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REFLECTIONS ON THE GAP HYPOTHESIS IN THE IMMIGRATION POLICY OF THE SLOVAK REPUBLIC ¹

Ján Lidák – Radoslav Štefančík*

ABSTRACT

The aim of the article is to explain why, despite the negative attitude of the Slovak political elite to international migration and the stated interest in restrictive migration policy, the number of migrants with the permission to stay in Slovakia is increasing from year to year. We explain this phenomenon by using the gap hypothesis, which describes the discrepancy between the goal of achieving a reduction in the number of foreign citizens through a restrictive immigration policy and between the real, growing number of migrants with a residence permission. That contradiction generally occurs because of the economic interests of employers, which may be at risk of labour shortages. However, this discrepancy may also occur due to the negative demographic trend and the interest of the state to create favourable conditions for the reproduction of the population. Thus, in the text we draw attention to the fact that although political actors articulate their negative relationship to migration, the existing migration policy shows liberal features. In this paper, we analyse the Slovak immigration policy. We believe that these are primarily the economic interests of large employers under the pressure of Slovak institutions, which are responsible for immigration policy making. We conclude that some political elites use the anti-migration appeal as a means of mobilizing voters. From the analysis of immigration policy, however, we identify a positive approach to tackling labour shortages in some sectors of the national economy, as well as the demographic deficit, by removing barriers to the employment of foreigners.

Key words: Slovakia, Gap Hypothesis, Demography, Economics, Migration, Public Policy, Immigration Policy.

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Introduction

International migration is one of the most recent issues that many modern nations are currently dealing with. In recent years, particularly in Europe, but also on the American continent, international migration, immigration problems, identity and integration problems have been among the serious issues of internal political development in all European countries, European Union and the world politics as a whole. There is no question that the phenomenon of international migration has a significant part in the form and nature of contemporary democracy and will take a dominant part in its future form and evolution. It is well known that the political systems of countries try to adapt to the impact and pressure of migration, changes in their internal structure, and new institutions are being created to address this issue. Ministries for migration have been set up in several countries, and other departments and working groups have been established to deal with the issues at the ministries. Political parties and political leaders who have built their agenda on the subject are emerging and gaining popularity (Gibson, 2002). However, this popularity is based on the fear of diversity, the fear of migrants, most of which are associated with religious diversity (Machyniak, 2018), regardless of the degree of religiosity of migrants. Even though the anti-immigration appeal was more typical of political parties in western European countries or other economically developed countries with a high number of migrants, this topic is also slowly getting into political discourse in the countries of Central and Eastern Europe. It is interesting to see how ideological boundaries between parties are blurred on the issue of international migration, as several right-wing and left-wing party subjects articulate this topic in a negative perspective.

The established political discourse and changes in the behaviour of political actors are the reasons why international migration has been observed not only by experts in the fields of demography, economics, geography, sociology, cultural science, but, even though with some delay, also by political scientists (Freeman 1992, 1995, 2004; Bolečeková, Olejárová, 2018). Just the delayed access by political scientists was, according to Freeman (2004, p. 113), the reason why “the most important and influential work on immigration and citizenship research, which should actually be at the core of political science interest, was originally created by non-political scientists”. Issues related to international migration have only attracted the attention of political scientists to the crisis in asylum policy in the European continent and the growing popularity of anti-immigrant party formations.

The problems of international migration and immigration in general are sensitive, they have huge potential to trigger political passions among the general public, as well as among the political elites (Štefančík, Matytsina, 2018). Attitudes towards migration can change the voters' behaviours, regroup voters from one political party to another, or they may be the reason why many people vote for right-wing extremists (Koziak, Hvasta, 2019). The common phenomenon of political discourse on international migration is the sharp polarization in all segments and structures of the society. Migration of people is becoming a source of conflict but also of development. It is the phenomenon that will increasingly influence the development of national states and of all mankind in the future.

