



**THE IMPACT
OF RUSSIA-UKRAINE
CONFLICT ON THE SOCIETY
OF CEE COUNTRIES**

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The Impact of Russia-Ukraine Conflict on the Society of CEE Countries

Chief Editor: Dr. KONG Tianping

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Preface

On February 24th, Russia launched so-called special military operation against Ukraine. Ukraine war broke out, Ukraine war is the most serious armed conflict that broke out in the European continent after World War II, and its intensity and scale exceeded the regional conflicts caused by the disintegration of Yugoslavia after the end of the Cold War. The war has geopolitical effects on Central and Eastern Europe and Europe as a whole, it may change the geopolitical landscape in Europe forever. The tragic event has created the largest humanitarian crisis after the World War II, driven millions of Ukrainians out of their homeland, left for European countries. The massive influx of Ukrainian refugees has posed tremendous challenges for Central and Eastern Europe, especially Ukraine's neighbors in Central and Eastern Europe. Despite most of the Central and Eastern European countries have welcomed Ukrainian refugees with open arms sympathetically, some observers did express concerns for the social and economic consequences of massive inflow of refugees.

This book is a collection of briefings originally published as the Weekly Briefing from January to May in 2022, which is a key finding of the China-CEE Institute. Nevertheless, the views expressed herein are those of the author(s) and do not represent the views of the China-CEE Institute.

The China-CEE Institute, registered as a non-profit limited company in Budapest, Hungary, was set up by the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS) in April, 2017. The China-CEE Institute builds ties and strengthens its partnerships with academic institutions and think tanks in Hungary, other Central and Eastern European countries, as well as other parts of Europe. The China-CEE Institute aims to facilitate scholars and researchers to carry out joint research projects and conduct field studies, to organize seminars and lecture series, to provide training programs for younger researchers and students, and finally to publish academic books, research reports and journal articles.

The authors of the briefings provided their observation on the social situation in Central and Eastern Europe at the writing time, put the social situation in the context of Russia-Ukraine conflict, shed light on the impact of Ukraine war on the society of Central and Eastern European countries. It should be noted that some briefings are relevant for the main theme of the collection, some briefings cover broader social and political issues. Their analyses revealed divergent aspects of society in Central and Eastern European countries in the aftermath of Ukraine war. I appreciate the intellectual efforts of the authors, hope these findings can enhance our grasp of current on-ground realities in Central and Eastern European countries, contribute to get a full picture of the main challenges facing the region.

Prof. Dr. KONG Tianping

Institute of European Studies, CASS

The Albanian Spring of Protests: Going from Crisis to Crisis (March)

Marsela Musabelliu

Summary

In the 32 years that Albanians have had the opportunity to protest, they have used this option extensively. Many times protests have meant civil disobedience, clashes with law enforcement, or worse. The more years go by, the more Albanians are using this element of social action more as a means to sensitize the masses on a certain issue, rather than to the end of achieving something. The intensity of protests has declined massively if compared to one or two decades ago. To some, this is a sign that society is improving with time; to others, this indicates a lethargic state of affairs within a hopeless society. This briefing is an overview of the latest protests in Albania and their implication for society in the near future.

Introduction: Starting as an online appeal for all Albanians to claim their rights and ask for lowering of prices of fuel and food, in March 2022, hundreds of citizens gathered in front of the Prime Minister's (PM) office. At the same time in different regions of the country, citizens gathered in the city centers, and on some of the main highways, to protest the unstoppable price increase on basic goods. Albania has witnessed many protests over the years, and almost every time at one point or the other, those protests were "tainted" by politics. This time around, citizens protesting claim that their actions have no political connotation, but represent only their basic interests.

