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Migration policy of Sweden: challenges and resolutions

Abstract

The article investigates the peculiarities of the migration policy of Sweden. Particular attention is paid to the current migration policy. From the experience of the past years, it is clear that the modern migration policy has the so-called historical memory closely related to the post-war immigration experience as well as the long-standing tradition to provide an asylum for war and political refugees. Now, the Swedish government has implemented a number of temporary legal changes aimed to reduce the migration inflow to the country and lower the attractiveness of Sweden for refugees in future. However, there is an obvious drop in the number of refugees coming to Sweden in the period of 2016-2017, there is still much to be done. The main issue is associated with the labour integration of those who have already found their way to Sweden at the peak of migration crisis in 2015.

Swedish migration policy has a number of weaknesses worthy of criticism in terms of refugees coming to Sweden within the recent years: lack of housing, integration policy and educational issues.

Keywords: *migration, migration policy, Sweden, migration crisis, the EU*

Abstrakt

Niniejszy artykuł bada zawilosci polityki migracyjnej Szwecji. Szczegolna uwage zwraca sie na wspolczesna polityke migracji. Z minionych doswiadczen wynika, iz wspolczesna polityka migracyjna posiada tak zwana pamiec historyczna scisle powiazana z doswiadczeniem imigracji powojennej jak rowniez dlugoletnia tradycje zapewniania schronienia dla wojennych i politycznych uchodzcow. Obecnie, rzad Szwecji wprowadzil wiele zmian w prawie w celu zredukowania naplywu emigracyjnego do kraju i obnizenia atrakcyjnosci Szwecji na przyszlosc. Chociaz pojawil sie znaczny spadek w liczbie uchodzcow przybywajacych do Szwecji w latach 2016-2017, w dalszym ciagu jest wiele do zrobienia. Glowny problem ma zwiazek

z integracją na rynku pracy tych osób, które już znalazły swoje miejsce w Szwecji w okresie szczytowego kryzysu migracyjnego roku 2015.

Szwedzka polityka migracyjna posiada wiele słabości podlegających krytyce w kwestii uchodźców przybywających do Szwecji w okresie ostatnich lat – są nimi: brak mieszkań, polityka integracyjna oraz kwestie szkolnictwa.

Słowa kluczowe: *migracja, polityka migracyjna, Szwecja, kryzys migracyjny, UE*

Introduction

Throughout the history, migration processes have played a prominent role in social development. The population migration is a prerequisite for a quantitative and qualitative economic growth, a mechanism for achieving consistency between the demand for labour and its supply. As one of the most complex social processes, migration of the population is connected with practically, taking into account all components of social life. In particular, migratory movements are one of the important factors in the reproduction of the labour force and the development of the labour market.

Migration processes have become one of the greatest challenges of the 21st century. Voluntary and forced migrations were accompanied by the development of humanity throughout its existence, but nowadays the volumes of migration have reached the largest scale. Immigrants have become an integral, necessary and, at the same time, problematic part of the country's life, one of the means of solving demographic and economic crisis, as well as the category of exacerbation of social, religious, political and ethnic problems.

Since the 1970s, the number of migrants in the world has doubled and continues to increase; in 1990, migrants accounted 15% of the population in 52 countries of the world. For Europe, the issue of migration is important precisely because Europe is one of the most attractive migratory ranges for migrants, which is reflected in the extensive and steady growth of migration figures there. Europe receives the largest number of migrants (56 million), while in Asia, there are 50 million and in North America – 41 million (Lindert, Schouler-Ocak, 2008, p. 14). According to the data of the International Organization for Migration, in 2017, the number of international migrants was 257.7 million people, and at such a speed, the growth of this indicator will approach the mark of 400 million by 2050, and in the Scandinavian countries this indicator is the highest, among the European states (Lindert, Schouler-Ocak, 2008, p. 16). The governments of the Scandinavian countries are now facing significant socio-economic problems (structural discrimination, lack of educational and professional growth for second-generation

immigrants, high rate of unemployment, barriers to linguistic and cultural competence) as well as the anti-immigration sentiment of the indigenous population.

