

Immigration in Current Political Discourse

The Case of Slovakia within the European Union

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Abstract: The article analyses political discourse about migration in Slovakia. The analysis is based on methodological perspective of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and analyses parliamentary debates, political programmes, daily press and official political documents concerning migration in Slovakia. The article aims to answer the question: Which views, interests and ideologies domain the migration discourses and policies in Slovakia? We come out from Alessandra Buonfino's conceptualization of securitization of migration in Europe. Buonfino talks about so called "shared vision" between EU and its member states (old member states) that is based on securitarian approach to the immigration, but in a way so that "it can be read in a humanitarian key". Slovakia, and generally new member states, are more often reproducers than producers of EU this shared vision, however this reproduction is highly selective. Discourses that form this shared vision are recontextualized, which means, adjusted to the specific (national) context. Discourse analysis is based on the assumption that "to talk" means "to act" and words (discourses) have a strong *performative* effect on social reality. That's why they are the important arena of power struggles.

Introduction

During the last decades, the "immigration problem" in Europe has been politicized and securitized. Alessandra Buonfino notes: „today, the border between security, terrorism, immigration and social fear has become very thin...“ (Buonfino, 2004, 23) Gwendolyn Sasse and Eiko Theilemann write: „Migration and minority policy issues are now at the forefront of the political debate in Europe. Both issues denote a dynamic and rapidly changing set of sensitive political, economic and social questions that affect domestic and international policy-making.“ (Sasse, Theilemann, 2005, 655)

Some authors pay attention especially to study of the discursive side of politicization and securitization processes. (Buonfino 2004, Bigo 2002, Huysmans 2000, Van Leeuwen, Wodak 1999). To analyse the discourse about migration¹ means to analyse also the relationship of the discourse and migration policies. Alessandra Buonfino remarks that there

¹ In this article the terms „migration“ and „migrants“ are preferred over the terms „immigration“ and „immigrants“. This decision comes out from the fact that official Slovak documents and legislation operates with this term, although in many contexts they practically means immigration and immigrants.

are many existing discourses on immigration that draw different frontiers between “friends” and “enemies” and between “us” and “them“; some of these discourses are ignored by policy-makers while others enter into dynamic dialogues with one another and shape the way policies are structured and negotiated. By producing such powerful discourses, public opinion can create a political imperative which influences the way governments operate and the “discourse type” they choose to adopt. This mechanism is relevant when thinking about the dynamics of political decision-making on immigration.“ (Buonfino, 2004, 37)

Thus we can say that discourse, mainly the dominant/hegemonic discourse, strongly influences the character of migration policies. On the other hand, the application of real policies and particular measures is not only the consequence of particular discourse. This is the question that many theorists of discourse arise – how can we explore the causal effects of the discourse?

Christina Boswell remarks that the analysis of policy making process and migration management requires the more sophisticated theory of organizational action. (Boswell, 2007, 590) She works with the Luhmann’s dichotomy of politics and administration. Administration agencies often aim at other goals than just to follow the requirements of politics. As a result the policy outputs often do not follow, or even contradict the proclaimed principles and rhetoric of the politicians. For example, the recruitment of the low-skilled workers in industrial sectors where they are needed continues despite the negative portrait of this type of migration in the rhetoric of many politicians. The real political measures adopted by politicians with anti-immigration political programs are often not as radical as their speeches, and usually are less ideological and more pragmatic.

The study of language/discourse cannot promote the exhaustive picture of how are the migration policies formed and applied, but it can enrich the classical institutional analysis in political science and contribute to the more comprehensive and critical understanding. Discourse analysis is based on the assumption that “to talk” means “to act” and words (discourses) have a strong *performative* effect on social reality (Austin, 2004). That’s why they are the important arena of power struggles.

Securitization of migration in Europe and “shared” vision between EU and its member states

In our analysis, we come out from Buonfino’s conceptualization of securitization of migration discourses in Europe. Buonfino claims that “immigration as a threat and a security concern has become the hegemonic discourse type in government policy” (Buonfino, 2004,

24). Issues of solidarity, ethics and human rights become, according to her, secondary to issues of security, thus endangering the livelihoods of newly arrived and undocumented migrants while stigmatizing already settled migrants. (Ibidem)

Buonfino also claims that “the nature of the immigration debate has become even more politicized at the European Union level as it reflects and magnifies the problems and concerns that nation states have already internally confronted” (Buonfino, 2004, 24). One of the main reasons for this are fragmented approaches with intergovernmental dialogue and cooperation that are the basis of EU migration policy. Thus also G. Lahav claims, pointing out that migration policy of EU is based on intergovernmental approach and on the principle of the “lowest common denominator” (Lahav, 2004), which means only those measures are put into practice on which all of the strong nation states agree – and usually these are mainly restrictive.

