/435186-chovanec-z-kvoty-1600-migrantu-jsme-vzali-12-vic-jich-neprijmeme.html

Externalisation, keeping 'the problem' outside, has been a dominant policy response, one in which the government found allies in other member states. Consequences of this approach for neighbours and refugees were not a significant factor in decision-making. Intra-V4 coordination has focused on strengthening EU borders and the solidarity component was mostly interpreted as sending aid to southern members and neighbours. The Czech Republic held the presidency in the V4 group in the period July 2015-June 2016, a time when the group's focus on migration had been unprecedented and when the group (thanks to its migration agenda) gained high visibility. A report published at the end of the presidency does not show that the CR would have any major disputes with V4 partners or that it would see its stance as problematic for EU cohesion. Part of the report is worth quoting at length:

> *The Czech Presidency's motto highlights the commitment to building mutual trust. The dynamic international developments that so strongly affected the Czech Presidency did not have a disintegrative effect on V4 cooperation and the group definitely did not fall apart. Far from that—when faced with the greatest political challenges of the present day, the V4 stood more united than ever before. Under the Czech Presidency, the group again showed that on issues of European importance it is a united and powerful actor looking beyond immediate personal gains.*[34]

[34] Visegradgroup.eu (n.d.) Annual report on the Czech V4 Presidency 2015-2016, http://www.visegradgroup.eu/documents/annual-reports/annual-report-of-the

## Rhetoric: Dienstbier's big flat and future leaders of the left

Defending reasons why the country cannot take more people has prevailed over building a constructive case for the institutional adaptation to a new situation.

There have, of course, been dissenting voices, both from inside the party and its broader intellectual environment. In a strongly-worded editorial in the online newspaper *Deník Referendum*, the editor-in-chief argued that the party is 'betraying' its own values.[35] Jiří Pehe, a politics professor and an author, has repeatedly argued that CSSD's stance on refugees has been co-responsible for its loss of a more liberal vote.[36] While we yet have to see more systematic research on this issue, anecdotal evidence suggests that indeed a number of CSSD grass-root organisers have been looking for stronger and more decisive leadership on the issue.

To illustrate the nature of the intra-party discussion on the topic: when former (until November 2016) Human Rights Minister (CSSD) Jiří Dienstbier suggested that the CR could take as many as 15,000 refugees, Interior Minister Chovanec commented 'I had no idea he had such a big flat'.[37]

[35] J. Patočka, Svým postojem k uprchlíkům ČSSD zrazuje sebe sama, 2015, http://denikreferendum.cz/clanek/20680-svym-postojem-k-uprchlikum-cssd-zrazuje-sebe-sama

[36] J. Pehe, Sobotka naznačil cestu z uprchlické pasti, ČRo Plus 2015, http://www.pehe.cz/Members/redaktor/sobotka-naznacil-cestu-z-uprchlicke-pasti

[37] idnes.cz (16.9.2015) To má Dienstbier tak velký byt? http://zpravy.idnes.cz/to-ma-dienstbier-tak-velky-byt-chovanec-odmitl-prijeti-15-tisic-uprchliku-1ov-/domaci.aspx?c=A150916_153850_domaci_kop

Chovanec's remark echoed a 'take them home' (*Vem si je domů*) sentiment widely shared on social media and in anti-refugee demonstrations, asking the refugee rights defenders to keep quiet unless they want to invite asylum-seekers to their own houses.

The prime minister made stronger appeals against xenophobia and hate-speech especially after the infamous appearance of President Zeman on the same stage with a leader of the 'We don't want Islam in the Czech Republic' initiative on 17 November 2015, the anniversary of the 1989 velvet revolution. Yet, the more compassionate messages were followed by contradictory statements (e.g., that the CR is not interested in having a 'compact Muslim community').[38] The PM on several occasions supported the Czech volunteers helping people in need in southern Europe, even saying that 'the future leaders of the Left are among those who today help the refugees'.[39] Yet the appeals for more humanism in the debate about migration policy were not strong enough to change the policy itself.

38 Pravo (23.8.2016) B. Sobotka: Nechceme tady mít silnou muslimskou komunitu. [We do not want here any strong Muslim community], http://www.bohuslavsobotka.cz/b-sobotka-nechceme-tady-mit-silnou-muslimskou-komunitu

39 lidovky.cz (23.1.2016) Sobotka: budoucí lídři levice jsou mezi těmi, kteří nyní pomáhají uprchlíkům, http://www.lidovky.cz/sobotka-budouci-lidri-levice-jsou-mezi-temi-kdo-nyni-pomahaji-uprchlikum-1qe-/zpravy-domov.aspx?c=A160122_214933_ln_domov_sij

## Public opinion: If we have to take refugees, give us Ukrainians

In an EU-wide comparison, Czech society belongs to the least supportive of taking refugees. In the Fall 2016 standard Eurobarometer, only 23% Czechs said the country should help refugees, the second lowest number in the Union, with an EU average of 66%.[40] More than half of respondents in surveys conducted by the Czech Academy of Sciences since late 2015 expressed opposition to accepting refugees from war-torn areas. Importantly, Czech society is more welcoming towards potential refugees from Ukraine than towards those from the Middle East and North Africa. The same poll shows that 'right-wing' voters are 'considerably more open to accepting refugees'.[41]

Similar right-left distinctions emerge from a poll regularly inquiring about social distance. A survey asking: 'Who would you not like as your neighbour' found that the voters who define themselves as left-wing are more likely to reject foreigners (43% compared to 25% right-wing), people with different skin complexion (rejected by 45% left, 26% right) and people with different religious beliefs (28% left, 17% right-wing).[42] To contextualise: neither foreigners, nor people with different religion or skin colour are among the top ranks of the rejected. Since 2003, the numbers show that people with drug and alcohol addictions and criminal pasts are the

