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International Migration in the Slovak Republic – Current Situation, Trends and Impact on Society

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SUMMARY

The issues of international migration in the Slovak Republic – despite their growing importance – are still on the periphery of societal dialogue. Respective institutions and actors in the field did not react adequately, effectively and in time to a relatively large influx of migrants (though rather transient ones) into the country in the last decade and to problems resulting from this fact. Nor in the sphere of research in Slovakia was published a work that would deal with the questions of international migration to the country in a comprehensive, uniform and detailed way from the methodological viewpoint. It is true though the phenomenon of migration with its political, economic, social, cultural, demographic, safety and other impacts increasingly belongs to the global challenges of civilisation and, therefore, is a highly topical subject.

With regard to the above outlined circumstances, an analysis of the situation, trends and significance of international migration in Slovakia and its societal context (which is the cardinal objective of this publication) seems to be necessary, contributory and eliminating the hitherto absence of developing such a theme by the Slovak scientific community. More in detail, our effort is so that the publication can: represent a pilot reference source of data on migration in the country; help saturate an increasing need of theory for information, analyses, evaluations and comparisons in this region; serve demands of practice to confront its partial experience and to gain new, broader and logically organised knowledge; identify problem sites in the domain of international migration in the country; initiate the creation of social, economic, institutional, legal and other measures to improve the current situation; form a good basis for next, more or less specialised researches in the future.

With respect to the given aims, we decided to present the reader with not only the contemporary state of principal components of international migration in the Slovak Republic, but also their trajectory of development in a certain time frame. The text thus examines the course of migration in the country for a longer period: sometimes since the birth of independent Slovakia to (within possibilities) the end of 2004, or even mid-2005. From the methodological viewpoint, we used in the research a standard methodological instrumentarium completed with a questionnaire survey of the migration situation in the country. This was realised with several tens of respondents from State administration, non-governmental organisations, international organisations, journalists, professionals as well as migrants proper living in the territory of Slovakia.

The publication is composed of 10 parts that are logically interconnected. After the introduction, the chapters evaluating key theoretical concepts of migration, the current situation in the world and in Europe particularly, the state and development trends in the major constituents of migration in the Slovak Republic, the public opinion and attitudes of the autochthonous population towards migrants, influences of international migration on society, a set of legal norms concerning migration, institutional factors of migration in the country, positives and negatives of the State migration and integration policies and, finally, prognoses, concluding remarks and recommendations for practice then follows.
The first chapter of the work (Introduction) presents international migration as a specific global phenomenon of contemporary civilisation influencing development on the international scene. Chapter 1 further debates the growing importance of migration, its transformations and societal impacts. The text also accentuates the need for studies in this sphere, especially in the Slovak Republic where the interest of relevant actors in phenomena and processes regarding migration is still mostly unsystematic, occasional and marginal; the orientation of native citizens, the media or even politicians in migration issues is weak; research reacts to the topic to a minimum degree. The first chapter also identifies the above mentioned objectives, determines the structure of the publication as well as informs about the methodology used.

Chapter 2 (Theoretical aspects of international migration) provides an overview of essential definitions and the typology of international migration and migrants, sporadically with English terms. The text deals more in detail with the causes of migration applying a three-level analysis of migration motives (macro-, meso- and microlevel). Then, the main macro-economic, micro-economic, socio-economic, sociological, psychological, network, institutional and other theories or concepts of migration are characterised. Effects of international migration are differentiated according to their influence on host countries, countries of origin and individuals. These impacts are largely discussed from the economic, social, political, cultural, demographic, settlement, environmental, psychological and institutional viewpoints. A thesis is emphasised that legal migration is of benefit to both the immigration and emigration countries though unevenly distributed across the entire social spectrum, while undocumented or forced migration has often negative consequences.

The third chapter is entitled International dimension of migration. It evaluates the state and development of migration, first briefly in all over the world since modern times to the present focussing on the last decades. The chapter gives several aggregate data on migrants by continents or countries and some other selected figures. At the same time, it outlines some qualitative data and depicts cardinal trends contributing to the intensification of international migration. Chapter 3 is then more devoted to the conditions in Europe. Here it first describes the individual phases of migration movements on the continent since the end of WW2 and then critically examines current processes, phenomena and problems. Subsequently, the chapter demonstrates more in detail, by most significant countries, the development, origin and numbers of migrants as a whole and specifically within a varied palette of categories of migrants – foreigners with a stay permit, labour migrants, asylum seekers and refugees, irregular migrants and others. This and preceding chapters cite a great number of works written by prominent foreign experts in the region of migration; most of the data refer to 2002 to 2004.