According to the above mentioned, we can conclude that international migration has broad implications, indeed. It positively or negatively affects individuals, countries of origin, as well as target countries. Their character is demographic, economic, social, cultural, safety and certainly political. Although international migration is associated with a number of negative aspects, for example in the field of security policy (Dulebová, Cingerová, 2019), migration can also serve as a tool to address some national problems, especially in the economic and demographic field. The question of ensuring economic growth and reproduction of its own population is one of the primary tasks of each national country. To ensure positive demographic development, the country can respond with national social measures, but it can also ensure population reproduction by other means. In Western Europe, for example, migration is now being vividly discussed as one of the measures to avert negative demographic trends.

In our thinking, we assume that despite the relatively loud criticism of international migration or loudly articulated fears of migrants from other cultural and religious communities, the Slovak governments have not been able to prevent a gradual increase in the number of foreign citizens in their territory. It is also possible to identify the interest of certain economic actors in addressing the problem of labour shortages in some economic sectors through international migration. These economic interests are so strong that they create obstacles to the implementation of a restrictive migration policy.

Thus, in our thinking, we come to a paradox, which is referred to as "gap hypothesis" in analyses of international migration (Cornelius, Martin, Hollifield, 1994; Joppke, 1998; Rosenblum, Cornelius, 2012). It is the gap hypothesis that is the object of interest of the political community in the field of international migration research (Hollifield, Wong, 2015; Kolb, 2003). In political science research on international migration, this term refers to a situation in which political

elites, on the one hand, are particularly negative about migrants and show an interest in reducing immigration through a restrictive immigration policy, but on the other hand, under the pressure of the negative demographic development of the national society, they accept measures that support and facilitate the admission and employment of foreign citizens in the national labour market. In this paradox, the question arises as to why proclaimed measures to reduce or stop immigration do not produce effective results, or why, despite these measures, there is an increase in the number of foreigners or labour migrants. Ultimately, there has even been a debate on the importance of national countries and their real capacity to control migration flows on their territory (Bonjour, 2011).

1 Demographic aspects of international migration

If we want to consider the economic consequences of international migration, we should not forget to point out the impact of migration on demographic indicators. Economic indicators are directly linked to demographic trends. It depends on demographic development, whether there is enough labour power, or whether there are prerequisites for ensuring a pension system. In case of a negative demographic trend, questions then arise as to whether it is optimal to address this problem, inter alia, by a liberal immigration policy. The negative demographic trend is also mentioned in the Slovak concept of migration policy as a factor that can have a negative impact on the labour market (Government of the Slovak Republic 2011).

However, the demographic consequences of migration may not bring benefits. The overall impact of international migration will depend on whether we are looking at migration from the point of view of the country of origin or the destination country of migration. Speaking of countries of origin, the migration of people has a negative rather than a positive impact. Some regions of the countries of origin are literally depopulated. If these regions are characterized by high unemployment rates, poor infrastructure, there are enough push factors (more to pull and push migration factors see Lee, 1966) to create international migration. Given that young, highly skilled workers are often actors of international migration, migration can have a negative impact not only on natural reproduction of the population, but also on the average educational level (Stradiotová, 2017).

Looking at international migration from a demographic perspective, it has a positive impact first and foremost on the target countries. The development of the

demographic structure of the population of European countries shows a long-term negative trend. New conditions in demographic development are referred to as demographic transition (Kirk, 1996). It manifests itself in a decline of birth rate, a decrease in mortality, an increase in the life expectancy, a change in family behaviours and shifts in the value systems. The population problem in correlation with international migration of the population significantly affects the quality of life, changes the economic and social processes, also at the local level (Čajka, Bolečková, 2017, p. 17). Declining birth rates and increasing life expectancy over the last decades represent a serious problem for the progress and structure of economic development in the European Union, as well as the standard of living of the European population. The aging of the population is a reality that will continue to deepen under the same conditions, yet there is no indication that any major systemic change should take place. If the birth rate continues to decline, and thus the population in the country continues to fall, this would pose a clear threat to each state in maintaining its viability and ultimately a significant loss in the country's geopolitical position. Today, this phenomenon results in the lack of labour in many European Union countries. Additionally, employers are putting pressure on national governments with a request to free up the legal market for foreign labour. Demand for high-skilled workers is increasing, but there is also a great interest in low-skilled workers.