[40] European Commission (2016) Standard Eurobarometer 86, National Report: Czech Republic, http://ec.europa.eu/commfrontoffice/publicopinion/index.cfm/Survey/getSurveyDetail/instruments/STANDARD/surveyKy/2137

[41] Centrum pro výzkum veřejného mínění (27.3.2017) Postoj české veřejnosti k přijímání uprchlíků, https://cvvm.soc.cas.cz/media/com_form2content/documents/c2/a4273/f9/pm170327.pdf

[42] Centrum pro výzkum veřejného mínění (11.4.2016) Tolerance k vybraným skupinám obyvatel – březen 2016. http://cvvm.soc.cas.cz/media/com_form2content/documents/c1/a7540/f3/ov160411.pdf

top three most rejected categories (74–91%), while foreigners and people with different skin colour or religion face less antagonism (8–37 %). While these numbers suggest that parties who claim to stand for 'left-wing' voters have more work to do in terms of allegiance to constitutional values, they also show that 'foreigners' or 'others' are not the default enemy number one for the Czech society.

Since asylum-seekers are often discussed as a security threat, and the issue has been tied to the debate about EU-wide solidarity, it is important to take note of another set of numbers, showing a considerable gap between perceptions of safety in the Czech Republic and in Europe. While over 80% of Czechs feel safe in the Czech Republic, only 14% say the security situation in Europe is good and predict a negative trend.[43] These numbers should be read in reference to wider Czech discussion of cohesion and integration in West European societies. Again, this brings us back to question of political leadership, as the leaders played a considerable role in sustaining the notion that West European societies have utterly failed in this regard. While West European refugee policies are not flawless, what matters for discussion here is that Czech leaders did concentrate more on the flaws rather than on the successes.

This brief excursion into polls also shows that the question of 'public fears' is indeed more complex than it was framed in political campaigns and it is justified to argue that had the communication during and before the 'crisis' been more responsible, the public perception could have been different.

[43] CVVM (17.1.2017) Hodnocení bezpečnostni situace v Evropě, https://cvvm.soc.cas.cz/media/com_form2content/documents/c2/a2148/f9/ob170117.pdf

Considering that there are very few refugees in the CR, the public was responding more to media images and political statements than to an actual higher number of arrivals. The total number of asylum applications in the CR was very low both in 2015 and 2016 (1,525 and 1,475, respectively) and the country has seen much bigger demand in previous years.[44] The 'crisis' posed no challenge for the country's capacities—and if it did, then it was to the capacities of NGOs and ad hoc civic associations who organized spontaneously and volunteered to provide direct assistance. Many Czech volunteers of various party affiliations dedicated their time and personal finances, helping in Hungary and the Western Balkans.[45]

## Conclusions

Overall, the 2015 crisis has caught the government unprepared. It did not just fail to present a plan and leadership, but even worse, it exacerbated the fears and uncertainties of the people. While some have defended the 'security first' approach as a necessary pragmatic step to avoid voter flight to other parties, such an approach eventually resulted in a race to the bottom. The concrete shares of coalition partners in such policies should be subject to more systematic research. What we already know for sure is that party competition has not revolved around how to better fulfil the country's international commitments. Instead, the focus has been on

[44] Ministerstvo vnitra CR (2017) Počty žádostí o mezinárodní ochranu v jednotlivých letech 1990-2015 a Počty žádostí o mezinárodní ochranu v jednotlivých měsících roku 2016, http://www.mvcr.cz/clanek/statisticke-zpravy-o-mezinarodni-ochrane-za-jednotlive-mesice-v-roce-2016.aspx

[45] For English-language stories of some of the volunteers see http://visegradrevue.eu/category/8-humansonthemove/

keeping Czech society safe and it has been frequently implied that refugees are a threat to security. While lip service was paid to EU and global obligations, in practice the country is far from fulfilling them. The Czech society has selective identification with the rights and obligations of EU membership and the policies and rhetoric adopted during the 'crisis' did little to strengthen a national consensus on more responsible engagement.

# THE LEFT AND MIGRATION IN HUNGARY

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Hungary has been affected by the migration crisis rather as a transit country than as a receiving country. With the fence along the southern border, however, its exposure to the inflow decreased substantially.[46] Nonetheless, the government has regularly acted upon the crisis, keeping it at the top of the media agenda, generally in reference to the protection of the Hungarian people. Hungarian opposition parties, however, have been mainly referring to the migration crisis as a secondary phenomenon, interpreting emigration of Hungarians to Western Europe as the major demographic problem for Hungarians. This might enlighten why these parties have not developed a comprehensive approach towards the crisis, and also why their capability to express and carry on the campaign has shrunk.

In the summer of 2015, four considerable actions were taken by the government, either in order to prevent immigrants from coming to Hungary or to draw Hungarians' attention to the supposed relation between immigration and economic deficiency or terror threats. The first was the billboard campaign of June 2015. The messages of this campaign suggested, among others, that immigrants are not law-abiding, and seek to take Hungarian peoples' jobs. Then, a national consultation was held "*On immi-*

[46] International Organisation for Migration: http://www.iom.hu/migration-issues-hungary

*gration and terrorism*", in which surveys were sent out to every Hungarian citizen over 18 years old. The questions in the survey explicitly assumed that the majority of the incoming people sought to benefit from the Hungarian welfare system, and routinely commit illegal or terrorist acts. In the same month, the Hungarian government officially suspended the adoption of the Dublin III regulations which were supposed to distribute those asylum seekers whose applications had good chances to be approved among the member states of the EU.[47] In August, a temporary fence was built on the Hungarian–Serbian and the Hungarian–Croatian border, in order to prevent undocumented immigrants from entering the country, and to register applications in an organized manner.[48]

