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The Migration Crisis from the East-Central European Perspective: Challenges for Regional Security

Abstract: Nowadays, the common denominator of involvement of the East-Central Europe in the international arena, and above all, the premise determining community of interest expressed in the European Union is the migration crisis. Despite the different circumstances of activity in the context of the migration crisis, states in the region express similar opinions on the consequences of immigration for security in the region. Above all, they emphasise the implications of immigration for the internal security of states. Given the complex nature of migration, this article focuses on the phenomenon of immigration in the EU, determining the causes of the escalation of the influx of immigrants and, above all, identifying the consequences for the security of states of East-Central Europe.

Keywords: *migration crisis, migration, the Visegrad Group, the European Union, East-Central Europe*

Introduction

The determinant of the involvement of the East-Central Europe in the international arena, and above all, one of the factors determining and modelling the cooperation of Central Europe is the migration crisis. Due to a similar assessment of its implications for European security, and above all, the position formulated and espoused with regard to migration policy of the European Union integrates the countries of East-Central Europe, an example of which is a convergence of positions of the Visegrad Group countries and joint proposals for action espoused by this body.

It should be emphasised that the Visegrad Group countries called “coalition of the reluctant” are backed by some countries of the region (primarily those located along the main migration routes), which undermines the effectiveness of EU policy in this area (Potyrała, 2015, p. 38). Despite declaring the will to fulfil the obligations of membership and expressing a willingness to increase the involvement in joint activities, these states indicate, however, the need to consider their proposals. The consensus on the migration crisis does not mean that there are disparities in other issues important from the point of view of the EU. It is proven e.g. by the summit in Brussels on 9–10 March 2017, during which the European Council chose Donald Tusk again for the position of the President. He was elected by the votes of 27 Member States with a clear Polish opposition, which importantly, expected its position on Tusk’s re-election to be supported by the Visegrad Group countries.

At this point, it should be noted that the mass influx of people into EU should be seen both in terms of the refugee crisis and more broadly in terms of the migration crisis. The migration crisis (caused by the massive influx of foreigners) is a seriously dysfunctional cultural, social, economic and political phenomenon carrying an extensive catalogue of risks and threats to the whole of Europe, including the EU (Czachór, Jaskólski, 2015, pp. 17–18). It should also be noted that regardless of whether the output category is a refugee crisis or the migration crisis, in any case, the situation of uncontrolled influx of immigrants raises risk of a political crisis especially in situations that reveal differences in the way of defining the EU interest and confronting it with the national interest of Member States. At the same time, the political crisis can affect both the EU as an organisation (political conflict between states and the European Commission), as well as it occurs within individual EU Member States where there are differences in the formulation and implementation of migration policy (Ośrodek Badań nad Migracjami Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego, 2015).

This article aims to analyse the migration crisis in the context of the security of states of East-Central Europe. Therefore, further considerations require an explanation of the category of “East-Central Europe region”. For the purposes of this article, this region is treated as part of the geographical space separated as a result of political transformations that occurred during the post-Cold War disintegration of power. Although, as noted by Agnieszka Orzelska, this region is of a relatively minor geopolitical importance in comparison to the turn of the 80s and 90s, it is still seen as the important area from the perspective of international relations (Orzelska, 2013, pp. 113–114). Bearing in mind the diversity in the way of drawing the borders of the East-Central Europe, it is assumed that this region includes eleven countries which have common characteristics and are integrated with each other by defined links of political, social, economic and cultural nature, namely Bulgaria, Croatia,

Czech Republic, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia and Hungary. It should be remembered that there is a multiplicity of different approaches to define this region (Znamierowska-Rakk, 2010, pp. 9–10). The understanding of the region adopted by the author is only one of the possible. However, despite the popularisation of the term “East-Central Europe”, Zbigniew Lach thinks that there is the lack of uniformed opinion on the territorial scope of this part of Europe. According to Lach, the broadest interpretation concerning the area of this macro-region includes: Finland, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary, Austria, Romania, Belarus, Ukraine, Moldova, Slovenia, Croatia, Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Macedonia, Albania, Bulgaria and Greece and Turkey. However, the narrowest interpretation narrows the East-Central Europe to Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia and Hungary (Lach, 2014, pp. 32–33).