That’s why the discourse has not changed so dramatically on the level of EU, and EU in fact responded to migration with the same securitarian discourse type. However, as Buonfino claims, it has been re-invented and re-articulated so that “it can be read in a “humanitarian key” expressed through a deep concern with human rights, cooperation and humanitarian intervention” (Buonfino, 2004, 25). Such re-invention and re-articulation of the existing national discourses are parts of the process of manufacturing the new identity of the European Union, an identity which aims to present the Union to the world as a novel, moral and supranational global actor.² (Ibidem) “The EU perspective on migration provides us with no “new” vision but with the emergence of a “*shared*” vision between the Member States and the EU..”(Ibidem)

Radoslav Štefančík claims that EU “has demonstrated the willingness to view the problem also from another point of view” apart from securitarian (Štefančík, 2010, 70). His interpretation seems to be more optimistic than the interpretation of A. Buonfino, however his formulation implies that still it is just a “willingness” and change in view rather than a change in real political strategy. Whatever our evaluations of this EU’s “right-based” approach (Sasse, Theilemann) or “humanitarian” approach (Buonfino) are, no matter we consider it a willingness to go step further from purely securitarian approach at least in the level of rhetoric, or we consider it just a “gold-leaf” for the same restrictive and security-based policies, we can agree that the Buonfino’s term “shared” vision could be useful when analysing the migration discourse in Europe.

² We can’t omit the fact, that from nowadays perspective, after EU has won the Nobel Prize for Peace, we can see these project as at least partially successful, whatever our evaluations of it may be.

We use the term “shared vision” to refer to the migration discourse in EU and Western Europe. Of course we could identify also specific national discourses in Western Europe and as well specific discourse of EU institutions, but for analysing the impact of these discourses on political discourse in Slovakia, we believe is more useful to describe them in their interconnectedness. Migration discourse of the EU and migration discourses of its member states (mainly so called old member states) interact and intersect dynamically mainly due to the above mentioned intergovernmental mode of building of migration policies. We can say that the member states have agreed not to break seriously the discursive rules set up by the “humanitarian” or “right-based” approach in exchange for EU not invading seriously their national sovereignty in migration policy issues, thus not intervening actively in changing the intergovernmental mode of building EU migration policies.

The idea of “shared” vision was developed by Buonfino on the basis of EU before 2004, thus having in mind only so called old member states, which are nearly the same group of states as when we use the term “old immigration countries”. The new member states are rather reproducers than producers of the “shared vision”. In most of them the immigration has been introduced in a qualitatively new way quite recently, and the “immigration problem” is not so burning. The agenda of migration is not important topic for political parties and does not play an important role in the elections. On the other hand, in official discourses the statement about very probable future increase in numbers of immigrants has become popular since 90’s legitimizing new institutional migration arrangement.

Analysing political discourse and recontextualization of migration discourses

Many scientists have become aware of the importance of discourse for shaping the social reality (so called narrative or discursive turn in social sciences). In our conceptualization of discourse we combine the elements of some of the existing conceptions. The definitions that best correspond with our understanding of the “discourse” are those of Link and Van Leeuwen. According to Link, discourse is “an institutionalized way of talking that regulates and reinforces action and thereby exerts power” (Link, In. Wodak, Meyer, 2009, 45). Van Leeuwen building on the work of Michel Foucault is defining discourses as „socially constructed ways of knowing some aspects of reality..., context-specific frameworks for making sense of things. “ (Van Leeuwen, In. Wodak, Meyer, 2009, 144)

Building on the work of Michel Foucault as well, we emphasise the structural aspect of the discourse. It means, it is not important to search for different (all) rules that an actor uses in his/her formulations, but for common rules that use all (different) actors. We are

interesting in rules that constitute discussion about migration in Slovakia; however we are aware of the fact that some structural components are not strictly national. The discourse has many transnational features, as well as many features that intersect from other discourses. Norman Fairclough uses the term “*nodal discourse*” for example referring to a globalism as a “nodal” discourse around which many other discourses cluster (Fairclough, 2006, 148). The globalist discourse (the specific neoliberal view on globalization) can be considered as nodal also in reference to the economization migration discourse which is going to be discussed later. “Nodal” discourses are due to their dominance/hegemony often recontextualized into many different contexts.