The next year was defined by two major measurements, in terms of the migration crisis. In March 2016, the government extended the state of emergency (previously limited to the southern counties) to the whole country, on account of the tightening of immigration regulations in Slovenia, Croatia and Serbia.[49] In October 2016, a referendum was held on the mandatory migrant quotas imposed on Hungary by the EU, asking *Do you want to allow the European Union to mandate the resettlement of non-Hungarian citizens to Hungary without the approval of the National Assembly?* Due to the low electoral turnout, the result (with 98.36% valid 'no' against 1.64% valid 'yes', with an additional 6.17% of invalid votes) remained formally invalid.[50]

[47] Index: http://index.hu/kulfold/2015/06/23/magyarorszag_kitette_a_megtelt_tablat/
[48] MNO.hu: http://mno.hu/belfold/lazar-nem-politikai-menekultek-ellen-epul-a-kerites-1299761
[49] Kormany.hu: http://www.kormany.hu/hu/belugyminiszterium/hirek/migracios-valsaghelyzetet-hirdetett-a-kormany
[50] Valasztas.hu: http://valasztas.hu/dyn/onepsz201610/szavossz/hu/eredm.html

In 2017, the issue of the migration crisis was slightly disregarded for a while, as the public attention was directed at an initiative for a referendum on whether Hungary should host the 2024 Olympic Games. In the early days of March 2017, however, the parliament approved a bill proposed by the government to detain migrants in camps on its border, so that while waiting for their cases to be heard, migrants would not be allowed to move freely around Hungary and could only leave outward.[51] In April, the government launched another national consultation called "*Let's Stop Brussels!*", sending questionnaires to the electorate, suggesting that, for instance, *Brussels wants to force Hungary to allow illegal immigrants into the country*, despite immigrant terrorist attacks.[52] According to the government's own statement, over 99% supported governmental policies.[53]

## Refugee policies offered by the left-wing parties

The Hungarian left-wing progressive parties, namely the Hungarian Socialist Party (MSZP, the successor party of Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party, which governed Hungary between 1994-1998, and 2002-2010), and the Democratic Coalition (DK, founded in 2011, led by former MSZP PM Ferenc Gyurcsány), proposed various policy measures to address the migration crisis. As time went by, however, they tended to become less and less active in offering policies, and limited themselves only to the articulation of the

[51] Kormany.hu: http://www.kormany.hu/hu/hirek/szigoritottak-a-jogi-hatarzarat
[52] Budapest Beacon: http://budapestbeacon.com/featured-articles/lets-stop-brussels-new-national-consultation/45493
[53] Kormany.hu: https://nemzetikonzultacio.kormany.hu/

main guidelines. The overall strategy of the parties can be understood only within the framework of the European Union, as they have repeatedly emphasized the EU's leading role in addressing the migration crisis. Both parties also prioritized the security of Hungarian people over other aspects of the humanitarian crisis when advocating for the reinforcement of border protection. This notwithstanding, in terms of a pragmatic, long-term and sustainable action plan, one comprehensive concept is hardly traceable on the side of either of the two main progressive parties. The lack of such a comprehensive approach may well be the result of the general argument of the parties that the crisis is merely a cover-up of the real problems, generated by the government.

At the beginning of the studied term, politicians of both parties initiated detailed and pragmatic policy measures. In the summer of 2015, during the settlement of the infamous temporary refugee camps at Keleti Railway Station, MSZP articulated its support for the establishment of official transit areas.[54] The party criticized the government for not having provided the Hungarian border protection service with sufficient financial support, IT assistance and logistics, and also introduced a bill advocating for the severe punishment of human smugglers.[55] MSZP proposed the revision of the Dublin III regulation and the establishment of an EU-wide burden-sharing mechanism in terms of the process of the applications and the distribution of the refugees.[56] They also pressed for an increase of the number of policemen on duty, the establish-

[54] MSZP.hu: http://mszp.hu/hir/tamogatjuk_a_fovarosi_tranzitteruletek_letrehozasat
[55] MSZP.hu: http://mszp.hu/hir/a_kivandorlas_kerdese_es_az_atvandorlas_kezelese_a_ket_legfobb_kihivas
[56] MSZP.hu: http://mszp.hu/hir/reagalas_jean-claude_juncker_felszolalasara

ment of hot spots and for the expulsion of economic migrants.[57] In November 2015, DK started to collect signatures in support of a refugee quota system, which in their view was in a position to ensure that Hungary settle only a few thousand refugees, arriving in a well-organized manner, as opposed to the uncontrolled inflow of a huge mass.[58] In the same month, DK also urged the Hungarian government to transfer the financial support it had received from the EU to respond to the refugee crisis to other member states that are willing to fulfil their humane and EU duties.[59]

With the advent of 2016, however, both left-wing parties' critiques of the government's migration policy turned less and less constructive, at least in terms of policy relevance. Politicians of MSZP suggested that Hungarian immigration and asylum regulations should be renewed, in order to guarantee the safety of the Hungarian people and the fair process of applications.[60] In March 2016, DK argued that the extension of the state of emergency (set by the government at the beginning of 2016) to the whole country was unreasonable and should have been limited to the border areas, but highlighted the insufficient number of policemen on duty and the low quality of public security in general.[61] In August 2016, partly in relation to the migration crisis, DK repeatedly argued in favour of the establishment of a common European army.[62] In terms of specific recommendations in relation to the management of the

[57] MSZP.hu: http://mszp.hu/video/kozos_europai_hatarrendeszeti_egyuttmukodes_kell_europa_hatarainak_vedelmeben
[58] DKP.hu: http://web.dkp.hu/sajtotajekoztato-brusszelben-targyalt-gyurcsany-ferenc/
[59] DKP.hu http://web.dkp.hu/kozlemeny-hova-lett-a-menekultek-ellatasara-szolgalo-unios-penz/
[60] MSZP.hu: http://mszp.hu/hir/a_menedekjogi_torvenymodositas_a_kormany_alkalmatlansaganak_bizonyiteka
[61] ATV.hu: http://www.atv.hu/belfold/20160312-nemeth-gyurcsany-onkormanyzati-lakasokat-adna-a-bevandorloknak
[62] DKP.hu: http://web.dkp.hu/orban-4-pontja-3-karos-1-lopas/

refugee crisis, however, both parties have been exposing rather modest activity; they have limited themselves to the proposal of more general action plans, which is in line with their argument that the problem is fake and is only used by the government for scapegoating.