Negative changes in the demographic structure of the population will continue to deepen in the future, and the predictions of reputable institutions show that by 2030 the working-age population of the European Union can decrease by about 20 million, or even by 50 million by 2060 (ILO, 2018). Forecasts show that the number of people aged 25-39 is declining and the projected decline between 2010 and 2030 will be 15.6 percent. The proportion of people at the age of 40-54 will also be reduced. The number of people over the age of 55 will increase by 15.3 percent in the same period and then start to fall sharply. The number of seniors at the age of 65-79 will rise sharply in 2010-2030, an estimated increase of 37.3 percent. It is estimated that the number of Europeans over the age of 80 will triple by 2050 and the number of Europeans at the age of 60-79 will represent one quarter of the total population of the European Union. According to UN estimates in 2002, the European continent is the only world region whose population will decline in the coming years. It should be noted that while the Central European population is slowly aging today, this trend will accelerate after 2030 and the Central European population will become the oldest population in Europe. Statistics estimate that, compared to the number of working age people,

before 2060 most people living in Slovakia will be of post-productive age (Čajka, Bolečeková, 2017, pp. 41-42).

Speaking of Slovakia, the demographic development is significantly worse compared to the end of the 1980s. According to the Becont Weekly Report (2015), at the end of the 1980s there were about two children per woman, in the mid-1990s it was only 1.5 child. This downward trend continued until 2002. This year, the natality rate in Slovakia reached a record low level, with only 1.19 child per woman. Since 2002, natality rates have risen slightly, currently at 1.45 child per woman. However, with a low natality rate, the age gap between the population is widening. On the one hand, the number of people at a young, pre-productive age is declining, on the other hand, the number of people in the post-productive age is increasing, and furthermore, the average life expectancy is increasing. Although forecasts suggest a slight increase in birth rates, it is only marginal, rising from the current 1.45 to 1.65 in 2060. This trend will result in a decrease in the number of children born annually from the current 55,000 to around 32,000 in 2060. As the number of pensioners increases, the number of economically active inhabitants will decrease (Bencont Weekly Report, 2015). This means that the number of economically active inhabitants in Slovakia is declining. Therefore, the question arises as to who will replace the shortage of working-age population in the near future in order to maintain the sustainable economic growth. Indeed, this deficiency might not have negative consequences only in the context of economic growth, but also in the context of ensuring the stability of the pension system.

2 Economic factors of international migration

In connection with the negative demographic trend, experts regularly provide information on the numbers of foreigners who are indispensable for national countries to ensure their basic economic functions. Labour migration affects both the country of origin and the country of destination, in which it can have positive or negative consequences. It has a negative impact on the country of origin if it is massively abandoned by highly qualified and talented workers, scientists and students who decide to remain abroad after graduation. The brain drain for the country of origin is not only negatively reflected in the absence of labour force. The loss of investments made by the state in the education of emigrants is also affected negatively (Langthaler, Hornof, 2008). However, the country of origin may also be lacking the less educated workers if they are scarce on the national labour market. On the other hand, migration has a positive impact on the

economy of the country of origin, as long as surplus workers in the national labour market are leaving. Reduced labour supply can lead to increased competition with a positive impact on the wage growth, but with a negative impact on economic growth. Migration leaves a positive effect, if immigrant citizens send part of their earnings (remittances) to their relatives (Mehedintu, Soava, Sterpu, 2019) and after a certain time they return to their homeland with new knowledge and work experience. The volume of such money sometimes reaches considerable proportions and can be a significant source of foreign currency for countries of origin with an overall positive impact on the financial balance and on the growth of the national economy (Cazachevici, Havranek, Horvath, 2020). Transfer payments support households of relatives, but also, they lay the foundations for capital formation for the later period after a possible return home.