Among the Scandinavian countries and other European Union member states, Sweden's immigration policy is considered as one of the most liberal. In 2015, at the peak of the migration crisis, 163,000 people arrived in the country, as well as a record number of unaccompanied minors, resulting in the first place for Sweden in taking the number of refugees per capita by comparison to other EU countries (Valverde, 2017.). The modern immigration model of Sweden has a number of vulnerabilities, and is also an illustrative example of the implementation of a certain kind of immigration policy for refugees. So, the following questions arise: (1) how effective is Sweden's modern migration policy, which relies heavily on the rich experience of previous years, but cannot always apply the already established and time-tested approaches to the current situation? (2) What controversial questions arise during the implementation of the migration policy of Sweden? (3) And, what mechanisms does Sweden apply to solve the problems?

Sweden's migration policy in historical retrospect

In the interpretations of the notion of "migration" there is no unity. There are many views on the essence of this phenomenon, which are reflected in the diversity of definition. Migration refers to the process in which an individual moves from one cultural environment to another for the purpose of a limited time or permanent settlement (Lindert, Schouler-Ocak, 2008, p. 17). This process is associated with changes in the style of living, self-identity, status, relationships, perceptions of cultural standards, and stress (Kazmierska, 2003; Valenta, 2010).

International Organization for Migration gives the following definition:

migration is a movement of a person or a group of persons, either across an international border, or within a State. It is a population movement, encompassing any kind of movement of people, whatever its length, composition and causes; it includes migration of refugees, displaced persons, economic migrants, and persons moving for other purposes, including family reunification.

The migration of any population in the narrow sense is an important component of the broader concept of migration. In the narrow sense, the concept of migration is identified with the notion of relocation. Migration in

the broader sense, except relocations, covers a number of other types of territorial displacement. This is a socio-economic and demographic process that represents a set of displacements carried out by people among countries, regions, settlements. Thus, migrations in broad and narrow terms are different phenomena, although in some sources they are mixed and often used synonymously, and therefore, function as identical terms.

International migration as a component of the overall migration process is not a new phenomenon. It arose many centuries ago for various reasons: military and colonial conquests, natural disasters, geographical discoveries and the development of new living spaces. The flows of international migrants were initially not recorded at all by state authorities, thus theoretical studies were absent. Only at the end of the 1960s, did the active research of this phenomenon begin. International migration should be considered as a logical consequence of the development of integration processes, a prerequisite for the establishment of a single international labour market.

The Kingdom of Sweden is one of the most developed countries in Europe, which successfully combines the traditions of the monarchical form of government with the practice of modern constitutional democracy. Specific characteristics of this country are: the unchanging policy of neutrality since 1814, the non-participation in two World wars, the record length of being in power of the Social-Democratic party, the historical tradition of peaceful means of transition to new formations, in particular from feudalism to capitalism, long-term favourable and stable conditions for the development of economy, the dominance of reformism in the working class, and the search for compromises in order not to offend the interests of different parties.

Sweden is called the "welfare state" mainly through a generous social system and a wide range of social benefits. This has led to the attractiveness of the state for migrants, who make up a large percentage of the population of the state. In 2011, in the rate of immigration, Sweden surpassed other EU countries, the United States, and Canada. According to a rating based on 148 different factors (The Migrant Integration Policy Index MIPEX), Sweden offers the most favourable and constructive conditions for migrants to integrate into the society, particularly, in terms of employment. Some other important advantages of Sweden include the actuality of laws that help family reunification, and the fight against discrimination, as well as many useful laws relating to housing, education, political participation and the citizenship of immigrants.

