

# MAPPING MIGRATION CHALLENGES IN THE EU TRANSIT AND DESTINATION COUNTRIES

Budapest, 26 October 2016, The Institute for Foreign Affairs and Trade

report  
from the Dialogue Workshop



REPORT No. **14**  
November 2016  
[www.euromesco.net](http://www.euromesco.net)



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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Dialogue Workshop on “Mapping Migration Challenges in the EU Transit and Destination Countries” was organised on 26 October in Budapest in the framework of a EuroMeSCo Working Package led by the Hungarian Institute for Foreign Affairs and Trade. The event gathered the authors of the Joint Policy Study, researchers and practitioners on the issue to discuss the initial findings of the research group.

The Joint Policy Study analyses challenges related to the influx of migrants and refugees into the selected EU transit and destination countries and their impact on EU migration policy framework. The workshop was structured along the chapters of the volume, focusing on the respective countries. The first session,



with Maja Bučar and Marko Lovec from the Center of International Relations at the University of Ljubljana, focused on Slovenia and Croatia. During the second session, with András Hettyey from the Institute for Foreign Affairs and Trade (IFAT), Hungary and Austria (as a specific case of both a transit and a destination country) were analysed. The next sessions examined classical destination countries, i.e. Sweden, with Gunilla Herolf from Trans-European Policy Studies Association (TEPSA), and Germany, with Christian Druck from MEIA Research. During the last session, with Roderick Parkes from the European Union Institute for Security Studies (EUISS), the EU's migration policy framework and possible solutions to the current challenges at the EU level were discussed.

## DETAILS OF THE FOUR SESSIONS

### **European Migrant and Refugee Crisis: Experience of the Transit Countries: Slovenia, Croatia**

Maja Bučar, a co-author of the chapter, started the presentation emphasising that none of the two countries has had a previous migration experience, except for refugees from Bosnia and Herzegovina in the nineties. Thus, a massive inflow of refugees in 2015 came as a new phenomenon for both countries. Closing down of Hungarian-Serbian border redirected the flow of migrants to Croatia and Slovenia. At the beginning, both countries were rather confident about their capacity to handle the influx. However, they soon realised that they were not capable of facing the burden. Although NGOs and civil society were very actively providing humanitarian assistance to the migrants, most of the refugees chose to continue their route onwards instead of staying in Slovenia and Croatia.

The legislative elections in Croatia have led to a renewed discourse on migration, with a winning central-right party labelling migration as a security issue. Similarly, in Slovenia the humanitarian dimension was obliterated by the prevalent securitisation approach. A fence was built in one segment of the border with Croatia, which caused tensions between the two countries. In addition to adopting national responses, both countries were asking for a

common solution from Brussels. The public opinion on the issue has also significantly changed. According to the polls, the majority of citizens felt threatened by an increasing arrival of refugees into their countries and thought that they had been left alone by Brussels.

#### *Feedbacks from other researchers and stakeholders*

The participants questioned whether Slovenia and Croatia have respected the asylum acquis and whether there was an interest of those countries to remain only transit routes. The necessity of changing the narrative of the so-called transit countries was emphasized, which seem to leave the responsibility of dealing with migration inflow to Western Europe. It was observed that, in addition to examining the position of government and the civil society, the chapter should analyse the role of media and church, and how they referred to the issue of migration.

Several participants made the point that the problem of irregular migration is not confined to certain EU member states, thus it could not be solved by the transit countries or by the EU-Turkey deal only. The countries of first arrival lack resources to handle the influx on their own. It was underlined that in relative terms, the numbers of refugees arriving to Europe were very small. Therefore, the EU weakness and inability to address the inflow of migrants might lead it to lose credibility in the eyes of the developing countries. One of the participants observed that the perception of crisis resulted mostly from the fact that the majority of refugees arrived only to three EU countries. Therefore, the situation of crisis was created by the mismanagement on the part of the EU.