Migration in the target countries has different economic implications. It helps to fill the labour market gaps in certain sectors, which may have a negative impact on the wage growth due to an increased competition. Countries get a skilled workforce without having to invest in their education. Due to the cheaper immigrant workforce, some sectors are able to maintain jobs that are unattractive to the home population because of below-average wages. An advantage is also the increase in the number of taxpayers of working age, which is positively reflected in the trust towards the continuous pension system. Migration has also a positive impact on the social system, with an overall impact on the state of public finances. In particular, labour migrants are predicted to use state social services to a much lesser extent than older people in the target country (Langthaler, Hornof, 2008). However, this presumption will only apply if the migrant population is predominantly young and healthy workers and they are directed towards countries with a growing economy. However, in the modern history of the European migration, despite the economic problems of the receiving countries, we have witnessed a cross - border movement of non-working wives and children with the goal to reunite families of working migrants.

3 Gap hypothesis on the Example of Slovak immigration policy

Migration policy means a systematic complex of state instruments in the area of immigration, asylum and integration, whose adoption at the national level is coordinated by a selected administration body (Stýskalíková, 2004; Barša, Baršová, 2005; Bolečková, Olejárová, 2018). As a rule, in the research of

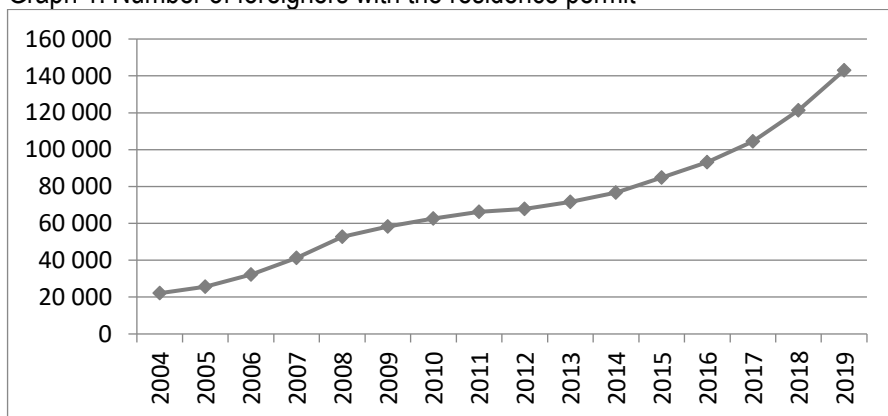
migration policy we will come across the division of migration policy into immigration, asylum and integration (Baršová, Barša, 2005; Štefančík, 2011). In the whole-European comparison, there were several models of integration policy in the 1990s (Fijalkowski, 1997). Currently, the full attention is paid to the command of language of the national society and accepting political and legal system of the receiving country (Barša, Baršová, 2005).

The model of Ursula BirsI and its co-authors is the appropriate one to present the complexity of immigration policy-making. According to this model, the core of immigration policy is the access to the territory of a particular national country and its political space. This depends on the motives and interests of the five spheres of public policy: labour market policy, economic policy, internal policy, foreign and security policy. This area of interest is surrounded by political and cultural factors, such as the public debate on immigration and asylum, party-political debate and public attitude. Finally, the outer square is embedded in the historically conditioned migration system of the target countries. In the past, the migration system has differentiated European countries because of their different relations between countries of origin and destination. These were based, for example, on colonial and post-colonial inter-country relations or on experience of exile and refugee as a result of war and Nazism. With the development of the economy and the shortage of labour, which was reflected in the recruitment of cheap third-country workers, the originally different migration systems in Western European countries are converging. It follows that, even if there are pressures from international organizations for close cooperation, the national country will remain the last instance to decide on the final form of migration policy. It is the national country that decides whether migration policy will be guided by its national traditions or by current demographic needs (Kritz, 1987).