## Political communication of the left-wing parties

Although there are some general patterns that characterize the communicative positions of the main left-wing parties, the overall communication of both MSZP and DK has fundamentally been framed by the actions that the government took in relation to the migration crisis. The communicative positions of the parties were formed in relation to these measurements, adopting a critical tone towards the government, a humanitarian approach concerning the refugees, a provident attitude towards Hungarians, and a cooperative character in relation to the EU.

Generally, both parties refuse to recognize immigration as a major problem for Hungary, and identify emigration as the most distressing contemporary demographic trend instead. Both parties emphasize that the problem Hungary has been facing is the management of the mere transit flow of people rather than that of a huge wave of immigration. Nevertheless, a considerable difference between the positions of the two parties can be found in their view on the magnitude of the problem. While MSZP has argued from the beginning that the ongoing crisis is not temporary, and therefore is not supposed to be dealt with using temporary measures, DK has suggested that the phenomenon often referred to as ‘migration crisis’ should not be viewed as other than the normal transit journey of helpless refugees, as the overwhelming majority of the incoming people were

not planning to stay within the boundaries of Hungary and therefore the adoption of extraordinary measures by the government was not well-founded. This notwithstanding, the parties agreed that the problem should be addressed not at the national level but at the EU level. It is also indisputable for MSZP and DK alike that the communication of the government in this regard amounts to a set of hate speeches, aiming to generate division and instigate Hungarians against unlucky refugees. According to the left-wing parties, the governmental campaign serves as a cover-up for the real problems that were generated by the government, namely the Hungarian health care system on the verge of collapse, the ruined education system and the penetrating corruption in the governmental sphere.

With regard to the various steps taken by the government, both MSZP and DK took a critical, and in most cases similar position. In the summer of 2015, both parties vehemently criticized the national consultation and the billboard campaign on migration, both pursued by the government, explicitly aiming to convince the Hungarian population of the negative effects of immigration on their lives as individuals and as a nation, too. These actions were regarded by MSZP as huge failures, both in financial and in moral terms;[63] the party argued that the money used for the campaign should have been spent on the improvement of the health care system and education and on the eradication of corruption.[64] DK distanced itself from the billboard campaign, and argued that the government only sought to rise tensions in order to distract people's attention from the decreasing level of their standards of living.[65]

[63] MNO.hu: http://mno.hu/belfold/mszp-hatalmas-bukas-az-idegengyulolo-konzultacio-1289599
[64] ATV.hu:http://www.atv.hu/belfold/20150708-ujabb-600-millios-plakatkampanyt-indit-a-kormany-az-ellenzek-felhaborodott
[65] MNO.hu: http://mno.hu/belfold/mszp-hatalmas-bukas-az-idegengyulolo-konzultacio-1289599

During the same summer, both MSZP and DK fiercely condemned the fence built by the government along the Hungarian–Serbian and Hungarian–Croatian border, but on slightly different grounds. While both parties argued that the fence was not a solution to the problem, MSZP put more emphasis on the social and financial costs that the fence required.[66] DK, on the other hand, took a more abstract point of view when arguing that the fence was demolishing the Hungarian democratic institutions, was a fundamentally reactionary measure[67] and that it divided Hungarians living in Serbia from Hungarians living in Hungary.[68]

In September 2015, MSZP took a turn in its policy and communication when most of its politicians abstained at the parliamentary voting on the modification of the law on national defence and police. Previously, the party had intensely criticized the modifications which allowed for the deployment of the army at the borders, but at the parliamentary voting, it displayed no considerable opposition. DK, on the other hand, was fierce in protesting against it, and simultaneously engaged in various humanitarian activities helping refugees.[69]

In March 2016, the introduction of the state of emergency enjoyed a comparably low level of interest on the side of both MSZP and DK. The former issued a communiqué in which it voiced its doubts concerning how well-founded the measurement was, and called

[66] MSZP.hu: http://mszp.hu/video/a_kerites_felgyorsitja_a_menekultaradatot
[67] Nepszava.hu: http://nepszava.hu/cikk/1062154-dk-erkolcsi-batorsag-kellene-a-migracio-megoldasahoz
[68] Vs.hu: http://vs.hu/kozelet/osszes/gyurcsany-szerbiabol-a-keritesen-at-biralta-a-hatarzarat-0915#!s12
[69] Index.hu: http://index.hu/belfold/2015/09/24/az_mszp_uj_jelszava_menekultugyben_pozitiv_semlegesseg/

for the release of further information on the subject matter.[70] The latter, however, took a more critical view. DK called the provision a *shame for Hungary* in moral and legal terms[71] and called attention to its huge financial aspects[72] and to the possibility of its abuse for political objectives.[73]

In relation to the referendum in October 2016 against the EU's refugee quota, left-wing politicians proved to be deeply divided. In a joint press conference, the parties announced that they would regard an invalid referendum as the long-awaited success of the Hungarian left.[74] Nonetheless, the communicative position taken up by MSZP changed several times, encompassing the whole range of possible political answers that could be given to the referendum. Throughout the campaign, party politicians called on Hungarians to stay home, to vote invalid or to vote yes, but at one point they also argued that they would support the government in its fight against quotas, hence implicitly advocating for a negative answer to the question of the referendum.[75] DK, although a year earlier it had collected signatures to support a refugee quota system, campaigned consistently for the boycott of the referendum, in support of which the politicians even wrote a campaign song.[76]