### **On the Border of Transit and Destination: Mapping Migration Challenges in Austria and Hungary**

#### ***Hungary***

András Hettyey started with a brief description of the historical context in order to explain the government's approach to the migrant issue. Hungary has been

shaped by emigration and immigration over the centuries, but for the current generation migration was something new. In 2013, the proportion of the foreigners living in Hungary made up only 1.4% of the population. Therefore, high numbers of irregular migrants crossing Hungary in 2015 significantly impacted the country - government and public alike - which were very skeptical of receiving the refugees. The international community accused Hungary of forgetting about its history and of being ungrateful for welcoming attitude it received from the West in 1848/1945/1956.

The government response to the increasing irregular migration was to present the refugees as a security and existential threat. In order to deter the irregular migrants, Hungary has refused to accept quota proposed by the European Commission and decided to build a fence on a segment of its border with Serbia. The Hungarian government's proposal to solve the crisis on the EU level included strengthening of external borders and helping to stabilize countries on the European periphery.

### ***Austria***

Austria has had an experience in dealing with immigration-related questions, as in 20th century, it faced the immigration of guest workers and refugees from the former Yugoslavia, especially from Bosnia and Herzegovina. However, the huge influx of migrants in 2015 greatly affected the country, raising concerns as to how to handle the problem. The approach of the Austrian government towards the refugees has changed from a “culture of welcome” to a “culture of deterrence”. Domestic concerns in the context of the presidential election in 2016 and the changes in migrant routes due to the erection of the Hungarian fence led many politicians to criticize the open door policy. As a result, a fence was built on a segment of the border with Slovenia and the number of asylum claims were limited. The solutions proposed by the Austrian government to solve the migration crisis were to increase common EU land and sea border controls and to stop human traffickers already in their territorial waters (e.g. Libya). In addition, Austrian officials urged Berlin to adopt a yearly maximum limit for asylum applications.

### *Feedbacks from other researchers and stakeholders*

Considering that the discussed cases are rather different, the participants suggested to examine them in two separate, shorter chapters. With regard to security approach, it was noted that on the one hand states had the right to manage their own security. However, on the other hand, this should be consistent with refugee protection. Some participants emphasized the importance of including a human rights perspective in the chapter on Hungary by analysing what the government had done to address the root causes of the crisis and what was the rate of development aid it directs to the origin countries. Last, the participants stressed the importance of a correct use of terminology in the chapters.

### **Sweden: Destination Country Searching for a European Solution**

Gunilla Herolf first acknowledged that the Swedish society had been traditionally supportive of migrants and refugees. There is a recognition in Sweden that without migrants the Swedish economy would not have developed so rapidly. Although Sweden has been a migrant-friendly country, it had to adapt its policy because of the immense number of asylum seekers in 2015. With over 163,000 refugees, Sweden was the highest per capita receiver in the EU in 2015. However, with 10,000 people arriving weekly at some stage, the society and the government were under severe pressure. The major difficulties encountered now are related to long processing of asylum applications, housing or integration into society and into the labour market. Due to changed circumstances, Swedish decision-makers decided to reintroduce border control in November 2015, to give temporary permits instead of permanent ones, and to limit family reunification only to persons with refugee status. Those decisions had an immediate impact on the decrease of the number of the refugees coming to Sweden. By adopting those measures, the Swedish government wanted also to put pressure on other countries to accept more asylum seekers. The Swedish government also presented ten standpoints to reform the EU's refugee policy, including the need to establish an obligatory redistribution mechanism and increase the quotas. Regarding the public opinion, the author emphasized that migration had not been

securitized in Sweden and religion had never been a concern for the Swedish society.