Although the political elites in Slovakia have been articulating international migration as a problem since 2015 (Ušiak, Jankovská, 2018), even as a threat to national security (Androvičová, 2015), it is possible to identify the gap hypothesis in a proclaimed approach to migration and real migration flows. Despite the negative attitude of most political leaders to international migration since 2015 (Filipec, Vargová, 2019), the number of foreign citizens permitted to stay in Slovakia is increasing (Štefaňáková, 2018). However, this increase was not caused by the refugee wave between 2015 and 2016, which practically bypassed Slovakia. This is due, among other things, to positive measures of the Ministry of Labour in the field of employment of foreigners. These government measures, led by the Smer-SD political party, were adopted despite the fact that since 2015,

the Smer-SD party has been showing particularly strong anti-immigration rhetoric. An attempt of the ruling party, Smer-SD, to bring the topic of international migration into the political discourse was also noted in the 2020 election campaign, but this time the issue remained without any significant resonance from the voters.

Graph 1: Number of foreigners with the residence permit



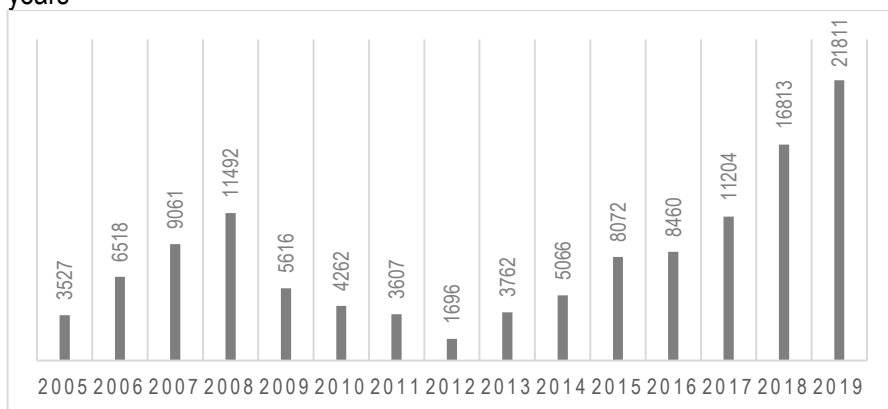
Source: ÚHCP – Bureau of Border and Foreign Police 2005-2019.

Graphs 1 and 2 show not only the number of foreigners but also the rate of increase by years. The 16-year period shown in Figures 1 and 2 can be divided into three stages. The first stage consists of years from the accession of the Slovak Republic to the European Union until 2009, when the consequences of the global financial crisis are beginning to manifest themselves in Slovakia. The second period is thus characterized by continuing growth, but at a much lower intensity than during the first stage between 2004 and 2009. This period lasts approximately until 2013 and is characterized, like the first stage, by the absence of a political discourse on international migration (Liďák 2010; Štefančík, 2010; Billý, 2012; Androvičová, 2015). The political elites became interested in international migration only after the migration crisis in 2015 (Macková, Harmáček, Opršal, 2019), which preceded the Slovak parliamentary elections. This period is characterized by a growing interest in the topic of international migration by the political elite, which has been and is still articulated, with a few exceptions, mostly negative. Migration is primarily linked to negative attributes such as threats to security and national, cultural and religious identity, or negative

impacts on the unemployment rate. At the same time, Chart 2 shows a significant acceleration in the increase of the number of new foreign citizens with a residence permit in the territory of Slovakia. Just to illustrate, only in 2019, i.e. during one calendar year, the number of foreigners with the residence permit increased faster (by 21 811 persons) than between 2009 and 2013 (by a total of 18 943 persons).