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[70] MSZP.hu: http://mszp.hu/hir/mi_indokolta_a_migracios_valsaghelyzet_bevezeteset

[71] DKP.hu: http://web.dkp.hu/az-uj-menekultugyi-jogszabaly-magyarorszag-szegyene/

[72] DKP.hu: http://web.dkp.hu/migracios-valsaghelyzetet-hirdetett-a-kormany-kezdodik-a-kvotakampany/

[73] DKP.hu: http://web.dkp.hu/a-szabadsag-unnepet-nem-lehet-betiltani-a-valsaghelyzet-nem-erintheti-a-gyulekezesi-jogot/

[74] Mandiner.hu: http://migracio.mandiner.hu/cikk/20160929_sajat_gyozelmenek_tartana_az_ervenytelen_nepszavazast_a_baloldal

[75] Index.hu: http://index.hu/belfold/2016/09/07/nem_lefekudtek_a_fidesznek_ennyire_hulyen_csinaljak/

[76] HVG.hu: http://hvg.hu/itthon/20160911_Ne_mondj_nemet_ne_mondj_igent_a_valasz_semmit_nem_jelent__itt_a_DK_kampanydala

In the beginning of 2017, when the government proposed a bill on the establishment of detention centres at the southern border, the two left-wing parties did not reflect upon it overmuch. MSZP took a modest position, saying that the party was not yet aware of the content of the bill.[77] DK, somewhat contradictorily to its prior argument, claimed that the involvement of the police in the border protection and the equipment of the border with various protective measures was unnecessary, and also expressed concerns regarding the supposed harm of the human rights of the refugees.[78] When the parliament approved the bill in March 2017, several NGOs protested against it in a joint communiqué, but MSZP and DK have not yet commented on it.[79] The national consultation on Brussels, however, was condemned by both parties.[80]

## Public opinion of citizens

The first major opinion polls and analyses on how Hungarians assessed the contribution of Hungarian parties to the resolution of the migration crisis were published in September 2015. Although there were differences in terms of the exact numbers, with respect to the main trends, all leading institutions found that the majority of the people agreed with the approach and the policy of the

[77] Gepnarancs.hu: http://gepnarancs.hu/2017/02/mszp-az-idegenrendeszeti-orizet-nem-lehet-megalazo/
[78] ATV.hu: http://www.atv.hu/belfold/20170113-vadai-nemzeti-ongyilkossag-hogy-orban-viktor-a-miniszterelnok
[79] Index.hu: http://index.hu/belfold/2017/03/08/a_fidesz_szerint_soros_gyorgy_es_brusszel_mar_megint_tamadast_inditott_magyarorszag_ellen/
[80] See: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tZ-HHa1_vdo and http://nepszava.hu/cikk/1128602-gyurcsany-ferenc-erjuk-utol-brusszelt

government, and the overall support for the Fidesz government increased.[81] One-third of the electorate, however, yet remained undecided.[82] Two-thirds of the population were hostile towards refugees, and around one-fifth thought that Hungary should welcome them.[83] Pollsters emphasized that leftist voters were the most divided and volatile group within the population, with a significant ratio of them supporting the erection of the fence and the deployment of police and military at the border,[84] but the base of MSZP and DK were registered as yet the most welcoming group.[85] In terms of competition for voters, several MSZP politicians expressed fear that DK would grab voters from them as a result of DK's comparably more consistent approach to refugees.[86]

[81] Szazadveg.hu: http://www.szazadveg.hu/hu/kutatasok/az-alapitvany-kutatasai/piackutatas-kozvelemeny-kutatas/a-magyarok-tobbsege-tamogatja-a-magyar-szerb-hatarra-tervezett-biztonsagi-hatarzarat; http://www.webaudit.hu/object.7ebb5252-0697-4a1d-8494-6019f109655b.ivy; http://kozvelemenykutatok.hu/2015-szeptemberi-kutatasi-eredmenyek-nezopont-intezet/

[82] http://www.webaudit.hu/object.7ebb5252-0697-4a1d-8494-6019f109655b.ivy; http://kozvelemenykutatok.hu/2015-szeptemberi-kutatasi-eredmenyek-nezopont-intezet/

[83] Szazadveg.hu: http://www.szazadveg.hu/hu/kutatasok/az-alapitvany-kutatasai/piackutatas-kozvelemeny-kutatas/a-magyarok-tobbsege-tamogatja-a-magyar-szerb-hatarra-tervezett-biztonsagi-hatarzarat; http://www.vg.hu/kozelet/a-fidesz-szavazok-sem-hiszik-hogy-gazdasagi-bevandorlok-erkeznek-457951

[84] Szazadveg.hu: http://www.szazadveg.hu/hu/kutatasok/az-alapitvany-kutatasai/piackutatas-kozvelemeny-kutatas/a-magyarok-tobbsege-tamogatja-a-magyar-szerb-hatarra-tervezett-biztonsagi-hatarzarat; https://www.gondola.hu/cikkek/98103-MSZP_es_a_migracio_-_nehez_ugy__.html; http://index.hu/belfold/2015/09/24/az_mszp_uj_jelszava_menekultugyben_pozitiv_semlegesseg/

[85] Szazadveg.hu: http://www.szazadveg.hu/hu/kutatasok/az-alapitvany-kutatasai/piackutatas-kozvelemeny-kutatas/a-magyarok-tobbsege-tamogatja-a-magyar-szerb-hatarra-tervezett-biztonsagi-hatarzarat; http://www.vg.hu/kozelet/a-fidesz-szavazok-sem-hiszik-hogy-gazdasagi-bevandorlok-erkeznek-457951