Unfolding of events

It took a 30% price rise of fuel in just 4 days that prompted a protest a Tirana's main boulevard on March 9th 2022. Protests against the prices increase took place in parallel in several cities of Albania also the next day. With placards in hand, protesters called for a reduction in taxes included in the price of fuel and a reduction of prices in food items to ease the costs of

living. Some drivers joined the protesters by turning off the cars on the street, which caused the center of Tirana to be blocked for hours. On March 10th, again on the streets of the capital, they call for the release of protesters who have been escorted to police stations over the past two days. Numerous police forces intervened to prevent citizens from blocking the movement of vehicles. The speakers in the protest stated that their livelihood is threatened by this price increase and the government should intervene. Protests against the increase of fuel prices also took place in south Albania, where farmers asked that the government reduces the price, as it is that much unaffordable that they risk bankruptcy. Numerous citizens also gathered in north Albania in the city of Shkodra. They asked the government to take immediate measures in the face of this situation. The call for protest was also supported by citizens of Durrës, who gathered near the train station, blocking the entrance to the city. Dozens of citizens stood around the clock holding placards, protesting the high prices. Roadblocks were also placed by citizens on the highways, where many turned off their cars in protest, interrupting traffic. In face of these difficulties, the government promised a kind of relief package for the ones in need, however, the amount borderlines ridiculousness (around 25 Euros € help per month for citizens in need, such as pensioners, citizens with disabilities, etc.). On March 19th, protests were present once again in Tirana.

A domino effect starting from fuel prices

The price of fuel has increased drastically in Albania. In December 2021, one liter of fuel had an average of 1.5 euros (€). The Ministry of Finance and Economy attributed this price increase to fluctuations in international markets and stated that the Albanian government could not influence free market fluctuations, especially in times of crisis. While fuel prices record only an upward trend, Albanian citizens pay a series of taxes, which are part of the price of fuel. Up to 55-60% of the prices of one liter of fuel is composed of taxes (Value Added Tax VAT, excise, circulation tax, carbon tax, recycling tax, etc.). According to the latest release from the Albanian Institute of Statistics (INSTAT), 30 main items of the basket of goods, including oil and gas, in mid-March 2022 were sold at an average of 20%

more expensive than in January of the same year. The largest increase in value was for oil, flour, and their byproducts. Cooking oil and butter prices had the highest growth rates. One kg of butter had an increase of 46.6%, while the price per one liter of oil increased by 40% more than in January. Another high increase was recorded by flour. One kg of packaged flour was increased by 36%. The price of pasta increased by 20.5%, one kg of bread increased by about 17%, milk about 35%, eggs by 16%, and yogurt by 17%. The outburst of the conflict in Ukraine and the sanctions against Russia brought about immediate increases in prices on all products. High energy and transportation costs are affecting the entire food industry chain in the country. The lack of animal feed is increasing the costs of large farms, as Ukraine and Russia were important suppliers in Europe for these products. This conflict has changed consumer trends. Under the panic that prices will rise further and that products will be lacking in the market, this month there were unusual purchases in oil and flour items to the extent that the shelves of the sales units were emptied.

The protests as a sign of an overly frustrated society

Albania is one of the countries that *de facto* are hit the most from the current crisis. As it is one of the poorest countries in Europe, deepening shortages in the international market risk becoming a threat to the very livelihood of the people. Given that Albania has the lowest minimum wage in the region, the average income is 7 to 8 times less than the European average, and basic goods prices are at 80% of the European average, the rise of prices for basic goods, become a menace also for the social stability. It takes just a little increase in prices to create an extremely difficult situation for the majority of Albanians.

In difficult and uncertain times, the government must come to the aid of the most exposed to poverty and the most vulnerable of society. The burden of the crisis should not be left to the citizens to shoulder completely because they (in the practical sense) cannot. The government is expected to intervene when the majority of society is on the verge of economic collapse. The well-being of citizens should be the priority but authorities use the excuse of uncontrolled rise in prices of fuel by “free market laws”.

Although the ruling force is a left-wing party, its government has no positive data on poverty reduction in its 8 years (according to the World Bank), while there are plenty of accusations of preferential links with interest groups that are symbiotic for survival. Therefore, the rise in fuel prices simply erupted over a pre-existing latent crisis. Even though the rise in prices coincides with the conflict in Ukraine (which has provoked a chain reaction), the protesters in Albania believe that this conflict is more a justification or excuse, rather than a true cause of this inflation for the Albanian market. Citizens cannot cope with the aggravated situation and thus they take the streets for their minimal/survival needs to be met.