Apart from the problems arising from the lack of compliance of the geographical and geopolitical delineation of the region, the countries qualified in the article as the East-Central Europe have the common perception of the dangers of mass, uncontrolled influx of immigrants (refugees and economic migrants) from conflict-ridden regions from the near and distant EU neighborhood. The political instability and multidimensional conflicts around the EU, as well as the level of socio-economic development of EU countries (in particular the countries of Western Europe) determine mass migration towards its territory (Sasnal, P. (Ed.), 2015, p. 9; Geddes, Scholten, 2016) - just to cite data presented by FRONTEX. According to this agency, 2015 was unprecedented for the EU, because during that year there were registered 1,822,337 illegal attempts to cross the external borders of the EU (FRONTEX, March 2016).

It is complemented by the finding that the scale of migration into its territory is determined by unresolved political, social and economic issues of regions situated in its neighbourhood. Equally important is the non-functionality of the procedures and mechanisms used by countries situated on the migration route, the sluggishness and the reactive nature of EU policies, the lack of unity within the international community, as well as the pragmatism of countries that play a crucial role in the migration crisis. As a result, the migration crisis has become a test of EU solidarity and the efficiency of the procedures and mechanisms of influence on these and other threats to the security of Member States. Apart from the exegesis of the reasons for this state of affairs, it should be noted, however, that the adopted decisions (such as an agreement with Turkey) confirm the determination of the EU institutions to make efforts to reduce the influx of immigrants. Importantly, they also point to the need to understand the multidimensional approach to solve the migration crisis. The complexity of the situation, and above all the complexity of the causes of the influx of immigrants into the EU, significantly hinders the operation of the European

institutions in the absence of consensus between the Member States on how to deal with the crisis.

As a result of the need to narrow the field of research this article limits the analysis to the issues that are crucial from the perspective of the research assumptions. Given the complex nature of migration, this article focuses on the problem of immigration into the EU, determine the causes of the escalation of this phenomenon and, above all, identify the consequences for the security of states of East-Central Europe.

The CEE Countries and the Migration Crisis

Today, the increase in the number of immigrants coming to Europe and entering the EU is a key challenge, which implies a policy of countries of East-Central Europe. Their reaction to the migration crisis is different and what is important determined by a number of political, social, economic factors. On the one hand, it depends on the scale of the influx of immigrants into their territory, but on the other hand it also depends on the migration experience of those countries, the policy introduced, the nature of social problems and finally economic, cultural and religious conditions (Drbohlav, Medová, 2010; Futo, 2010; Divinský, 2010). By arguing for the need to ensure the safety of its citizens against potential threats, particularly terrorist threats, Central European countries (or at least some of them like Poland and Hungary) are contesting EU-recognized solutions, such as refugee admission.

Analysing of the current activity of these states in terms of the influx of immigrants and measures to stop and control the inflow undertaken by European and international institutions shows the reluctance to accept immigrants. The conservative attitude of countries in the region results to some extent from the lack of immigration tradition, in particular, due to a lack of experience with immigration from Islamic countries (Kropáček, 2003, pp. 273–280; Lederer, 2003, pp. 317–322; Nalborczyk, 2003, p. 229–230). The perception of immigrants coming from this culture as strangers strengthens the anti-immigrant attitudes of the public. Taking into account the prevailing situation in the international arena, and more importantly identifying potential threats to the security of states, we should point to immigration as one of them. The lack of openness of the societies of East-Central Europe is seen as a legacy of those countries belonging to the Eastern bloc. As noted by Dariusz Kałan, in comparison with Western Europe, the wealth, the weakness of the administration, deficiencies in infrastructure and lack of history with Islamic culture and generally negative experiences of the governments of those countries with minorities determine the reluctance of countries of East-Central Europe to accept the immigrants (Kałan, 2015, p. 1). In combination with the lack of education in the spirit of multicultural-

ism, the promotion and display of the negative aspects of immigration strengthen the (usually unfounded) fear and anxiety towards immigrants. Apart from the broader analysis of the causes of this phenomenon, it should be emphasised that politicians motivated by political calculations avoid making decisions against public opinion, including those relating to accepting immigrants.