[86] Index.hu: http://index.hu/belfold/2015/09/24/az_mszp_uj_jelszava_menekultugyben_pozitiv_semlegesseg/

About a year later, yet prior to the referendum, ZRI Závecz, a polling firm, found that MSZP voters were still the most volatile group among Hungarians, with only 29% of them planning to boycott the referendum, while 70% of DK voters were committed to refraining from it.[87] In interpreting this result, pollster Tibor Závecz argued that leftist Hungarians were traditionally more likely to challenge their party's position than rightists, but also blamed MSZP for not having launched an effective campaign for the boycott and thus making it harder for voters to identify their party's position in relation to the referendum.[88] Following the referendum, ZRI Závecz detected that support for parties actively campaigning increased, with DK reaching its absolute peak, while 62% of the voting age population was undecided in terms of party preferences, and 59% was not satisfied with Hungarian politics in general.[89] In terms of the voting at the referendum, the Századvég Foundation found that 10% of self-identified leftists voted yes, 60% voted no and 25% voted invalid, while 2% of centrists voted yes, 77% voted no and 5% voted invalid. The Századvég Foundation, however, did not identify the ratio of voters who boycotted.[90]

[87] ATV.hu: http://www.atv.hu/belfold/20160812-szetrobbantja-az-mszp-tabort-a-kvotanepszavazas; http://index.hu/belfold/2016/08/03/kvotareferendum_kvotanepszavazas_kozvelemenykutatas_zavecz/

[88] ATV.hu: http://www.atv.hu/belfold/20160812-szetrobbantja-az-mszp-tabort-a-kvotanepszavazas

[89] Zavecz Research: http://www.zaveczresearch.hu/nepszavazas-aktivabbak-lettek-valasztopolgarok/

[90] Szazadveg.hu: http://www.szazadveg.hu/hu/kutatasok/az-alapitvany-kutatasai/piackutatas-kozvelemeny-kutatas/a-tobbseg-szerint-most-brusszelen-a-sor-a-nepszavazas-utoelete

## Conclusion

The two main Hungarian left-wing parties, MSZP and DK have been facing difficulties in developing a consistent approach to the migration crisis. In terms of policy recommendations, both have emphasized the importance of public security; with regard to communication, MSZP and DK alike have adopted a humanitarian attitude. Striking a balance between these two points would be fundamentally important for both parties, not only to gain voters, but also to present a constructive critique of the shortcomings of the policies implemented by the government.

Both parties have transmitted messages that were often in contradiction with earlier announcements, or—especially in the case of MSZP—with simultaneous announcements made by associate party politicians. To put it differently, while both parties have tended to articulate a more or less inconsistent position in temporal terms (e.g., in the case of the importance of border protection, or that of the refugee quota), at one point in time, DK was able to speak with a single voice, while MSZP failed on two occasions (at the voting on the modification of the law on national defence and police in September 2015, and on the migrant quota referendum in October 2016) to develop a comprehensive proposition respected and complied with by all party members. Also, while DK has always remained in opposition towards the government, MSZP politicians sometimes seemed to be in line with, or at least to tacitly approve, Fidesz–KDNP's position. As argued by pollster Tibor Závecz, this has certainly made it more difficult for its voters to relate to MSZP, thus enabling comparably high voter volatility. DK, on the other hand, succeeded in launching effective campaigns, in terms of the clarity of the messages, and thus has been able to maintain a base loyal to the party's creed.

While opinion polls have substantiated the evidence that active campaigning increases the support of the campaigning parties, it is important to discern the difference between the relative success of the ruling parties and that of the progressive parties. While the Fidesz–KDNP coalition had long been campaigning with various measures to convince Hungarians that the EU was planning to forcefully settle migrants in Hungary, the outcome of its efforts remained below the validity threshold at the referendum. On the other hand, 55.92% percent of the people with the right to vote refrained from voting, which might well mirror general ignorance about the problem, but also the success of the boycott campaign.[91] In addition, an unprecedented number of 224,668 people voted invalid,[92] which suggests that there is a significant, politically active group without definite party preference, critically evaluating the politics pursued by the government. Channelling them could be the next step on the agenda of the progressive parties.

Since the issue of migration has been framed as an EU-wide crisis, by now it is clear that there is no point in keeping it low on the agenda or trying to lessen it. However, being aware of the results of the national consultations and the referendum on migration, it seems unlikely that this framing can be responded to with rationalist (either demographic or economic) or moralist arguments, put forward mostly in Western Europe, that refer primarily to the ageing European population, to the need for low-skilled labour or to fundamental humanitarian duty. The Hungarian government has apparently managed to frame this issue as an identity question, so if the progressive parties are unable to exceed this narrative,

[91] Valasztas.hu: http://valasztas.hu/dyn/onepsz201610/szavossz/hu/eredm.html
[92] http://valasztas.hu/dyn/onepsz201610/szavossz/hu/eredm.html Net. Jogtar.hu: http://net.jogtar.hu/jr/gen/hjegy_doc.cgi?docid=A16K0001.NVB&timeshift=fffffff4&txtreferer=00000001.TXT

they shall have to respond to it with a similar one, by elaborating a narrative of their own about the community of the Hungarian people, without rationalizing or moralizing the problem. Nonetheless, they should be careful while doing so; in Hungary, the potential in the term "nation" has traditionally been exploited by the right, but moving from the concept of the "Hungarian nation" towards that of the "Hungarian people", instead, may entail the risk of ultimately developing a populist narrative. On the other hand, addressing the migratory phenomenon on an emotional level, from the perspective of the "community of the Hungarian people" may carry political potential within itself. However, this approach evidently necessitates compromises with the parties' prior human rights perspective, and ultimately, this process may involve the reconceptualization of how the fundamental values of the progressive parties should be applied while developing public policy.

