

Zahradníček's blog for English speaking students

Part sixteen: Brno Bulgarians, or Brno Greeks?

In one of previous blogs I have mentioned that Czechia is very poor on ethnical minorities, what makes local people quite difficult to understand that people might be different, but not bad.

Nevertheless, later I admitted that some minorities still live in Czechia and namely Brno: for example remaining part of the Greeks that came to former Czechoslovakia because they have been leftist and Greece those days has been left by strongly right-wing government. After 1989 "velvet revolution" people from foreign countries started coming to Czechoslovakia and (after 1993 disunion) Czechia just "normally", just for finding another place to live, finding special jobs or studies, or something else. Some of them were and are just living here temporarily, some other decided to stay, typically because of finding a partner here.

A special group are "guest workers" or "Gastarbeiters" (this originally German term became international and is used also in English or Czech). Unlike German "Gastarbeiters" that are mostly Turks, majority of Czech guest workers are Ukrainians. They are doing poorly paid jobs (Czechs would not be very enthusiastic to do such job) and they send majority of the earned money to their families home in Ukraine – to obtain suitable healthcare, to pay for releasing their sons from army (otherwise they would have to fight in Donbas region) and for many other reasons. Men usually work as hardhats, women as cleaning ladies – huge majority of cleaning ladies in St. Ann's Faculty Hospital are Ukrainians. Some of them have more than one employment, to be able to send as much money as possible, having no free time, nearly no personal time, just hard working all the time.

So, today's Brno is already less "ethnically uniform" as twenty or even thirty years ago (and I would add: good luck for that). But how Brno itself reflects this fact?

Firstly, commercial sphere adapted very quickly. Especially restaurants adapted to large variety of cuisines are more and more common in Brno. Indian, Thai, Vietnamese, but also Ukrainian or Arabic restaurants exist. Even a Jewish restaurant existed, unfortunately it finished; but let's hope it is not forever.

As to high-class foreigners – managers, university teachers and similar people, commonly known as expats, they are organized quite well; there exist Brno Expat Centre prepared to help them in their lives and also in many other topics.

But what about other people with native language other than Czech, sometimes living in Brno already for a long time and less or more assimilated? Are they able to keep at least a part of their original culture, and even to enrich local people? Also here it starts to be better. The main event that exists in Brno every year is "Babylonfest", and in 2019 we have already its 12th year (19th to 26th September 2019). It consists of concerts, workshops, meetings, and one "main" day (this year it has been Saturday 21st September) there is a procession with flags, exhibition of folklore ensembles and degustation of national meals. People can see here Poles, Slovaks, Bulgarians, Greeks, Russians, Germans, Magyars, but also Roma people. To be honest, citizens of Brno are not very interested in this action. But the mere fact that it exist is a good message, as all events like this may help fight against nationalism and xenophobia, that endanger Czechia and the whole Europe.

Anaway, I am optimist and I hope that Brno is going to become again an international city. It might learn from mistakes of other cities and to avoid making ghettos and no-go-zones (even the situation of some "nearly-ghettos" of Roma people around Cejl, Bratislavská and Mostecká streets is now improving).

And maybe, once international students in Brno would also decide to prepare a "multi-culture event" 😊

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