Among the countries of East-Central Europe, the consequences of the migration crisis being faced by the states located on the transit routes. A special role is played by Bulgaria, which borders with Turkey, on the territory of which reside most of the refugees from Syria and that was the first stage of the main migratory route from Syria to Europe (Jarosiewicz, Strachota, 2015). It should be emphasised that in the initial phase of the migration crisis Bulgaria struggled with the influx of migrants trying to enter its territory and Western Europe. Importantly, the first wave of immigrants in Bulgaria came already in 2013 causing a huge organisational and financial challenge for the country (Andreev, Mierzwińska, 2013). With limited possibilities, this state was not able to effectively protect its borders against the influx of illegal immigrants and provide sufficient support to those who were in its territory (Dąbrowski, 2013). At the same time, it should be noted that the refugees coming to Bulgaria do not perceive it as the destination country but the stop on their way to Western Europe. In addition, Bulgaria has taken steps to protect its borders, e.g. building the fence along the border with Turkey or strengthening the police force to protect the border. These projects, however, proved to be ineffective, as evidenced by the illegal crossing of refugees in both eastern and western border of Bulgaria. Despite the abuse and sometimes brutal practices of the Bulgarian police, which were noted by Human Rights Watch (Human Rights Watch, 2016), determined immigrants were still trying to get through the territory of Bulgaria further ahead to Western Europe. At this point, it is worth to mention civic self-defense units, which aim to intimidate and catch refugees on the border between Bulgaria and Turkey. By arguing for the need to ensure the safety of their residents these extremist paramilitary groups led violent actions against immigrants. Moreover, only the critical approach to these actions of European human rights organisations caused any reaction of the Bulgarian authorities, which began to criticise such actions (Germanova, Dzhabazova, Bienvenu, 2016).

Importantly, the decisions of Bulgaria's neighbours determined the change in its policy towards immigrants and seeking ways to reduce their inflow. It should be noted that none of the countries in the region was able to independently control and stop the migration wave. Consequently, they sought to facilitate the transit of migrants to neighbouring countries by pushing away the burden of responsibility (e.g. the closure by Hungary of the border with Serbia has increased the flow of immigrants through Croatian territory). Frequently, this practice carried a number of tensions

in the region and recriminations about the escalation of the crisis (Szpala, 2015). First of all, the countries expected support from the EU institutions and defined the actions taken by the EU Member States as 'absolutely disloyal' and marked with the particular interest (*Gazeta prawna.pl*, 24.08.2016). It should be noted that the sealing of borders by the following countries caused the situation, in which Bulgaria – being in the front on the way of immigrants to the EU – was not able to absorb all incoming immigrants and provide them with the necessary support. It is also worth noting that the countries most affected by decisions taken by their neighbours referred to the solidarity and expected more advanced actions on the part of the European community. Importantly, none of the countries in the region was considered by migrants as an attractive destination country. Therefore, these countries wished to fulfil their role as transit countries and conduct reactive policy in this regard to target countries such as Germany. At the same time, as noted above, the states accused each other of the deepening problems related to the migration crisis (Szpala, 2015). At the same time, it should be noted that countries reluctant to immigrants, such as Hungary, did not only attempted to modify refugee migration routes but also undertook a series of measures to limit the potential influx of immigrants into its territory. As an example, a referendum on compulsory refugee resettlements was held on 2 October 2016 in Hungary. Although it was not binding (the threshold of 50% of eligible voters was not exceeded), however, its results confirm the anti-immigrant attitudes of Hungarian society, reinforced by government rhetoric. (*Polsat News*, 2016).