# CONCLUSION: "FLEXIBLE SOLIDARITY" IN CENTRAL EUROPE

TAMÁS BOROS, POLICY SOLUTIONS

For the left-wing parties in Central Europe, the refugee crisis was not simply a one-off emergency situation that needed to be momentarily managed. The mass arrival of refugees in the region created entirely new political framework conditions that compelled the parties to fundamentally rethink their policies and values. In three of the four countries analysed in this volume (Austria, the Czech Republic and Slovakia), left-wing parties were involved as coalition partners in the government during these years (in Hungary, the leading opposition party throughout this period was a left-wing party). It was therefore not sufficient for these parties to proffer theoretical responses to the refugee situation, but they also had to show in practice how they intended to handle this challenge. To make the situation even more difficult, elections were scheduled in all four countries within 2-2.5 years of the onset of the crisis. In formulating their approach to the refugee crisis, therefore, these parties had to take the utmost care to preserve their electoral appeal. Thus, the refugee crisis was simultaneously a policy challenge, a moral challenge and a political power challenge for the progressive parties in the region. In terms of public policy, they had to identify solutions to such fundamental issues as the European Union's refugee quota scheme, Viktor Orbán's closure and sealing of his country's southern border—accompanied by massive anti-refugee rhetoric on the part

of the Hungarian government—and Angela Merkel's welcoming attitude towards refugees, with the latter two marking the opposing extremes in the approaches taken by European governments towards the refugee crisis. Morally speaking, the crux of the issue was whether the basic left-wing value of solidarity ought to be interpreted as applying primarily to citizens who live within the country's own borders or more globally, to all humans in need regardless of their country of origin. In other words, the crisis prompted the question of whether a left-wing party could distinguish between persons in need on the basis of their respective nationalities, especially if a foreign person's life is in danger, while in the case of a compatriot "only" his or her material welfare is in jeopardy. The crisis also raised the question of how far solidarity can go: Do we have an obligation—and in fact do we even have the capability—to support or accept refugees regardless of whether they number in the few thousands or in the hundreds of thousands?

Finding the right answers to these questions was further encumbered by the attitudes of left-wing voters in the region. The post-communist countries had received negligible numbers of immigrants during the past decades, and as a result an overwhelming majority of voters in the Czech Republic, Hungary and Slovakia are opposed to the idea of letting in refugees and they tend to relate negatively to immigrants. In fact, when it comes to refugees, they often consider even the policies of mainstream right-wing parties too permissive. To make the issue even more difficult to tackle, far-right and populist parties in all the Central European countries have turned anti-refugee policies into flagship issues, consistently appealing to and sometimes successfully luring wavering left-wing voters. Effectively, therefore, left-wing parties in the region faced the quandary of having to choose between standing steadfast by their humanist values and retaining the support of their voters.

On the face of it, reconciling their values with the prevailing political realities should have been easiest for the Austrian social democrats (SPÖ). After all, over the last few decades, supporters of the Austrian left have had the opportunity to familiarize themselves with both the benefits and the drawbacks of a multicultural society. In the wake of the Yugoslav Wars in the 1990s, the country had managed to integrate a substantial number of refugees, more or less successfully. Nevertheless, of all the parties analysed, the SPÖ found itself compelled to perform the greatest U-turn on this issue, shifting within the span of only a few months from the celebratory welcoming of refugees at Vienna's central rail terminal to adopting one of the strictest refugee policies in the European Union. The case of the SPÖ is perhaps the best illustration to show how even an established, socially embedded social democratic party was unable to withstand the pressure emanating from a political climate that is increasingly drifting rightward. When its coalition partner (the centre-right ÖVP), its main opposition rival (the far-right FPÖ) and even large segments of the party's own base demanded harsher refugee policies, the previous *Willkommenskultur* proved untenable at a point in time that had not been favourable for the left to begin with.

Other left-wing parties in the region did not support Merkel's refugee policies even for the length of time during which the SPÖ held out with the German chancellor. In the first weeks of the crisis, the two parties of the Hungarian left, MSZP and DK, openly helped the refugees who arrived in Budapest. Ultimately, however, the huge number of the arriving asylum-seekers, the all-pervasive anti-refugee propaganda campaign of the governing Fidesz party, coupled with a broad susceptibility in Hungarian society to xenophobic ideas, quickly persuaded the two left-wing organizations to change their position on this issue. Though they continued to reject all forms of hatred, in terms of their overall approach towards the

refugee issues security policy considerations increasingly moved to the foreground and supplanted human rights as the top priority, especially in the case of MSZP. In the Czech Republic, the local social democratic party followed the same line in a governing position. Specifically, they sought to reduce the refugee issue to the questions of reinforcing the Schengen borders and keeping immigrants out of the EU. At the same time, however, they rejected xenophobic rhetoric (which was often embraced even by their own coalition partners). The Slovakian main governing party, SMER-SD, decided to "accept the inevitable" and get ahead of the curve; it dominated the 2015-2016 election campaign with a pronounced anti-Islam and anti-refugee rhetoric. Under the slogan "*Protecting Slovakia*", Robert Fico fought against immigration—which, incidentally, did not affect Slovakia—and the EU's proposed refugee quota. Still, to some extent the Slovakian SMER followed a different trajectory than the other left-wing parties in the region in the sense that over time—and especially after winning the 2016 election—the party's anti-refugee rhetoric softened. In fact, in 2017 Slovakia even accepted some refugees from Greece and Italy, thereby fulfilling a previous commitment.