Although the issue of international migration after the 2016 parliamentary elections has fallen into the background, it has remained present on the political discourse, especially during the election campaign before the presidential elections in 2019. During the election campaign before the parliamentary elections of 2020, in addition to the right-wing extremists who are against migration, the leader of Smer-SD Robert Fico and the Prime minister nominated by the same party, Peter Pellegrini, had presented their negative attitude towards migration. Graphs 1 and 2 also show that the growth in the number of migrants has accelerated after the effects of the financial crisis and the second government of Robert Fico. That is, a government that was formed by only one political party, the social democrats of the Smer-SD party. It is the political party that expressed a particularly negative attitude towards international migration in 2015. Thus, the number of migrants in Slovakia was growing most rapidly under the rule of the political party whose representatives were extremely negative towards international migration.

Graph 2: Number of new foreign citizens with residence permit in Slovakia by years



Source: ÚHCP – Bureau of Border and Foreign Police 2005-2019.

The growth of the number of legally resident migrants in Slovakia was also due to the liberal aspects of the current immigration policy, which responded to labour shortages in some sectors of the national economy. The decisive instrument of the Slovak immigration policy is thus connected with the conditions for the employment of foreign citizens (Stojarová, 2019). Even the basic and initial document of the Slovak Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs, and the Family of the Slovak Republic (hereinafter only Ministry of Labour) in the field of migration policy entitled Migration Policy of the Slovak Republic with a view to 2020 states that “long-term negative demographic development shows that the Slovak labour market and social security system are significantly dependent on human capital from abroad” (Government of the Slovak Republic, 2011). This document was adopted four years before the migration wave in 2015. It even assumes that the state will not be a passive observer in this area, but will actively pursue the search for a particularly high-skilled legal workforce. To achieve this goal, it tries to accelerate the process of providing work permits, visas, supporting the admission of economic migrants, facilitating migrants' access to health care and social security, or setting up information and consulting centres for migrants (Government of the Slovak Republic 2011).

Firstly, possible economic losses force employers to put pressure on the government to open up the Slovak labour market for the workforce from abroad. Although the Ministry of Labour has adopted liberal measures to support the employment of foreign citizens, the head of the ministry, **Ján Richter**, has publicly stated that this is by no means an admission of migrants. Foreign citizens will be allowed to come to Slovakia from abroad only to districts with a maximum of 5% unemployment rate and will occupy professions for which there is low demand by the Slovak population (Toma, 2018, p. 9). Current companies in Slovakia are not able to cover more than 83 thousand jobs. The lack of professions includes not only highly qualified workforce; i.e. doctors, nurses, IT specialists. An even greater problem is the low-skilled workforce - metal workers, miller operators, drivers, forklift drivers, production operators. Thus, the statements of the Minister of Social Affairs fit into the concept of the gap hypothesis, that despite obvious measures to address labour shortages by creating conditions for the employment of foreigners, the state representative will argue that by this measure the state does not provide support for migration flows towards Slovakia.

Measures of the Ministry of Labour have had an impact on the growth of the number of foreign citizens with the residence permit in Slovakia. These measures even caused that the number of foreign citizens living in Slovakia from third

countries and the European Union found a balance. While ten years ago the foreign citizens from EU member states prevailed, this situation is now coming to terms. Among the EU member states, Slovakia is dominated by migrants from the Czech Republic, Hungary, Romania, Poland and Germany. From the third countries, citizens of Ukraine who were the largest group of foreign citizens (38 307, compared to 24 913) in the territory of Slovakia, show the greatest interest in staying in Slovakia. Next in line are citizens of Serbia, Vietnam, Russia, China and Northern Macedonia. If we look at the reason for the stay of the third-country nationals in Slovakia, employment is the main rationale. At the end of 2019, 26 196 foreigners claimed the employment as the reason for their stay in Slovakia, while the year before it was 15 387. A strong group are also foreign Slovaks living in Slovakia, then entrepreneurs, migrants who came to Slovakia for the purpose of family reunification and finally, students (ÚHCP, 2019).