The 4th chapter (Qualitative and quantitative analysis of the contemporary situation and development trends in international migration in the Slovak Republic) forms the central part of the publication. The situation and recent developments within all constituents of international migration in the country are characterised here in a detailed way. The chapter divides the migrants in Slovakia by types into the permanent migrants, undocumented migrants, asylum seekers and refugees, foreigners with a permit to stay, labour migrants, persons who were granted Slovak citizenship, expatriate Slovaks, de facto refugees and displaced persons; though – as stressed – they often intermingle in space and time. For each category of migrants, Chapter 4 provides a multitude of statistical data on their number, development, structures, countries of origin and many other particular quantitative and qualitative attributes, where possible until mid-2005. (It is worth mentioning here, e.g., a huge 131-fold unexpected increase in the number of asylum seekers in the country during the period 1992-2004, a dramatic growth in the number of undocumented migrants culminating in 2001-2002 etc.)
Chapter 4 further evaluates many accompanying phenomena of migration in Slovakia and also brings original findings that issue from our research. We can give in this context, for instance, the problem of registration of permanently emigrated persons from the country and in fact negative net migration instead of officially declared positive one (at the level of around 15 thousand people per year); politically relevant issues of the extent, forms, impacts of and repressive measures against smuggling of and trafficking in migrants in Slovakia; hitherto little published information on the development and features of asylum migration and on the comparison of various views on restrictive asylum policy in the country (including the non-attractiveness of the Slovak asylum system for refugees); selected problems in the category of foreigners with a stay permit (transformation of their structure, reasons for their stagnation in number, difficulties with obtaining a permit, regional disparities in their distribution etc.); the weak examination of labour migration and the insufficient registration of labour migrants (entrepreneurs in particular) as well as their evidently low number in Slovakia in comparison with those in neighbouring countries; the unexpectedly often used naturalisation of foreigners in the country but a missing policy in this sphere; prevailing unwished economic reasons to apply for the status of expatriate Slovak along with the stagnant reform of the system of care for these persons.

The subject of the following, fifth chapter is obvious from its title – Public opinion and attitudes of inhabitants of Slovakia towards international migrants: xenophobia, discrimination, racism? The chapter first provides an exhaustive overview of significant surveys of public opinion or researches of attitudes of inhabitants towards migrants since the birth of the Slovak Republic together with some recent international comparisons. We come to a conclusion that Slovakia does not form any negative extreme in Europe in this context despite presented mostly unflattering facts. However, as proved by concrete manifestations of xenophobia, intolerance and discrimination in the country, there are large reserves and places to remedy the current situation, especially as regards the population, self-government and State administration. Despite that some State institutions have lately initiated programmes and carry out action plans against discrimination and racism, most of the migrants in Slovakia often meet them both, namely directly or mediately through members of the family, friends and members of their community.

This chapter also deals with causes of intolerance in Slovak society. Here a substantial role was played by a relative isolation of the country during the past decades, but the disinterest of politicians or the superficial and marginal interest of the media have also negative influence on inhabitants. In this relation, opinions of representatives of State administration, non-governmental organisations, international organisations, journalists, professionals as well as migrants proper – all mapped within the already mentioned questionnaire survey of the migration situation in Slovakia – corroborate the above facts and bring new findings.

The 6th chapter (Influence of international migration on Slovak society) is dedicated to an evaluation of consequences resulting from the presence of migrants in the territory of Slovakia for the majority society. More specifically, demographic impacts of migration in the country, the participation of aliens in the education system, the health state of migrants, the occurrence of social-pathological phenomena among them, the share of foreigners on the level of criminality in the country as well as the importance of migrants in creating a multicultural environment in Slovakia are analysed.

We have found that demographic impacts of migration in the country are still imperceptible. The overall number of foreigners in Slovak schools is slowly increasing; at present it ranges from 0.1 to 3.0% (doctoral students) by type of school. For this reason various conceptions of educating the children of migrating parents started to be elaborated in recent years. Our research further demonstrates that in view of the health state of migrants in
Slovakia and its impact on the autochthonous population, fears of spreading contagious illnesses by foreigners are completely unsubstantiated. Similarly, the share of migrants with respect to the selected social-pathological phenomena is statistically insignificant. The influence of foreigners on criminality in the country is a highly discussed topic. However, it is shown that except for some delicts (drug traffic, smuggling of migrants, car thefts, racketeering and the like) the criminality rate of foreigners in Slovakia is much lower than assumed (approximately 2% of clear-up offences, 1.5% of prosecuted persons, below 1% of condemned persons). As to the acceptance of migrants’ cultures by the Slovak population: there exists a great potential in the country to improve cultural and social relations between the migrants and the natives as well as to develop cultural diversity. Besides, hitherto cultural influences of migrants on Slovak society are manifest at an individual or group level rather than at the level of the whole country.