The process of recontextualization is the process of transferring given elements to the new contexts (Reisigl, Wodak, In. Wodak, Meyer, 2009, 90). Fairclough emphasises that recontextualization is often targeted and comes first to prepare the ground for further measures. “The process of recontextualization is an active process of appropriation within new contexts, where circumstances, histories, trajectories, strategic positions and struggles within these contexts shape the ways in which recontextualized elements are appropriated and the outcomes of recontextualization.” (Fairclough, 2006, 147). In the case of Slovakia (and other countries of EU) this transmission is supported by the institutional mechanisms (Schengen regime, Dublin system etc).

The term “political discourse” is usually used to refer to the discourse of politicians and political representatives (in this sense it is used by different authors providing so called Critical Discourse Analysis – for example T. Van Dijk, Ruth Wodak etc). Alessandra Buonfino prefers the term hegemonic “policy discourse”, as she argues that “every discourse is essentially a political discourse” (Buonfino, 2004, 31). We agree with her, and we do not define political discourse through its agents – politicians, but rather we think it is important to analyse all actors who contribute to the political discourse. In this case the boundaries of political discourse are fluid, and what statements belong to the political discourse depends on the context. For example the discourse of NGOs who deal with the topic of migration can be a part of the political discourse as they enter into public and political discussion. Due to the lack of space in this paper we do not analyse the discourse of NGOs systematically, however we believe it’s an important part of the analysis and should be in the future added to our research.

Critical Discourse Analysis

Main method we use for our analysis is so called Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). We should rather say it’s the methodology because it does not provide us with the concrete

techniques and guides for our research. Teun van Dijk, for example, prefers the term Critical Discourse Studies “to designate a multidisciplinary field of scholarly activities” (Van Dijk, In.: Wodak, Meyer, 2009, 62]. Further he emphasises that “DS has many types and methods of analysis: it is not a method among others within the humanities and social sciences”. (Ibidem) CDA represents many different approaches that have certain common features. For example, authors using the CDA are interested in “*naturally occurring*” language use by real language users. Moreover, they study the functions of (social, cultural, situative and cognitive) *contexts of language use*. (Ibidem)

This impetus on context differs them from other types of discourse analysis that are more linguistically and constructively oriented. CDA is not interested in investigating a linguistic unit per se but in studying social phenomena which are necessarily complex and thus require a multidisciplinary and multimethodical approach. However, as the core of this method is the analysis of language use, authors analyse different phenomena of text grammar and language use: coherence, topics, macrostructures, speech acts, argumentation, rhetoric, mental models and many other aspects of text and discourse. (Wodak, Meyer, 2009, 2)

Another important common feature is connected with the word “critical”. The critical impetus lies in the deconstructivist strategy aiming at discovering of the hidden meanings and power interests lying behind the discursive strategy. Krings argues that this concept of critique is conventionally used in a broader sense “denoting the practical linking of social and political engagement” with a sociologically informed construction of society” (Krings, In. Wodak, Meyer, 2009, 7).

In our analysis, we are inspired by CDA approaches. Our analysis is more contextual and we don't analyse many linguistic phenomena. We focus mainly on topic analysis – in which topics, in which contexts the migration is discussed in analysed texts. Further we focus on representation – how are the immigrants represented in these discourses, what images of immigrants do these texts construct. We analyse also the argumentation: which arguments are used to present the “truth” and the occurrence of so called “false argumentation”. And finally, we analyse legitimization forms – how are the statements legitimized, which ways of legitimization are used. What “nodal discourses” (can say also ideologies) stand behind.

The texts we chose for our analysis are: parliamentary debates connected with the topic of migration (from the year 2007 when Slovakia entered the Schengen Union); statements and opinions expressed by politicians in the media (mainly in daily press); official documents, materials, laws, manuals etc. connected with the topic of migration.

Sources of political discourse about migration in Slovakia

Discourses on migration, integration, and multiculturalism are related to national identities and self-definitions as well as to practical policy interests. In Slovakia, migration can be seen as a relatively new phenomenon. Before the 1989 the borders were controlled in a way that only the specific groups of immigrants could enter the territory, those who were officially admitted by governing elites, e.g. foreign students from certain third countries, Vietnamese workers etc. These groups of people were concentrated in certain social areas, so immigrants were seen only for those moving in these social areas. This type of immigration was considered unproblematic, because the fact that incomers were coming from politically friendly countries was more important than the fact of their cultural otherness.