The reactions of Central European countries to the EU policy are varied and result from their experience with migration policy, the needs and possibilities of the labour market, public attitudes. At this point it is worth pointing to Hungary, which particularly hard suffered the consequences of the influx of immigrants from the countries of East-Central Europe (i.a. financial costs related to the provision of medical care or food for immigrants as well as costs related to border protection etc.). Because of its geographical location, it has become a transit country for immigrants and to the greatest extent bear the costs refugee crisis. At this point, it should be noted that Hungary is located on the so-called Balkan migration route (FRONTEX, 2015, p. 29). It leads through Turkey, Greece, the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia to Serbia, and then through Hungary and Croatia to the other EU Member States. Before it closed its borders it was the most popular way to reach Western Europe from the Middle East, South Asia and Africa (Żornaczuk, 2015; "Western Balkans. Annual Risk Analysis 2015"). Due to the scale of the phenomenon and, above all, due to the lack of satisfactory solutions for Hungary from the European institutions, this state has taken independent decisions designed to protect it from the consequences of an uncontrolled influx of immigrants. At this point, there should be mentioned a 175-kilometer fence

built on the border with Serbia and Croatia. What is more, the situation in terms of refugee flows through the territories of countries in East-Central Europe was also influenced by the closure of the Hungarian-Serbian border and strengthening immigration laws in Hungary (15 September 2015). Then the immigrants decided to modify the route (leading mainly to Germany, the Scandinavian countries, the UK) by selecting the passage through Croatia and Slovenia (Żornaczuk, 2015). This decision activated the next countries in the region who argued for changing the current policy of the European institutions in fear of an influx of immigrants. For example, shortly after the closing of the Hungarian-Serbian border and change of migration routes to Croatia, the Croatian government has announced that it will enable them to register and go to the next states. However, the influx of immigrants turned out to be too large to deal with the formalities. Therefore, it was decided to allow immigrants to quickly leave the territory of Croatia and move forward to Slovenia (“Niekontrolowane migracje”). However, Slovenia – while trying to respond to the development of the migration situation - initially refused to allow the organised means of transport to pass from Croatia, strengthened controls at the border and declared its adherence to required procedures. In practice, however, like other countries in the region, it has not fully closed its borders and de facto has not hindered the transit of migrants towards Austria (Szpala, 2015).

Also, Romania had to face the consequences of the influx of immigrants and like other states from the Visegrad Group refused the system of allocation of immigrants proposed by European institutions (TVP Info, 2015). Criticising how the EU dictates the need for the acceptance of refugees, Romania advocated the need to take into account the specificity of the region in the decision-making process concerning migration crisis (Gniazdowski, 2015). It clearly articulated its negative position on this issue at the meeting of the Justice and Home Affairs Council on 22 September 2015, where along with the Czech Republic, Slovakia and Hungary, it voted against the decision on the deployment of refugees in EU countries. Interestingly, previously also Poland and the Baltic countries criticised the setting of a mandatory number of refugees, but at the September summit, they deviated from the common position. In the following weeks (after the victory of the Law and Justice party in the parliamentary elections in autumn 2015), Poland returned to the negation of the EU position by opposing the relocation of refugees.

Particularly important in the context of the migration crisis in Europe and its consequences for the activity of the Central European countries was the closure of the so-called Balkan route. As a result, those countries which have so far remained on the sidelines of the migration crisis took appropriate decisions in fear of the influx of immigrants. The consequences of these decisions related not only to the countries

located in the close vicinity but also to other East-Central European countries, such as Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia. The decision to close the existing transit routes for migrants caused them to seek alternative solutions. The Baltic states feared the modification of routes having in mind the events of the summer of 2015 when more than 6 thousand immigrants entered Finland from Russia and in the autumn of the same year another group of immigrants crossed the border with Norway on bicycles (Polish Express, 2016; Defence24, 2016). A specific response to the growing threat of the influx of illegal immigrants is the building of a 23 km long fence on the border between Latvia and Russia. Similar decisions were made by Lithuania by deciding to build a 135 km long fence on the border with the Kaliningrad Region and Estonia (Adamowicz, 2017). While implementing EU policy on immigration, the Baltic states stressed that if Europe does not strengthen external borders, develop a mechanism for the return of migrants and the fight against human trafficking, the states will not be ready to fulfil all the requirements of the EU (TVN24, 2015). In this place, a refugee allocation system shall be mentioned, which was questioned by part of the Member States. The Baltic States (Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia) expressed approval for the refugee allocation system and initially declared their voluntary acceptance. A problem occurred regarding the concept of the European Commission to accept additional numbers. Although ultimately the authorities of Lithuania, then Estonia and Latvia have decided to accept a one-off additional number of refugees as part of the EU solidarity, these countries questioned the introduction of a permanent number of refugees. At the same time, like other Central European states, they argued for the right to make the selection of persons to be accepted (Hyndle-Hussein, 2015). It should also be noted that like other countries of East-Central Europe, Baltic countries also were not perceived as target countries by migrants (Łomanowski, 2016).