In some Slovak sectors, labour shortages are strong. The most lacking workforce in Slovakia is in the automotive industry, where they need to cover up to 14 000 vacancies in the long-term (Toma, 2018, p. 9). A major reversal in the labour market does not seem to happen and the demand for labour will continue to rise. Employers argue that this is a temporary phenomenon. There is also a tendency that the workforce will settle in the receiving countries. For companies, a two- and three-year contract may not always be of an advantage. The cost of training and qualification of the workforce is high. It is preferable to extend the stay, but this will also be related to the arrival of the wife and children and the subsequent establishment of the family, as it is already happening in some parts of Slovakia. In short, what is happening on a large scale in Europe, is also happening on a small scale also in Slovakia. The problem with this situation is that state power towards the public refuses to discuss liberal immigration policy. In addition, there has been a lack of a stronger debate on integration policy in Slovakia in the long-term (Zakova, 2019). Therefore, it is possible that Slovakia will repeat the mistakes of Western European countries. In the long-term, we might be negative about migration, reject the idea that foreign citizens are already part of the Slovak Republic, while not dealing with the issue of their integration. Thus, it may happen that due to the absence of an effective integration policy, migrants will be isolated from members of an autochthonous society, which may ultimately lead to several problems (Plavnická, Šlosár, 2017).

In addition to the positive views on tackling some economic problems through international migration, there is also the thesis that negative demographic trends are not a sufficient reason for further recruitment of workforce, not through

migration at all. Demographic imbalances could be tackled, according to some politicians, primarily by emigrating some older people from high-income countries to southern Europe, noting that this is currently the case in Norway and Germany, for example. However, this thesis is not thoroughly elaborated and remains to be speculation only. Finally, the migration of the elderly people does not solve the problems of the shortage of the economically active population. In any case, the number of inhabitants in Slovakia is not currently decreasing, on the contrary, it is increasing, albeit only slightly. However, this increase is not caused by a natural increase in the Slovak population, but by an increase in the number of foreign citizens with a residence permit (Čiefová, Raneta, 2017). Despite this optimistic approach, other forecasts suggest a decline in the Slovak population in the long-term (Bolečeková, 2014).

Furthermore, national governments could address the problem by gradually extending the retirement age, depending on the average life expectancy, i.e., if every ten years the life expectancy is extended by two years, this should be automatically projected and added to the retirement period. **Paul Collier** (2017) calls the presented solution one of the most encouraging achievements of the interplay between science and public policy. As life expectancy increases rapidly, the society cannot afford to pass this entire period on to the pension period. If a society becomes richer, it can gradually afford to reduce the retirement age in relation to the life expectancy. According to the author, this option should presume a specific retirement age. The reason why this solution does not work in Europe is due to lack of political will. An illustrative example is the Slovak Republic, where the parliament approved by constitutional law the upper age limit (64) for retirement.

Last but not least, there is another solution, stated by the author, saying that political elites should convince the population of the conscious need to accept and reconcile for some time with a reduction in the country's economic growth, wage decline and the associated living standards of the population as a result of flows and migration as a whole and not to recruit any labour force (Collier, 2017). In any case, the possible approaches presented are interesting, but we cannot imagine how successful a political party would be in a political rivalry, if it chose these principles as its agenda. Rather, the tendency in Slovakia is to mobilize voters often by non-systemic social measures before the elections.