The fall of socialist regimes in Eastern and Central Europe was marked by the revival of nationalist sentiments. The extreme case was the former Yugoslavia. On the other hand, in Czechoslovakia nationalist discourses did not gain such dominance. The nature of Slovak nationalism can be better understood when analysing the relationships inside the country - among the main ethnic group of Slovaks and other ethnic groups such as Hungarian or Roma minority. The nature of the discussion about minority rights is crucial for understanding of the discourses about migration and as well as for anticipating how could this discussion continue if the so called “new minorities” of migrants settled in the territory would ask for more rights and better inclusion into the public life of the society. This presupposition is based on perceiving of minorities and immigrants as “others” – those who do not belong to the national community, community of “us”.

Alena Chudžíková analysed Slovak political discourse about minorities and minority rights and she claims that in Slovakia, “any requirements of the minorities are understood as the threat for the majority as a nation” (Chudžíková, 2011, 12). In Slovakia the type of nationalism that dominates is so called ethnic nationalism and essentialization of ethnic identities. The political discussion about minority rights is usually quite intensive.

Important factor that forms the nature of the discourse is the institutional arrangement of migration management in Slovakia. The agenda of “stay of the foreign state members” belongs to the Office of border and foreign police (Úrad hraničnej a cudzineckej polície-UHCP) under the Ministry of Interior. Another important institution is the Migration office (Migračný úrad) belonging as well under the Ministry of Interior. The agenda of this office is mainly to provide the asylum applications but as well to prepare strategic documents for whole migration area.

It means, main competences concerning the migration management are concentrated into the agenda of Ministry of Interior, perceived as a “power resort” focusing mainly on migration control. This fact strongly influences the nature of the discussion about migration in Slovakia – topics under which migration is framed. Those who talk about the topic and who give their opinions for the media are most often the ministers and representants of Ministry of Interior. As a result, many important questions concerning migration, as for example the integration of immigrants, are completely missing in the discussion while others, as for example criminal activities of immigrants are emphasized. Third important factor is the influence of the EU discourse about migration (“shared” vision) that has been discussed in the previous parts.

Political discourse – migration in political debates, programmes and daily press

In this part we will analyse parliamentary debates about migration, opinions expressed by politicians in the media (daily press), and political programmes from selected elections and we focus our attention on how politicians frame the problem of migration in their speeches.

Generally, we can say that Slovak political parties pay little attention to the topic of migration in their political programs. If they refer to the problem, usually it’s indirect and marginal notice, that counts migration among other problems. For example current government party SMER-SD (social democratic party) names *“migration and unfavourable demographical development”* among other problems such as *“global changes in economy”* or *“climate change”* (Smer-SD, 2012, 4) Similarly, SDKU-DS (until 2012 the most popular right-wing party) counts migration among other problems in the part “Secure Slovakia” in its program for parliamentary elections 2006: *“Security threats that are related also to Slovakia are much more differentiated than in the past. Main danger for the lives, health and property of the citizens, economic development and prosperity of the state are mainly non-military changes such as terrorism, ...,failing states, regional conflicts, organised crime and corruption, uncontrollable migration and...”* (SDKÚ-DS, 2006, 41)

These formulations evoke an ambition to show the competence to be aware of the new current challenges in the world. Selected problems are placed into the programs not because the party wants to present their conception and solutions to them, but rather to show the political competence. This is the part of the process of political learning and the core of the process of recontextualization. Political leaders presenting what they have “learned” often use the language of the dominant/hegemonic discourse (in this case securitarian) while ignoring

other alternative discourses. Thus they become reproducers of the particular discourse type with specific argumentation, modes, styles, legitimization forms etc.

In above mentioned statements we can see what we could call the factor of “newness”. When emphasising the new, unprecedented state of the problem, we can make an excuse for new and unprecedented solutions. This type of “agenda setting” is often used in political documents especially when the topic is politicized. We can say that it’s as well a legitimization method. To denote particular problem as a new often means, we don’t have to provide reasoning for our statements, because the evidence will be soon shown to everyone, while nowadays only “we” (visionaries, politicians) can see the connections and consequences.