A reflection of the reluctance of East-Central Europe countries towards the proposed migration crisis solutions is a slow process of refugee acceptance under the relocation and resettlement system. It should be noted that only part of the states adopted refugees under a resettlement system (mainly from Turkey, Jordan and Lebanon). Thus, these states fulfilled their obligations related to the provision of safe and legal entry to Europe for persons requiring international protection (European Commission, 2017). However, the actions taken by part of the Central European countries are seen as disappointing. At this point, the EU institutions indicate Hungary and Poland as the states that do not meet the requirements and have not relocated anyone on their territory yet. Equally, critical opinion was given about Slovakia, Bulgaria and the Czech Republic, which hardly fulfilled their commitments (Report from The Commission to The European Parliament ...).

Table 1. Asylum and first-time asylum applicants in East-Central Europe in 2011–2016

	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
Bulgaria	890	1 385	7 145	11 080	20 365	19 420
Croatia	-	-	1 075	450	210	1 715
the Czech Republic	750	740	695	1 145	1 515	1 475
Estonia	65	75	95	155	230	175
Lithuania	525	645	400	440	315	425
Latvia	340	205	195	375	330	350
Poland	6 885	10 750	15 240	8 020	12 190	12 305
Romania	1 720	2510	1 495	1 545	1 260	1 880
Slovakia	490	730	440	330	330	145
Slovenia	355	295	270	385	275	1 310
Hungary	1 690	2 155	18 895	42 775	17 7135	29 430

Source: Asylum and first-time asylum applicants – annual aggregated data (rounded). EUROSTAT.

Taking into account the risk of influx of immigrants and previous experience of migration, countries of East-Central Europe present different views about how to overcome the effects of mass migration. It is worth to point out the approach to migration policy postulated by the Visegrad Group since autumn 2016, also referred to as “flexible solidarity”. The concept presented at the informal EU summit in Bratislava on September 16, 2016, says that the ability to receive refugees and immigrants should be tailored to the specifics of the country, its features and experiences (Visegrad Group, 2016). A common approach to the migration crisis does not stem from the convergence of global interests and regional solidarity but is dictated by the particular interests of each of these states. Guided by individual premises, they oppose proposals to solve the migration crisis proposed by the EU institutions, which in their opinion result in an increase of the influx of immigrants into the EU. Stressing the need for humanitarian assistance for refugees, they contest primarily the imposed mandatory mechanism of accepting immigrants mainly for economic and socio-cultural reasons. They justify their position through the top-down nature of the imposed solutions, which do not take into account the will and most importantly the specificity of each country and the nature of the problems they face, but also the immediacy of postulated solutions (Sasnal, P. (Ed.), 2015, p. 14).

The Visegrad criticism of the EU policy on migration crisis is supported by some countries from East-Central Europe. Romania, Bulgaria and the Baltic states questioned the decisions taken while expecting the EU to develop more efficient proposals taking into account the specificities of the region and primarily aimed at the

Table 2. First-time asylum applicants by countries of origin in the countries of East-Central Europe in 2011–2016