Chapter 7 – Legal norms pertaining to international migration and their effects in practice – constitutes a relatively extensive text. It encompasses a synoptic and quite detailed characterisation of the recent development and content of Slovak legal acts concerning residence reporting, permanent migration, undocumented migration, asylum, stay permits, Slovak citizenship, status of expatriate Slovak, foreigners’ employment and enterprise, and others. Information is also provided on prepared amendments of Slovak laws in the period to come. Besides Slovak legal norms, corresponding legal acts of the European Union, recommendations of the Council of Europe or United Nations conventions – that have been transposed into the Slovak legal system – are mentioned where it is relevant. The following issues are separately described in the chapter: the implementation of the Schengen acquis in Slovakia and the protection of its borders in practice along with defining the most important tasks until 2007; questions associated with the implementation of the Dublin Convention together with the explanation of working the identification system of EURODAC in Slovakia; and the rights of foreigners in the country in the context of international agreements and the Slovak Constitution with an emphasis on the rights of movement and stay.

The 8th chapter deals with the fundamental actors in the region of international migration in the Slovak Republic at present (Institutional background of care for migrants). Organisations and institutions coming in any form to contact with migrants, refugees and foreigners with a permit to stay in the territory of Slovakia are characterised here from the viewpoint of their competencies, functions, organisational affiliation, position in society and key activities in particular. In principle we may differentiate these subjects into State, non-governmental or international ones and associations of migrants. Within the State sector, scopes and activities of institutions under the Ministry of Interior, Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Family and other central authorities are depicted in detail. Further the role of local and regional self-government in taking up some migration matters is outlined. From among the international organisations working in the field activities of UNHCR and IOM in Slovakia are evaluated. Chapter 8 also characterises all non-governmental, human right, religious and other organisations that are aimed at caring for migrants in practice in the country. In the end the chapter presents associations of migrants in Slovakia; however the number of active ones is not high.

The migration and integration policy of the Slovak Republic as an inseparable part of migration management in the country is examined in the ninth chapter (Migration and integration policy of the State). The chapter first defines principles of migration management, strategies and policies in general and their development in Europe over the recent period. The accent is put on a critical evaluation of the development of immigration, asylum and integration policies of the European Union as a whole. Then the migration policy of Slovakia is analysed with all its positives and negatives. Chapter 9 points out the recent practical non-existence of State migration policy though the contrary was officially declared. Only at the
beginning of 2005, the Conception of State migration policy of Slovakia was approved by the Government as a relatively comprehensive document. However, further elaborations by the respective ministries just begin therefore a concrete shape of this Conception will only be known in the future. In any case, the Conception represents a significant progress in comparison with the preceding state although it is a framework document only.

In this chapter we focus more on the integration policy of the Slovak Republic as this is least developed out of all constituents of migration policy in the country. After defining the general content of integration policy we discuss the situation in Slovakia and stress the need for urgent and marked changes. Though it is true that in the very last years some ministries have started to develop particular integration document (e.g. Ministry of Education or Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Family), but a comprehensive integration policy is still missing in the country. These facts are also confirmed by results of our questionnaire survey, in which we addressed representatives of State administration, non-governmental organisations, international organisations, journalists, professionals as well as migrants living in Slovakia and asked them about the integration and social exclusion of migrants in the country. Answers of most of the respondents have been a valuable contribution to the debate on the degree of integration of migrants into Slovak society, the quality of implemented integration as well as migration policy and their weak points.

Finally, the last, 10th chapter of the publication (Conclusion) recapitulates and synthesises above presented facts and the most important signs, properties, processes, phenomena and problems of international migration and its components in the territory of Slovakia. Besides, it outlines prognoses of migration development both in the world and the country in a quantitative and qualitative way emphasising their methodological complexity and unreliability. At the very conclusion of the chapter we formulate a set of recommendations for several dimensions in order to improve the contemporary state in the field of international migration. From among these recommendations we may here cite: to clearly articulate the migration doctrine of the Slovak Republic; to define the priorities of the country in view of migration and migration policy; to provide principally greater financial means than so far for the main actors working in the region of migration management in Slovakia; to prepare a comprehensive national integration policy of the country; to consider the establishment of a special governmental or parliamentary Committee for matters of migrants/foreigners and to create a new Migration Office managing all issues related to migrants; to improve collaboration and coordination among the cardinal subjects in the country within the sphere of migration; to adopt hitherto missing programmes and schemes to support legal labour migration; to quickly establish a migration information centre; to make the working of the media more active towards objective informing of the public about the entire palette of aspects of international migration in the country; to consider the formation of a new independent scientific discipline – migration studies – in Slovakia and to engage the scientific community more in systematic, objective and thorough research in the topic.

With regard to the limited extent of this publication it was impossible to deal with attributes of international migration in the Slovak Republic much in detail. Despite we tried to demonstrate a comprehensive picture of migration reflecting its contemporary state, development trends, most significant regularities, processes and mechanisms of operation, impacts on majority society and vice versa, fundamental actors, legal norms, policies as well as to outline potential areas for improving the situation. Let the reader judge whether we fulfilled the objectives of the work; however we would be pleased if the publication International migration in the Slovak Republic – state, trends, societal contexts was a good aid in orienting to this issue. International migration is an integral part of a globalising world, in which the country has since May 1, 2004 belonged more again than before. Slovak society
will have to get used to an increasing number of migrants in its territory with all accompanying phenomena and it is up to the country merely to cope with this fact properly.