Setting the problem of migration to the sequence with other problems such as climate change, or unfavourable development, terrorism etc. emphasizes the global dimension of the problem. If something is global it of course concerns us no matter the particular situation (in our country) is, because we can be potentially threatened. Slovakia has no experience with the big migration flows, on contrary, the quantifiable trends shows the increase of legal stays and rapid decline of illegal stays, as well as the decline in numbers of approved asylums in last years, mainly after Slovakia joined the Schengen union. The number of foreigners residing on the territory of Slovakia was 1,23% in 2011 (ŠÚ SR, 2012).

The above mentioned right wing party SDKÚ-DS later, in its program for the 2012 parliamentary elections framed the problem of migration differently. The party wants to *“enhance the attractiveness of Slovakia for global talents, make it easier to come and stay for highly-qualified migrants and businessmen, including the students and scientists. In this area we are among the worst countries in EU, although the qualified workers are for our economies a gain. They bring with them innovations, new competences and work possibilities.”* (SDKÚ-DS, 2012, 9).

This type of argumentation can be included in what Buonfino calls “economization of migration”. She claims that this discourse has been introduced by many business and governmental organisations, however, it “has not received widespread public acceptance, nor has it entered the dominant discourses in government policies” (Buonfino, 2004, 38).

We can say that this economization discourse is more typical for right-wing liberal parties and politicians. It is typically based on the idea of migration as “flexible mobility” emphasizing the idea of migrant as a worker – moving freely according to the market needs while often ignoring other aspect of migration, as well as the fact that migrants are not only the work force.

Partially, we can see the economization discourse as a competing to the securitarian one. However, we saw that the same party (SDKU-DS) had previously adopted the argumentation typical for securitized discourse and later they emphasized the economized view. Not only this example remains us that these discourse strategies – securitization and economization, do not have to be inevitably competing. On contrary, politicians may present quite coherent opinion claiming on one hand the need for better flexibility for certain groups of immigrants and on the other hand the need for security measures to cope with other groups of immigrants.

In the political discourse about migration in Slovakia the ideologically most prevalent are “conservative and nationalistic” points of view. Most typical representatives of these discourses are two political parties: KDH (Christian Democratic Movement) and SNS (Slovak National Party), however nationalistic and conservative approaches toward migration are in different modifications typical also for other important political parties.

SNS is an example of nationalist political party whose argumentation concerning the migration problem is similar to right-wing nationalist parties such as Front national in France or FPÖ in Austria. The difference is in accent, as immigration is not for SNS such an important topic as are the problems of autochthonic minorities, but SNS can potentially play the role of a political party building its agenda on anti-immigration rhetoric. At the beginning of the campaign for 2012 parliamentary elections, the election leader Anton Danko named as one of the most important clauses of their programme “*the fight against the islamization of Europe*” (TASR, 2012). It happened after the visit of Austrian FPÖ vice-president Johann Gudenus and thus these statements are example of paradox of europeization of nationalistic parties. Finally, main topics of the elections were different mainly due to the big anti-corruption protests, so the SNS did not developed this topic further.

The standpoint of KDH is quite different, emphasising the traditional Christian democratic values. What is important that this party held the post of Ministry of Interior for eight years from 1998 to 2006 and then from 2010 till March 2012. As we mentioned above, this “powerful” governmental department controls most of the migration agenda. However, it is mainly the restrictive agenda – to control the entrance of the foreigners and to execute the asylum seekers’ applications through its “Migration office”. Moreover the KDH politicians try to build their image as fighters for fairness (anti-corruption agenda) and safety above all. Often they adopt the securitarian discourse type presenting the immigrants as possible security threat but as well as social or cultural threat for national and traditional culture of Slovakia. Their attitude towards the possible economic contribution of migrants can be

summarized quoting the expression of Vladimír Palko (ex-Minister of Interior): “we need children not immigrants” (SME, 2007). In the European Parliament elections KDH presented its effort to eliminate the abuse of asylum systems by economic migrants from third countries. Negative connotations can be found also in the program for national parliamentary elections. KDH wants to preclude the negative experiences of some member states with migration. This idea was clearly formulated by the minister of interior from KDH Daniel Lipšic who claimed “...the project of multiculturalism in Europe failed, and it’s not our aim to repeat this failure” (SME, 2011).

Having in mind that this party occupied position of minister of interior for a long time, and as a consequence, KDH politicians were those who have been speaking most often about migration in media and in parliament, we can say that this type of political discourse was most prevalent and has had the strongest impact on the character of migration policies and measures adopted in last years. KDH politicians often presented the opinion that we should accept mainly the immigrants from culturally related countries who are according to them more easily integrated. This idea was further placed into the strategic document “Migration Policy of Slovak Republic. Perspective until the year 2020.”