	First-time asylum applica- tions	Three most common country of origin								
		First country	number	%	Second country	number	%	Third country	number	%
EU	1 255 640	Syria	362 775	29	Afghanistan	178 230	14	Iraq	121 535	10
Bulgaria	20165	Iraq	6910	34	Afghanistan	6165	31	Syria	5955	30
Croatia	140	Syria	25	18	Kosovo*	10	7	Afghanistan	10	7
Czech Republic	1 235	Ukraine	565	46	Syria	130	11	Cuba	125	10
Estonia	225	Ukraine	95	42	Iraq	15	7	Syria	15	7
Lithuania	275	Ukraine	60	22	Georgia	45	16	Russia	35	13
Latvia	330	Iraq	85	26	Vietnam	80	24	Ukraine	45	14
Poland	10 255	Russia	6 985	68	Ukraine	1 575	15	Tajikistan	525	5
Romania	1225	Syria	550	45	Iraq	190	16	Afghanistan	90	7
Slovakia	270	Iraq	170	63	Afghanistan	25	9	Ukraine	15	6
Slovenia	260	Afghanistan	45	17	Iraq	45	17	Iran 30	12	
Hungary	174 435	Syria	64 080	37	Afghanistan	45 560	26	Kosovo*	23 690	14

* Kosovo under United Nations Security Council Resolution 1244 of 10 June 1999.

Source: *Asylum in the EU Member States*, EUROSTAT.

liquidation of causes of the crisis. The states pointed to risks arising from the influx of culturally different migrants (e.g. threats of terrorist attacks). An example is e.g. the statement formulated by Slovak Prime Minister Robert Fico, who justified his objection to the proposal of the Commission with the need to guarantee the security of the state and citizens against Islamization (Potyrała, 2015, p. 39). The negative opinion was also expressed by Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban indicating that the migration crisis will last until its causes remain. Moreover, statements such as “migration is a Trojan horse of terrorism” and, consequently, identifying migration as a factor stimulating terrorism only reinforce anti-immigrant attitude (Gazeta prawna. pl, 07.03.2017). Such an attitude was widely expressed not only by the Visegrad countries but also by other countries in the region. Although generally nobody linked immigration with terrorism, the states pointed to another kind of security threats (e.g. an increase in crime, possible social conflicts, and cultural tensions) (Potyrała, 2015, p. 42–44).

To conclude this part of the article, it should be emphasised that the migration crisis results in the disclosure of differences in the definition of the EU interest and, above all confronting the positions of Member States with the vision of migration crisis management. The expectations and demands of the countries located on the migration routes as well as those located in their further vicinity are not the same. Mechanisms to impact migration crisis adopted by the EU polarise the Member States which, irrespective of their location, consistently contest the proposed solutions due to their own political calculations. The states most dissatisfied with such policies take individual decisions that are believed to protect them from the uncontrolled influx of immigrants (e.g. building walls, fences), and are reluctant to implement the EU guidelines and expectations seeing them as not taking into account their interests. Moreover, particularly worrying is the rise in xenophobia and nationalism, which cause the increasing distance between the public and the immigrants. Equally worrying is the politicisation of the immigration issue and the inclusion of this issue into the political discourse solely dictated by the particular political calculations.

The Threats to the CEE Security in the Context of the Migration Crisis

From the perspective of East-Central Europe, the migration crisis leads to a few conclusions. Firstly, the impact of the migration crisis (it refers e.g. to the scale of the influx of immigrants to the individual countries or the scale of transit) on individual countries in the region is varied. Secondly, the migration crisis in Europe stepped up discussion in the countries of East-Central Europe, and in consequence, the issue of migration has become politicised. In each of these countries, the problem of reset-

ting refugees became the part of the internal political discourse in order to achieve particular and immediate political objectives (e.g. consolidating the electorate, gaining voters, strengthening political power). Thirdly, the refugee crisis consolidated the regional states, especially states that comprise the Visegrad Group (it refers to jointly expressed opposition to the mechanism of automatic refugee relocation). Fourthly, none of the countries in the region is a destination for immigrants but only transit country on their way to richer Western countries.