The reason for the Swedish government's loyalty to migrants is primarily the lack of labour resources. As a result of this, in the 1960's, there was

an increase in the dynamics of migration processes. In comparison with other countries, Sweden is among the leaders in the receiving the number of immigrants. Despite this, migration remains a politically controversial phenomenon. On the one hand, it is possible to notice the positive aspects of migration processes, such as the attraction of highly educated migrants to the country, which resulted in a great increase of the productivity and competitiveness of the country. On the other hand, some political forces fear that immigrants take away job places for locals, or cause the increase in the state's expenditures on social benefits and needs (Antropov, 2007, p. 80). The problem of replenishment of labour resources is solved with the help of a large stream of immigrants, who gradually transforms a homogeneous Swedish nation into a multicultural country.

The history of immigration to Sweden is rooted in the distant past. For centuries, not only ethnic Swedes but also representatives of many other nationalities have participated in creating a prosperous state of general well-being. Overall, immigration to the country began long ago. In the Middle Ages we could talk about the so-called labour immigration, when wealthy burghers of German commercial cities of the Hanseatic League, began to settle down in the Swedish cities of Visby and Stockholm (Westin 2006). The Finnish peasants began to develop the sparsely populated regions of central Sweden in the 1500s, and in the late 1600s. Belgian blacksmiths and casters played a significant role in the development of the iron-and-steel industry. In the 1700s, the country accepted the members of the Jewish community and representatives of the French intellectuals. In the 1800s, as the construction of brick buildings began in large cities, Italian architects (Migrationsverket, 2016), known for their skill, were drawn to Sweden. The mass emigration of ethnic Swedes to the United States and Australia from 1850 to 1930 left a huge trace in the history of Sweden, having made a significant impact on the country's cultural and demographic landscape for many decades to come. More than 1.5 million settlers, fleeing poverty and religious persecution, left their homeland in search for a better life.

Thus, until the 1930s, Sweden remained ethnically homogeneous, and immigrants accounted for only one percent of the population. Everything changed with the start of the Second World War. During the Second World War, Sweden became a new home for a large number of refugees from neighbouring countries. For example, between 1941 and 1945 about 49,000 Finnish children were evacuated to Sweden due to active military actions (Santavirta, Myrskylä, 2015). During the German occupation of Denmark and Norway, many Jews and members of the resistance movement managed

to find refuge in Sweden. Later, they got jobs in factories and in the fields of agriculture and forestry, replacing tens of thousands of Swedes who were called to serve in the National Guard. By the end of the war, about 30,000 Estonians and 5,000 Latvians crossed the Baltic Sea in search for a new home, and in the period from 1945 to 1948, the population of Sweden increased by 30,000 – they were the representatives of different nationalities living in concentration camps.

The post-war period was marked by another important event for Sweden. In 1950, the United Nations Refugee Agency was created, and Sweden immediately became its active member. So, within the framework of the program for the resettlement of refugees, thousands of Hungarians and Czechs, who escaped from the Soviet regime shortly after the Hungarian uprising in 1956 and the invasion of the Soviet troops of Czechoslovakia in 1968, were sheltered in Sweden. As a result of the 1973 coup in Chile, over the next seventeen years, Sweden hosted more than 18,000 Chilean refugees fleeing from the Pinochet military regime, as well as 6,000 refugees from neighbouring Argentina, Bolivia, Uruguay and Peru (Benito, 2005, p. 6-7).

On July 1, 1969, the control over migration policies came under the authority of the newly established Swedish Migration Board, which was created to regulate the flows of labour immigrants and integration programs (*Migrationssverket (Swedish Migration Agency)*, 2016). From now on, those who wanted to live and work in Sweden were supposed to provide a job placement, as well as prove that they have financial and housing resources (Segal, Elliott, 2010).

In 1975, the Riksdag adopted a revolutionary law, which initiated a new policy of multiculturalism and integration. The traditional approach, focused on the natural process of assimilation, was completely revised. The three pillars of the new program became equality, freedom of choice, and sociability (Borevi, 2014, p. 710). This meant that the immigrants permanently residing in Sweden had the same rights as the ethnic Swedes. Immigrants did not need to sacrifice their cultural, linguistic, and religious values in order to integrate into the Swedish society. Everyone could decide if he/she wanted to live in the Swedish way or stay in his/her cultural environment. From now on, this became a personal matter for everyone and the government had no right to influence anyone's choice.