What has contributed to the hegemonic position of this discourse type is the fact that alternating Minister of Interior Robert Kaliňák from SMER – SD (2006-2010; March 2012 – nowadays) has not presented any alternative view and his political approach to the migration has been more similar than different, presenting the opinion that “*naturalization should be the end of the process of integration not its beginning*” (Kaliňák, 2007). He as well agreed to prefer the immigrants from culturally related countries. The fact that the biggest left-wing political party does not represent an understandably alternative political view on migration and related issues (such as minority rights in general) is one of the most important arguments why we think the securitization discourse type will probably in the future gain the dominance without much fighting.

Partially, we can say that an alternative view has been presented by SMK and later by Most-Híd which are political parties representing Hungarian minority. Politicians representing these parties reacted several times in favour of foreigners and migrants in parliamentary debates and media. They were questioning political measures presenting the immigration as possible security threat. For example, as a reaction to the proposal of establishing the waiting period before naturalisation for refugees in 2007 László Nagy (SMK) told: „I don’t know about any circumstances that would talk about the danger of mass infiltration of persons with terrorist background” (SME, 2007). And again, his reaction in discussion about building the

mosques in Slovakia was the most opened one. He told that the party (Most-Híd) does not have the official attitude towards building the mosques, but he personally is not against. *“We are living in a multicultural country and the religion diversity could be enrichment”*. (Sudor 2010)

On the other hand, this political party focuses mainly on Hungarian minority and thus its representatives emphasise the difference between them as autochthonic minority living on this area for thousand years and immigrants: *“It’s not lucky to compare the autochthonic nation living on the territory of Slovakia with migrants. Hungarian national community cannot be considered a group of migrants. This national community lives here for thousand years. We are not migrants.”* (Dotankoch, 2008)

Really an alternative view on migration (that means not securitarian and not economized view) is presented mainly by non-governmental organizations, scholars and some think-tanks. However, their possibilities to influence the dominant discourse, to enter the public debate for example through media are much more limited.

With the risk of the simplification we can say that in old immigration countries usually the social democratic parties are those who represent the more moderate and less restrictive view on migration building on values such as human rights, tolerance, anti-racism etc., thus they are those who are closest to the “right-based” or “humanitarian” approach. This political view is in Slovakia missing on political scene, because as we mentioned above, Slovak social-democratic party SMER-SD’s approach to the migration is ambivalent and rather conservative and nationalistic. However, as we will show later, analysing political documents, it does not mean that Slovakia completely ignores this EU discourse (humanitarian “shared” vision).

But, as the only coherent opinions presented to the public and to the employees of migration administration are conservative and restrictive, the adopted measures usually do not contradict these principles. The lack of the public debate about the topic has caused the situation that political and administrative parts of the execution work “at rest” as they know their activities will not be marked by any political turbulence.³

It does not mean that the situation rests unchanged. In the new “Foreigner law” (Zákon o pobyte cudzincov..., 2011) valid from January 2012 the project of “Blue cards” has been introduced. For the first time, the Slovak migration policy aims at not only discouraging immigrants from coming but as well at attracting them to come. Of course this does not

³ For example, the director of Migration office holds this office from 1995 until nowadays cooperating with different governments.

change significantly the nature of the migration discourse and policies. The law has been criticised for measures that are mainly restrictive such as prolonged period for obtaining the citizenship etc. (Bargerová, 2012)

Political discourse – migration in official documents

In this part we analyse official documents and laws dealing with migration in Slovakia. In these documents we focus on analysis of proclaimed principles on which the policies are based and on the way these principles are formulated and presented to the public. We analyse all important documents approved from the beginning of Slovak Republic in 1993.

The very first document concerning migration “*Principles of migration policy*” was, as Slovak migration expert Boris Divinský claims, composed of “ten relatively vague clauses” (Divinský, 3). More complex documents were approved much later: “*The Conception of Migration Policy*” in 2005, “*Conception of integration of foreigners in Slovak Republic*” in 2009 or “*Migration policy of the Slovak Republic Perspective until the year 2020*” in 2011. These documents however, have not got rid of certain “vagueness” completely.