Migration flows are now one of the most important challenges faced by the EU and the Member States. Their nature and consequences for countries mostly burdened with an influx of immigrants pose a serious threat to the cohesion of the Union. The European Commission's proposals on the resettlement of refugees coming to Europe among the Member States, including the countries of East-Central Europe, cause the resistance of some of them, thus demonstrating the complex nature of European cooperation. Apart from the sources of the migration crisis, this situation shows deficiencies in the functioning of the EU. On the one hand, there is pressure and attempts to impose solutions pushed through by some Member States (especially Germany), on the other hand, there are opinions about the lack of solidarity and selfishness mainly in relation to those countries that are contesting the proposed solutions (Miecznikowska, 2016, p. 401; Wojnicki, 2016, p. 548). The dispute over the compulsory relocation of the refugees does not resolve the humanitarian crisis, and only strengthens the belief of both parties as to the legitimacy of their demands. However, this situation is disturbing for several reasons. It does not only expose the weakness of the EU in crisis situation demonstrating the inability to manage the crisis but also leads to a confrontation between its members. The removal of a political crisis that results from the migration problem in the EU is in the interests of the Union as an organisation that wants to play an important role in the international arena. Internal disputes are not favourable, especially in the context of Brexit that has significantly weakened the capabilities and position of the EU. The difficult situation was intensified by the dispute against the re-election of Donald Tusk between Poland and the other Member States, or the announcement of the candidate for president of France Marine Le Pen on the need for revision of the cooperation with the EU.

The massive influx of immigrants into the EU must be considered as a potential security threat. At this point, it is worth noting that the display of the negative consequences of this phenomenon for security in Europe is one of the factors influencing European public opinion. According to the Eurobarometer, nowadays immigration and terrorism are seen as the biggest challenges for the EU. It is worth noting that, according to a survey 69% of Europeans are in favour of a common European migration policy, while 61% positively assess the immigration of people from the other EU

Member States. However, 56% negatively perceive immigration from outside the EU (European Commission, Autumn 2016; European Commission, 2016). These trends are confirmed by studies of Chatham House, the Royal Institute of International Affairs in London. According to a survey conducted on a sample of 10 thousand people in Austria, Belgium, France, Greece, Spain, Germany, Poland, Hungary, Italy and the UK, 55% of the citizens of ten European countries voted in favor of stopping further immigration from countries that are mostly Muslim (Kazimierczak, 2017). Such attitudes of the public are based on fear for an increase in crime, potential terrorist attacks and other more or less real threats to the functioning of the host countries (Morozowski, 2016). Raising the issue of financing costs related to the protection, support, and ensuring the viability of immigrants in the EU strengthens anti-immigration sentiment – especially in a situation where immigrants are treated primarily as recipients of support and not as the people who in the long run can enhance the economy of the host countries. The intensity of the migration crisis and, above all, terrorist attacks in Paris, Brussels or Berlin contributed to an increase in scepticism about their acceptance. “A side” consequence is an increase of radical sentiment especially in East-Central Europe (Czachór, 2016; Grodzki, 2015). This trend is confirmed by the acts of hostility directed against foreigners and a growing reluctance on the part of society to immigrants perceived as those who want to use the social resources of the host countries and representing a threat to public order. Given the above, it is necessary to counteract the tendency to perceive immigrants (both refugees and economic migrants) as a threat to society. Emphasising in public debates the social, cultural or economic consequences, regardless of the veracity of these claims, is not advisable and not in favour of the development and functioning of society itself. Public debates marked by stereotypes and simplifications show that the most heard is the voice of opponents to acceptance, who cause public opposition by exposing only one side of the problem. However, it is understandable considering the growing security risks of countries e.g. in connection with terrorist attacks in Europe. The worrying information that the groups of refugees include militants of the Islamic state along with the problems in regarding the identification of those reaching the territory of the EU reinforces negative social attitudes (Reuters, 2016). Proven examples of the involvement of immigrants in the organisation of terrorist attacks only strengthen the concern and opposition to the influx of immigrants. Just like examples of the involvement of immigrants in criminal activity do. In particular, European public opinion was moved by prominent examples of sexual offences (Deutsche Welle, 05.01.2016). However, we cannot forget that the beneficiaries of the immigration crisis are criminal groups and organisations. Firstly, they benefit from organising the smuggling of migrants in the EU, secondly, from making profits from drug trafficking,

prostitution and other forms of organised crime. At the same time, it is worth quoting the opinions of German experts, who point out that there is no evidence of any link between the influx of refugees and the increase in crime. The German Federal Office of Criminal Investigation (BKA) in the prepared report explaining the essence of the problem stressed that the crimes committed by refugees in 2015 remained at the same level as those committed by native Germans (Deutsche Welle, 13.11.2015). On the basis of available statistical data it can be stated that if there is an increase in crime, it occurs in the second-generation of immigrants, and - what is worth emphasising - towards immigrants (Deutsche Welle, 10.07.2016). In the case of the criminalization of the second generation, it is a consequence of ineffective policies of immigration integration. Moreover, the increase in crimes against immigrants is to some extent a derivative of anti-immigrant attitudes (Deutsche Welle, 23.05.2016).