The Czech, Hungarian and Slovakian societies tended to look at the refugees arriving in the European Union with apprehension and rejection (which was often fuelled by political rhetoric). Public opinion polls suggested that resentment towards refugees and immigrants was not any less typical of left-wing voters than of society at large, and in fact—especially in the Czech Republic and Slovakia—it was at least as high or even higher than the corresponding reservations harboured by right-wing voters. Given this situation, the left-wing parties in the region had three strategic options available to them. The strategy chosen by the Slovakian SMER party may be subject to substantial moral criticism, but from a purely power political perspective, a strategy that satisfied voters' desire for a rejection of refugees

appeared rational. This strategy basically posits that the responsibility of political parties is to give a voice to the preferences of voters. Put simply, this implies that if voters do not want to accept refugees, then the parties representing them must take that position as well. Correspondingly, SMER engaged in intense anti-refugee rhetoric during the campaign and ended up winning the 2016 election. Nevertheless, the party's support dropped massively—it lost over 10 points within a few months—and in early 2016 far-right and populist right parties gained ground at SMER's expense. What this means is that even if from a power-political perspective it may appear rational for a left-wing party in Central Europe to adjust its communication to the anti-refugee sentiments in its own base, there is no real-life evidence that such a move would help them retain the allegiance of their voters. In fact, it may achieve the complete opposite—it could shift the public's attention to an issue on which the radical solutions proffered by right-wing and populist parties appear more credible. As a result, such a course of action may ultimately end up bolstering a party's own competitors.

Another strategic course available for left-wing parties in Central Europe is to pursue a two-pronged approach that simultaneously emphasizes solidarity with refugees and the importance of protecting European and national borders. This kind of delicate balance might satisfy the needs of both those voters who feel that their safety is threatened by immigration and those left-wing or liberal voters who expect a greater commitment to helping refugees. Morally, such a strategy is clearly more acceptable to the left than stoking anti-refugee sentiments, but the lack of an unequivocal and easily identifiable stance is a disadvantage in a world where political messages tend to be reducible to the length of a Tweet. In terms of preventing the attrition of left-wing voters, such a strategy is only viable if the left simultaneously has other issues that it can use to dominate the political agenda and if it can ensure

that voters do not look at the refugee issue as the most important challenge facing their country. In the latter scenario, potential shifts in the left's refugee policies or a more complex approach towards the problem will be less unsettling for voters. Such a see-saw policy was deployed by the Hungarian Socialist Party (MSZP), the Czech Social Democratic Party (CSSD) and, as of 2016, also by the Austrian Social Democratic Party (SPÖ). Nevertheless, neither has been particularly successful with this strategy. Over the past three years, MSZP and SPÖ have managed to roughly stabilize their respective levels of support, while the CSSD lost over half its voters—but, of course, the refugee crisis was only one of the issues that influenced these trends, if a fairly important one.

A third strategic option for the Central European left would have been to take charge of the initiatives aimed at accepting and assisting refugees, and to make their policies more distinctive and credible by sticking to this position even under pressure from the right. Yet, none of the left-wing parties in the region adopted this strategy. In fact, all across Europe, major left-wing parties buckled under pressure and ended up abandoning their refugee-friendly rhetoric sooner or later. It is readily apparent that in most countries of the European Union—and this is especially true of Central Europe—policies aimed at the mass acceptance of refugees might be a winning stance in moral terms but they are extremely detrimental to the political prospects of the parties that hold such positions. The political leaders at the helm of these parties decided that accepting masses of refugees could have jeopardized not only their chances of forming a government (or of being re-elected), but in some cases even of gaining sufficient votes to enter parliament. As the record shows, none of these parties were willing to take that risk.

Politically speaking, the refugee crisis confronted the Central European left-wing parties with a no-win scenario; ever since 2105,

they have been unable to identify a winning strategy in response to this challenge. Their best option was to minimize the harmful impact of the issue. With the exception of Austria, the societies in all these countries were radically unsympathetic to the notion of accepting refugees—to some extent also as a result of the incitement by populist and extremist parties. Austria was also the only one among the countries analysed that had had to seriously grapple with the issues of immigration, multiculturalism and refugees before 2015; these issues were virtually unknown in the Czech Republic, Hungary and Slovakia before the onset of the crisis. The political climate also proved extremely inhospitable in these countries in the sense that the most important political opponents of the left (FPÖ, Fidesz and the Czech populist ANO2011 party) had absolutely no qualms about fully exploiting the political benefits of inciting the public against refugees, thereby preventing the emergence of a political consensus across party lines. Finally, it is important to stress that the whole set of developments associated with the crisis—that is, the mass influx of refugees, the media coverage that amplified the prevailing sense of chaos, the growing frequency of terrorist attacks and other crimes in Western Europe, as well as the financial burdens of integration—coming as they did in the years just following the global financial crisis, rendered it impossible to persuasively present the potential benefits of immigration.

On the whole, therefore, the left can best help refugees if it does all in its power to ensure that the issue does not dominate the public agenda. If there is no "winnable" way of raising or discussing the refugee question—and that is exactly the situation in Central Europe—then it is in the left's most fundamental interest to ensure that public discourse does not centre on refugees but instead on other winnable issues, such as raising low wages, eradicating poverty and improving healthcare and education. These continue to remain vital missions for the left, and they are still worth fighting for.

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POLICYSOLUTIONS

# "The Flexible Solidarity"

## How Progressive Parties Handled the Migration Crisis in Central Europe

For the left-wing parties in Central Europe, the refugee crisis was not simply a one-off emergency situation that needed to be momentarily managed. The mass arrival of refugees in the region created entirely new political framework conditions that compelled the parties to fundamentally rethink their policies and values. In this book, FEPS and Policy Solutions present studies from Austria, Slovakia, the Czech Republic and Hungary to analyse the approach of the Central European left-wing parties towards migration, with the aim of identifying a common pattern, understanding motives and drives, and formulating recommendations on how to deal with the refugee question and other issues related to migration in a progressive way, consistent with the fundamental value of solidarity.

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