Analyzing what principles domain the official migration documents in Slovakia firstly and above all, we can see in all documents the strong impetus on the “*national interests*”. This principle is emphasised through several forms. First is its prioritization and repetition. When counting the aims and principles of migration policy – this “national interest” always comes first or among the first. In “*Conception of migration policy*” from 2005 first aim is the “*protection of national interests of Slovak republic and realisation of aims and priorities in the area of migration*” (Konceptcia migračnej politiky SR, 2005). When naming the main principles of this conception, the principle of “sovereignty” comes first. “*Principle of sovereignty guarantees the right for Slovak Republic to protect its national interests and to manage the migration with regard to maintaining the social stability, traditional way of life, on the basis of economical and social possibilities of Slovak Republic respecting of course its duties coming from international agreements and documents and forms the conditions for intensification of the fight against illegal migration and terrorism.*” (Konceptcia migračnej politiky SR, 2005, 6)

In this quotation the right of Slovak Republic to choose who can enter its territory and stay is emphasized. The claim that Slovakia will apply this right with regard to maintaining social stability evokes that immigrants are those who can possibly endanger the social stability. And secondly “*in regard to protect the traditional way of life*” evokes that people

in Slovakia are living in some specific traditional way of life, which is the claim that is itself disputable, and even if this would be true, it again claims that immigrants are those who can endanger this traditional way of life.

Another form of emphasising national interests could be called “*creating an enemy*” and criminalization of migrants. The discursive side of criminalization means to formulate statements, laws etc. in accordance with negative stereotypes that partly correspond with social representations shared by a majority of the population. The presupposition that migrants could be a bigger danger for national interests than natives is strongly present in many formulations. The condition “if the foreigner does not represent a threat for national security and health” is present in many paragraphs and many rights for migrants are conditioned by this. For example, among the first things that can be the reason for rejection of permanent stay, the following is mentioned: “*The police will reject the application for permanent stay if a) the state member of third country is persona non grata b) it is a reasonable suspicion that the third country member will during his stay endanger the safety of the state, public order or public health.*” (Zákon o pobyte cudzincov, 2011, § 48, ods.2) These and similar statements create an image of immigrants whose criminal activities are more dangerous (they are actions against the state) than “ordinary” criminal activities of native citizens (that are not defined as attacks on broader community of people, they stay individualized).

The criminalization can have different forms. For example in Conception of migration policy, that should be a strategic document that is more general than concrete, when evaluating the positive steps that had been done in the past, the following measurement is mentioned: “*What has been actually improved is the protection of these camps (camps for asylum applicants - author’s notice) by the professional security services. The obvious problem in administration of these facilities is the frequent devastation of the inventory and interior furniture by the asylum applicants, which requires fairly big financial resources for elimination of the damages.*” (Konceptia migračnej politiky, 2005, 4)

Among the different general steps mentioned in the Conception, this concrete measurement is mentioned. It is clear that is the problem from the view of official institution. Immigrants themselves could mention other concrete problems they have but of course, in this conception there was no space for that. It means the conception in this case neglects the view of other actors apart from the institution itself, and as well overemphasizes the concrete problems from the point of view of employees of state institution. In Slovakia, the railway and

bus stations are devastated, children playgrounds are devastated and many public spaces that are not under strict protection are devastated - and of course, mostly by Slovaks.

The very term “national interests” is very vague and at none of the documents it is explicitly verbalized, however it’s clear that it can be defined very flexibly in cultural, economic or social areas. And practically it means that Slovak Republic can choose who will come and stay even if this choice is led by incorrect information, evaluations or even on prejudices. Thus the subject of migration policies seems to be rather the “national community” itself who has to be protected than immigrants themselves.

For example, in the document “Migration policy of the Slovak Republic Perspective until the year 2020“, the following formulation can be found: „*The Slovak Republic inclines to an integration model based on the full acceptance of its political and cultural background.*” (Migračná politiky SR s výhľadom do roku 2020, 2011, 9). This practically means the endorsement of the assimilation model. In the rest of the EU the reciprocal integration model is preferred at least in the rhetoric. In the same document we can find a formulation „*The basic criterion applicable to the acceptance of foreigners within the controlled economic migration is their potential for the development of the Slovak economy ... with an emphasis on culturally related countries.*” (Migračná politiky SR s výhľadom do roku 2020, 2011, 6). This clearly demonstrates an ambition to combine the economic criteria with the cultural ones and it shows the superiority of so called “national interest” to other principles such as the non-discrimination.