The period from 1980 to 1999 made a big impact on the image of Sweden as a "humanitarian superpower." In the mid-1980s, there was a great growth in the number of refugees from Iran, Iraq, Libya, Syria, Turkey and Eritrea. The second significant event of those years was the fall of communist regimes in Eastern Europe. As soon as people got a relative freedom of

movement, many of them rushed in search of a better life to more developed and prosperous states; Sweden was no exception.

The end of 1990 was marked by new challenges – collapses of the USSR and the end of the Cold War. On the one hand, the development of democracy and economic growth in the former communist countries, along with the termination of long wars in Lebanon, Eritrea, Iran and Iraq had a positive effect on the reduction of the number of refugees in Europe. On the other hand, the disintegration of the USSR and one of its satellites – Yugoslavia and the tragic events in the state led to a massive migration of thousands of people who were fleeing from the war. For example, in Sweden 100 000 thousand refugees from the former Yugoslavia found a new home, most of them were Bosnians and 3 600 thousand were Kosovo Albanians (Benito, 2010, p. 12).

In the wake of an unprecedented influx of refugees, the Swedish authorities for the first time encountered a number of serious problems. Firstly, more and more people who received a residence permit in Sweden as compelled immigrants sought to carry after themselves the numerous relatives remaining in ruined and impoverished countries after the war. As a result, the Swedish government was forced to impose a number of restrictions on those who wanted to move to Sweden under the family reunification program. The second major problem was the lack of identity documents of many refugees, which, in turn, complicated and delayed the process of issuing residence permits and also prevented the removal from the country of those whose asylum requests were rejected.

In the spring of 2001, Sweden joined the Schengen agreement. The open borders and the free movement of people within the Schengen zone led to a significant increase in labour migration in both directions. It is noteworthy that in 2004, shortly after the largest enlargement in the history of the EU, Sweden became one of the three countries (together with Great Britain and Ireland), which did not begin to impose temporary measures to control the citizens coming from the eight recently acceded countries of Eastern Europe. Despite this, unlike Great Britain and Ireland, Sweden did not experience an immigrant boom with cheap labour forces.

Another armed conflict, caused by the invasion of the US troops of Iraq in 2003, led to a new wave of military refugees. A striking example is a small Swedish city of Södertälje, which is actually a suburb of Stockholm. In 2007, the city received 1,268 Iraqis, accounting for 5% of all those who arrived in Europe as refugees from Iraq, or 1.5% of the population of Södertälje. For comparison, the United States and Canada, taken together, took just 1,027 people in the same year (*Sweden and Migration*, 2016).

In 2013, the Swedish government implemented two important immigration policy reforms. First, illegal immigrants living in Sweden without a formal permit and their children from now on were entitled to health insurance, dentist services and emergency medical care along with all other Swedish citizens (Potkanski, 2015, p. 71). Secondly, beginning with September 2013, the Swedish Migration Service guaranteed the legal status of the refugee to all the Syrians and stateless persons who arrived in the country, which, in consequence, seriously influenced the further development of the migration policy of Sweden (*Sweden offers ...*, 2013).

Sweden and the migration crisis in the EU

The armed conflict that erupted in the spring of 2011 between the government of Bashar al-Assad and the opposition forces has turned into a lingering and bloody civil war that is now considered one of the greatest humanitarian catastrophes of the present. Nearly five million people were forced to leave Syria since the beginning of 2011 (2015 Situation Report on International Migration). According to IOM, Syrians today account for 40% of the total number of refugees in the world (Tuttle, 2015). Without a doubt, the Syrian crisis has become a real challenge for the entire world community. In 2013, with a further escalation of the conflict, the Swedish government decided to guarantee an automatic residence permit to all Syrians arriving in the country, as well as to provide eight thousand Syrian refugees, already residing in the country, with a permanent residence permit along with the possibility of transportation to Sweden the members of their families (*Sweden offers ...*, 2013).