#### *Feedbacks from other researchers and stakeholders*

Participants observed that the paper should analyse what impact the massive arrival of refugees had on different groups within the Swedish society, e.g. workers. It was noted that although religion was not an issue for Swedish citizens, it might have been a concern for migrants. Considering that a great part of refugees are children, the participants stressed that the chapter might also include information on whether there were specific integration policies towards them. The failure of the EU in dealing with unaccompanied minors was underlined, especially as they were not considered as priority group for Dublin or for relocation. The participants reflected also on what kind of message Sweden, which until now was considered to be one of the most positive examples in the EU, was sending to other Member States by introducing restrictions. It was highlighted that the paper should gather the best practices of Sweden in order to provide know-how for the other Member States. Other questions concerned the effect of a long processing of asylum applications and the fact that the refused Afghan asylum seekers were sent back to their home country, where the security situation was still unstable.

#### **Inevitable Integration Challenges for the Federal Republic of Germany**

Christian Druck first acknowledged that the German government and the society were in favour of providing asylum to those who are considered refugees. Integration of those persons into German society is one of the most important pillars of German migration policy. Residence permit can be obtained after three years of uninterrupted legal residence in Germany. The applicant needs also to prove that he/she has a regular income and knowledge of German culture and language. However, with an increasing number of refugees, the integration system had to face several challenges, especially with regard to the entrance of refugees in the labour market. Lack of necessary qualifications impedes the refugees from integrating into the labour market. In order to help

the refugees to adapt to the market's needs Germany provides them with trainings. Although very costly, they are necessary to stimulate the integration process. The author noted however that 80% of the refugees stopped their vocational training before finishing it in order to get a job as soon as possible. Last, the author observed that the government and public opinion's stance towards refugees had been very positive. This is because Germany is economically strong, thus it can take in high number of refugees. However, if the economic development slows down, the attitude towards the refugees and their integration may change.

#### *Feedbacks from other researchers and stakeholders*

Some participants positively assessed German role in handling the migration issue. Exchanging best practices of the German integration process was highly recommended. Good functioning of the Königstein Schlüssel (German distribution key of asylum seekers) was highlighted, especially in view of the shortcomings of the EU quota system. However, it was observed that Germany also committed some mistakes, i.e. suspending Dublin system, a decision that was legally possible, but politically very costly. It was also noted that the paper should examine in more detail the role of civil society and private sector in integration. Last, some participants suggested the author to compare the system of benefits offered by other Member States in order to identify the motivations of refugees in choosing specific destinations.

#### **Impact of Migration Challenges on the EU Policy Framework**

Roderick Parkes began his presentation by referring to the issue raised several times during the workshop, i.e. whether it can be said that the EU has a common migration policy. Firstly, he observed that the EU migration policy framework had been conceived in different political circumstances. The EU migration project, communautarized after signing Schengen Agreement, aimed at lifting the borders and promoting mutual cooperation between the Member States. However, the 2015 migration crisis showed that this policy framework was not designed to address challenges of such a great significance.

Harmonisation of rules did not lead to disappearance of geographical and historical differences between the Member States. Thus, some EU states had to bear a disproportional burden. The inability of the EU to control its borders led to a growing lack of trust and solidarity among the Members States. The divergence between the Member States stance on migration was also aggravated by a crisis of democracy and growing popularity of an anti-migration discourse. In order to address the crisis most of the Members States have opted for adopting solutions on a national level, which were often said to be violating international laws. Despite those developments, the author noted however that the EU migration policy was being reformulated. And although it was still unknown what final shape it would have, we needed to acknowledge that Schengen was the future.

#### *Feedbacks from other researchers and stakeholders*

Participants noted that very often migration policy was more effective on the national level than on the EU level, which could be a normative problem for the EU. At the same time, it was observed that most of the solutions applied by some Member States were only pushing the problem to another country. The participants noted that the Member States have different capabilities to deal with the migration issue. Therefore, the EU should find a common solution, which could be applied for all Member States. At the same time, some participants expressed concerns with regard to the EU lack of capability to address the migration problem, stressing that the paper should examine how the EU could be more effective in this regard.





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