Unfortunately, however, focusing the debate around the potential risks arising from the influx of (legal and illegal) immigrants, ignores the potential benefits of accepting immigrants. Immigration may be a factor mitigating the anticipated gap in the resources of the labour market. This aspect of migration should be analysed especially in those countries which are beginning to experience shortages in the labour market, and in which the demographic situation is far from desired. With the proper integration policy, immigrants can constitute a reinforcing agent, and not weaken the development and functioning of the state.

At the same time, it should be noted that the scale and nature of security threats are dependent on whether we are dealing with a country of destination or transit. Countries of East-Central Europe, due to the status of a transit country, suffer to a lesser extent the consequences of the migration crisis than e.g. Greece or Italy, which are the first states to accept immigrants and are obliged to provide them with food, water and shelter. It is also a source of problems in those Member States that are on the route of immigrants on their way to a destination, such as Croatia, Hungary, Austria and Slovenia. Many of these people are going to other EU countries, mainly to Germany, and they have to deal with the far-reaching effects of the migration crisis. In 2016, nearly 750 thousand people requested asylum in that country which accounted for nearly 60% of applications (Asylum and first-time asylum applicants). Regardless of the scale of immigration to the various countries in the region, fear of potential threats to security and public order, and above all the accentuation of terrorist threats intensified reluctance to accept immigrants. It should be noted that European countries are not only the target of terrorist attacks, as evidenced by attacks carried out in several European capitals, but also become an area of recruitment of potential terrorists, and terrain to raise funds for terrorist activities and the place of implementation of the propaganda activities aimed at radicalization of attitudes and

behaviors (Raczyński, 2015, p.17). The literature also emphasises other consequences of the influx of immigrants to the security of the state and host society. These include, among other things, the presence of large numbers of immigrants, especially those coming from other cultural circles and not sufficiently integrated, can generate social tensions, leading to protests and riots (Raczyński, 2015, P.19). Regardless of the fact that the countries of East-Central Europe are transit states, influx causes reactions from opponents to receiving refugees and economic migrants in the form of rallies, protests or actions aimed directly at the immigrants. Immigrants are not satisfied themselves and criticise the conditions offered at refugee centres. They expect greater concern about their safety from host countries and better social care.

Conclusion

Migration problems faced today by the EU, and in particular, the strategy to counter the massive influx of people, influence the cooperation between countries of East-Central Europe. Despite the discrepancies occurring periodically against this background, nowadays these countries present a similar approach. However, the denial of actions adopted by the EU institutions does not constitute a waiver of the joint action in crisis conditions, but the only presentation of a different vision of its solution. At present, the reaction of the Member States is not only dependent on the number of immigrants, which flows to them but it is also dictated by political calculations. Opposition to their acceptance depends not only and not so much on the scale of the influx on their territory or the immigration policy, but also on the attitudes of the politicians and public in this regard.

Countries in the region contesting the mechanisms of interaction of the EU institutions on migration crisis point to the implications of immigration for the security of the region. They draw attention to the direct and indirect threat to the internal security of the countries located at the transit routes. It should also be noted that a peculiar side effect of decisions taken by those countries that were in the highest degree affected by the influx of immigrants (closing of borders, restoration of control, construction of walls and fences) were conflicts in the region and the blame for the escalation of the crisis. Above all, the migration crisis resulted in disputes between states reluctant to accept immigrants and those that have supported European solutions. The ongoing dispute perpetuates the belief in the lack of solidarity and particularism from the Visegrad countries, which in the future may result in recourse to this situation in the discussions on the EU forum and in making decisions relevant to the interests of the Visegrad countries.

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