In the period from 2014 to 2017, 87,809,000 Syrians requested for the status of refugee in Sweden, almost all of them received a positive response. In 2015, the influx of refugees peaked – nearly 170,000 asylum seekers arrived in Sweden (*Migrationsverket (Swedish Migration Agency)*, 2016). Even according to the Swedish standards, it was too much of the weight. Given this, in 2016, the asylum legislation was changed and the possibility to get a refugee status has become much more difficult.

At the end of 2015, it became clear that the immigration situation was out of control, and the EU member states were not in a position to agree on quotas of refugee allocation (Frej, 2015).

In October 2015, the Swedish Social Democrat and Green coalition government presented an agreement with the right wing party alliance, arguing that society was facing a "collapse" and that they needed to create

some "breathing space" ("andrum") through a series of migration policy changes (Riniolo, 2016). From January 2016 onwards, passport controls were introduced at Swedish borders, causing asylum applications to plummet. In the spring of 2016, a government proposition for interim legislation to delimit immigration to Sweden was launched. The proposition was heavily criticised by a range of institutions and civil society organisations involved in the consultation process. Despite this critique, the proposed interim legislation was implemented for a three-year period in June 2016. The interim legislation, presented in a more detailed way below, entails several changes to the processes of migration control in Sweden. The most drastic changes are the introduction of temporary instead of permanent-residence permits, the demand on migrants' labour market performance for permanent residence permits, and for family reunification, the introduction of "lower thresholds" of low-pay sectors such as service work, and the cutting of daily allowances applied by the Swedish Migration Board to persons under expulsion orders.

Among the key measures to the change, the immigration law was in power to refuse permanent residence permits, which came into force on July 20, 2016. Mostly, this decision was applied to the refugees from Syria. In fact, in 2013, the Swedish Migration Service revised its policy on Syrian refugees, guaranteeing them a permanent residence permit in Sweden, regardless of the circumstances surrounding each case (Ostrand, 2015, p. 272). Nowadays, it has been decided to reject this practice, with the exception of families with children under the age of 18 and those refugees who were able to apply for a permanent residence permit before the new legislation came into force.

The main problems concerning refugees that Sweden is facing now are as follows:

- (1) Lack of housing. The problem is not even related to the absence of hospitality or the increased hostility to refugees. The fact is that Sweden cannot just physically settle them down. Refugees are forced to sleep in the corridors and premises of migration centres, which by definition are not residential areas. Tents in the conditions of severe Nordic winters are not a real alternative. Under these circumstances, the government of the country organized special buses, in which refugees were transported to the northern and north-western regions of the country. Regions where very few people live, where people are needed and where there are opportunities for their resettlement and construction of houses for them. But the refugees rebelled. There was an incident, which is very indicative: a group of refugees was brought to live in a village in a mountaino-

us, forested area on the border with Norway, and they refused to leave the bus, saying that there was "very cold and lonely to live". This case is not only one example; they are becoming more and more common.

Under such conditions, the government did not have the choice but to ask the army for support. That did not mean the appearance of machine gun nests and artillery on the borders, but purely bureaucratic assistance: soldiers and officers went to offices to accept and consider applications for the refugee status. At the same time throughout the country, the searches for heated sports halls, hangars, concert halls and other premises, which could become a temporary haven for refugees, began.

It is interesting that in this situation not only the refugees themselves, but also the locals suffered. The fact is that prices for rented accommodation have sharply risen. For example, some companies that deal with the placement of refugee children take from the government 200 EUR per day per child. Although according to public opinion polls, about one third of the Swedes express readiness to place refugees in their apartments and houses, but in reality, very few people dared to take such a step.