The second inseparable and even more complicated side of the investigation of this issue is the perception of the problem by representatives of public administration and self-government who are directly affected by the problem-

solving in practice. Representatives of the public administration are and will be forced to respond to the situation and make adequate decisions - to address the consequences of immigration, the adaptation of immigrants and civic coexistence. Self-governing regions, cities and municipalities play a key role in addressing specific problems and integrating at the local level. They may be faced with decisions related to the increase in crime, tackling offenses, allowing demonstrations, veiling of girls in schools and other problems. It is symptomatic that news of migrants is gradually appearing in the media, which of course, when their number is basically negligible, causes negative emotions in the ranks of a certain part of Slovak population. At present, after a strong negative wave, the admission of migrants and hence of the foreign workforce can be problematic, as evidenced by the facts that occurred in several cities that had to address these problems in their territory. We are referring to the 2015 Gabčíkovo referendum and also to the measures related to the foreign workforce and public order in the town of Sereď. Citizens who opposed the construction of hostels for foreign workers expressed their dissatisfaction in this town. The same problems were registered in other towns and cities of Slovakia, such as Trnava, Galanta, Nitra, Považská Bystrica, and also in Topoľčany.

Conclusion

In the paper we attempted to explain the paradox, which is referred to as a gap hypothesis in the political research of international migration. However, this concept originated in western European countries after analysing migration policies on the one hand, and the real state of migration on the other. This paradox is also present in Slovakia and represents the difference between the strong anti-immigration rhetoric of the political elites and the real state of Slovak immigration policy.

In the text we pointed out that the topic of international migration has not been in the forefront of interest of the Slovak political elites for many years (Billy, 2012). The facts are the contrary. If noticed, then primarily by academics and scientists. This lukewarm approach of Slovak politicians to migration was not affected by the number of allowed residence permits, which started to grow sharply after the Slovak Republic joined the European Union. Slovak politicians only noticed migration in the summer months of 2015, just a few months before the parliamentary elections. It was articulated solely in negative terms; international migration has become a serious security threat – as delivered by the narrative of

politicians. Migrants were perceived as a threat to home culture, national and religious identity, or the rule of law not only by right-wing extremists, but even by representatives of the ruling party Smer-SD, which endorses the ideas of social democracy. Even in 2016, the topic of migration dominated for a few weeks as the main election topic, even though Slovakia was not hit at all by the migration wave in 2015. This is where we come to the paradox of the gap hypothesis, which has been valid for Slovakia since 2015. Despite the proclaimed measures to prevent the entry of migrants into the territory of the Slovak Republic, the number of migrants continued to grow sharply.

This can be explained via the tools of immigration policy. While the political elites were extremely negative against migrants, outside the mainstream it applied measures to solve the problem of a workforce outage. On the one hand, the governmental parties have presented an interest in closing national borders with physical barriers to create the impression that through these steps they are impeding migration flows. On the other hand, they pursued the goal of eliminating obstacles to the employment of foreign citizens through liberal immigration policy instruments. They also considered migration as one of the tools to address the negative demographic trend. Based on this discrepancy between the stated interests and the real status of the number of migrants in the territory of Slovakia we also verified the validity of gap hypothesis in case of Slovakia.

The negative attitude of the political elites towards international migration is manifested mainly in the run-up period prior to the elections. Its role is to mobilize voters, but it has little to do with real immigration policy. In the period between the elections, a period of stable political power distribution in the parliament between the coalition and the opposition, the actors take measures to promote economic growth. This group certainly includes a measure to support the employment of foreigners if there is not enough labour available in the labour market.

In the paper we have also outlined the state of Slovak migration policy. We still consider this as inadequate in Slovakia. The long-term low interest of both, the political elites and the state authorities in international migration and consequently, the extraordinary negative view without prior professional discussion results from a non-systematic approach of the Slovak state authorities. This was evidenced by the lack of a concept of migration policy, which is unable to flexibly respond to the rapidly changing situation in the field of international migration. As the Migration Office of the Slovak Republic does not address the issue of the integration of migrants, there is still no institution in Slovakia coordinating the actions of state authorities. The foundation of a joint office with

exclusive competence for issues related to foreign migration has not been established yet, although it has been envisaged to be operational already in 2010. In regard to the fact that the debate on international migration is still under the influence of negative emotions and is regularly used as a populist way of mobilizing voters, we do not expect an early return to a rational approach towards this global phenomenon.

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