Another important principle shaping these conceptions, laws and policies is the “*respect for human rights*”. However, appealing to this principle is often “negotiated” through other institution such as the United Nations or European Union. The documents often appeals to the duties and responsibilities coming from international documents or EU requirements (harmonization with EU legislation). As a result, sometimes this makes an impression that it is something we don’t want to, but we have to do. On the other hand appealing to the “superior” institutions such as EU or UN, is a form of legitimization by authority and gives an impression that the documents and their consequences are good, standard, and similar to other EU member states.

In many texts, the principle of respect toward human rights is proclaimed in an obligatory form mainly in the introductions of different laws and documents. However, the general category of immigrants is scarcely portrayed as the subject of these rights. Those who are connected with it are mainly the vulnerable categories, such as: under aged persons, old

persons, women, children, and “real” refugees. But apart from these categories, the immigrants are more likely to be portrayed as: work-force, speculators, bogus applicants, criminals etc.

Slovak Republic is generally understood as a country of transit of the immigrants. In connection with this, immigrants are in some places blamed for their false interest – they claim they will stay here and then they leave. “Slovak Republic henceforth stays the transit country of different immigration flows of legal and as well illegal migrants destined to the economically more stable and more attractive countries of Schengen space. For these reasons, Slovak republic is obliged to accept the following trend and create the effective system of measurements focused on regulation of migration.” (Dôvodová správa, 1) As we can see, the idea of transit country thus also serves to legitimize the restrictive measurements on the borders.

On the other hand, we can find many notices talking about the „huge increase in numbers of immigrants“ (Konceptia migračnej politiky SR, 2005, 4) which contrasts with the previous idea of Slovakia as a transit country and questions the restrictive measurements concerning the permanent stays and naturalization. “From the statistical indicators results that the number of illegal immigrants increased enormously in 2001, when it presented 15.548 persons... Enormous increase in numbers of foreigners resulted also in asylum applicants.” (Konceptia migračnej politiky SR, 2005, 4)

New law “about the stay of the foreigners” has not changed the previous practice to include the problems of border protection into one law with the agenda of stay of the foreigners. This step was however criticized by the NGO’s. For example the Centre for research of ethnicity and culture (CVEK) claimed that “arrangements of the legal reform of the border control into the law that talks about stay and integration of foreigners in SR can be perceived as a manifestation of effort to create an atmosphere of endangerment of the state by foreigners” (Bargerová, 2012, 3).

Conclusion

Slovak political discourse about migration tends to securitization. The only reason we can hesitate whether the discourse is or is not securitized is the very low intensity of the discussion. Some authors, for example Salter, consider the intensity of the discussion about the issue as a precondition for securitization. (Salter, 2008: 325) On the other hand, we can suppose that if the migration would become more important issue in public debates the tendency towards securitization is the most probable discursive strategy. The academic expert

in the panel discussion that was dedicated to problems of migration and related policies in Slovakia noticed that the discourse and policies that enhance perceiving of migrants as essentialized “others” grows, and migrants are usually perceived as objects that can be managed, and essentialized otherness excludes the potentially shared equality. (Filadelfiová et al. 2010: 114).

The political debate about migration is very single sided with the dominance of conservative and nationalist views with new but still marginal tendency to understand certain types of migration (mainly the high skilled migrants) as positive. The low intensity of political and public debate and the underdevelopment of migration policies are interconnected. The fact that public is not informed about migration policies opens the space for making the policies „behind closed doors“, and causes the blurring of boundaries between political and administrative part of migration management. Thus many problems that immigrants face when entering or living in Slovakia and that are long lasting (such as huge queues on foreign police departments or missing right for so called “tolerated” stays) stay unsolved and do not receive broader attention (for example from the media).

The lack of “political correctness” in political discourse about migration in Slovakia comes in hand with adoption of new topics and discursive element from EU’s “shared” vision. It means the official document often appeal to the principles such as non-discrimination and at the same time principles that contradict this principle (as for example above mentioned impetus on selection of immigrants from culturally related countries). This clearly evokes that culturally different people could be a problem and thus problematizes this type of migration. As Didier Bigo reminds us with the words of Jean Delumeau, security “consists of reassuring and protecting the public, not disturbing and worrying them. But sometimes, in seeking to achieve the former we unintentionally produce the latter. Reassuring does not consist of conjuring up every possible danger in order to "sell" security, or of denying or minimizing genuine dangers. Rather, reassuring entails re-establishing the symbolic order-- not in its original form, but by managing its transformation.” (Delumeau, In.: Bigo, 2002)

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