- (2) Integration into society. Sweden is making efforts to integrate asylum seekers into the society life. For example, there are a lot of language courses and retraining courses. When the number of refugees did not exceed one hundred thousand a year, the situation was under control. The government, in particular, tried to move refugees from shelters to ordinary homes as quickly as possible in order to create the preconditions for integration into society. The willingness to help for a long time was quite high. People felt certain devotion to the tradition of "open doors", there was a consensus on this issue in the society. On the other hand, there has never been a full discussion on it. As soon as someone dared to express criticism, this person was quickly accused of xenophobia – even if criticism was justified. Now, the situation has changed and the discussion in the society on migration has become more active. Meanwhile, in Sweden, long before the mass influx of refugees, there was a small but rather aggressive group of right-wing radicals. They occasionally attacked refugee shelters. In 2015-2016, the number of such attacks increased.
- (3) Education. As Sweden was the first among all the EU member states as far as the number of minor refugees in 2015 was concerned, the issues related to their integration and further employment, which are now on the agenda, are particularly acute. Today, the integration policy for minors has become one of the most discussed topics and a popular subject

of research on refugee immigration policy (Çelikaksoy, Wadensjö, 2015, p. 3). In general, Sweden has rather good indicators of the so-called educational integration in comparison with other OECD countries (*Working together ...* 2016, p. 27). This demonstrates the success of integration policy in the long run, as it is aimed at the immigrants' children in the next generations. This kind of integration is called "progressive integration", as the performance of students is improving from generation to generation. It is important to note that not only school performance, but also a sense of belonging to the Swedish society is growing. For example, the results of the surveys showed that in the second generation of immigrant, their children perceived themselves as fully-fledged members of the Swedish society and did not experience any differences between themselves and their peers whose parents are indigenous residents of Sweden (*Helping immigrant students ...*, 2015, p. 6).

However, the situation with minors having arrived in Sweden in recent years is not so certain. Most of those who have received a residence permit in Sweden in 2015 (71,000 thousand of juveniles) are young people of senior school age who arrived at the end of compulsory schooling. Looking at the similar international indicators as well as the educational success of children and adolescents who moved to Sweden at an earlier age, the level of knowledge of students who have arrived in Sweden in recent years leaves much to be desired. For example, in 2013, 38% of immigrants who arrived in Sweden at the age of 15-24 years had an education level below average (*Working together ...*, 2016, p. 28). In many respects, this can be explained by the fact that the educational standards adopted in the countries of origin of refugees can differ seriously from the Swedish ones, and were often perceived as lower. As a rule, the transition from a secondary education to an upper secondary school is particularly difficult. Nowadays, only one of two adolescents continues to study at a senior school; others are forced to interrupt their studies (*Working together ...*, 2016, p. 29).

Conclusions

In general, we can conclude that the immigration policy of Sweden has a long complicated history and the core of it is "historical memory". Even during the peak of the migration crisis in 2015, the Swedish government decided to continue to adhere to the policy of "open doors". Such a decision was justified by the long tradition of sheltering military and political refu-

gees. The importance of Sweden's historical experience lies in the fact that the current attitude towards refugees relies heavily on the past views and the notion that immigrants are a valuable labour source without which it would be simply impossible to create a state of general welfare.

Sweden's positive experience in the field of integration of the refugees into the society life becomes a background of its current migration policy. The high indicators of labour integration in the long run are an indisputable proof that the Swedish model is working. Having a valuable experience of the 1990s crisis that arose shortly after the collapse of Yugoslavia, Sweden is absolutely confident that appropriate and effective measures taken by the state contribute to the rapid and effective integration of the immigrants and refugees into the society life, which, in turn, bring undeniable economic benefits to the state.

Undoubtedly, the migration crisis of 2015 brought new challenges to Sweden and its migration policy. It had to deal with much bigger number of refugees under new circumstances (lack of housing, educational issues, etc.), but the practical experience has helped to solve many problems rather effectively in comparison with other EU member-states which cannot effectively manage this issue till nowadays.

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