The PM calls it a “national shame”, his ministers’ call for citizens to be more financially restrained and to use their vehicles less. However, could this be the solution? - The government anathematized the protest by attaching political tails, however, it later set up a board to monitor the fuel market. Some days after the protests the Minister for Energy and Infrastructure called for a meeting with the largest distributors of fuel in the country, and the prices slightly declined, yet, the protests continues. Citizens believe that this rise in prices is abusive at its core, and the government is not acting to their benefit, but only serves a handful of people. The PM went even further as to label the protest as pro-Russia. It is a shame – the Albanian PM stated – that in difficult times like these, a small minority of Albanians fled the streets and protested. However, during a visit of the EU chief diplomat Josep Borrell in Tirana, he stated that citizens in Albania, as well as in the rest of the Western Balkans and beyond, have legitimate concerns over the rising prices of fuel and food.

Conclusion

Any initiative or movement of the community for public interests, beyond the political parties, appears to be welcomed by all. There are many reasons for this fragile state of affairs in Albania. They are related to governance, monopolies, the international situation, the non-utilization of the country's natural resources, labor force migration, and many other factors. All the above and more have been present largely for years; the question is why has large-scale poverty plagued now more than before? – After the

pandemic restrictions, and the turmoil of prices in the international market, the only ones that had to pay more are citizens. The owners of large companies were not affected; the government not only was not affected but due to the price increase cashed in more revenue in the past months. The ones who pay are citizens, and this crisis after crisis makes them poorer.

Masks Have Fallen: No More Masks Indoor, Vaccination Remains Low (March)

Faruk Boric

Summary

Almost exactly two years after first recorded case of infected with the Covid-19 virus, the competent institutions in Bosnia and Herzegovina - governments of two entities and Brcko District - have issued decisions repealing existing measures aimed at preventing the spread of the virus. The repealed measures primarily relate to the abolition of the obligation to wear masks indoors. Although the austerity measures were not particularly rigorously respected throughout BiH, and although the introduction of various restrictions, including lockdown, was accompanied by loud protests, the news of the lifting of measures passed quietly. Obviously, news from Ukraine replaced those about vaccines and the number of patients on the frontpages of news-portals, TV news and daily newspapers. Although no one can surely claim that measures that would include the mandatory wearing of masks and the closure of public areas will not be reintroduced, it is likely that such measures would cause dissatisfaction among citizens and further economic uncertainty.

Introduction

The first case of infection with a new strain of coronavirus in Bosnia and Herzegovina was recorded on March 5, 2020¹. The first death was recorded roughly two weeks later, on March 21². Two years after the outbreak of the pandemic in this part of Europe, the competent institutions, governments in the entities of the Federation of BiH (FBiH) and Republic of Srpska

¹ The first case of coronavirus in Bosnia and Herzegovina, an infected father and child. <https://www.slobodnaevropa.org/a/30469735.html>

² The first death from the consequences of coronavirus infection in BiH. <https://www.aa.com.tr/ba/balkan/prvi-smrtni-slu%C4%8Daj-od-posljedica-zaraze-koronavirusom-u-bih/1774252>

(RS), and in the Brcko District (BD), almost synchronously made decisions abolishing the obligation to wear masks indoors (Only *recommendation* of such measure remained in force). All three governments made decisions within their jurisdictions.

At the beginning of March, wearing masks indoors was abolished by the Brcko District, the specific administrative unit of local self-government under the sovereignty of Bosnia and Herzegovina. On March 7, the Headquarters for the Protection and Rescue of the BD, city located in the northeast of BiH, issued an order abolishing the epidemiological measure of indoor masks mandatory wearing. The exceptions from this abolition are health institutions and nursing homes where wearing the masks remain obligatory. This was confirmed by the Government of the Brcko District. Epidemiological measures applied in the education system are being abolished in order to facilitate teaching and accompanying activities¹.

In the entity Republic of Srpska, the obligation to wear protective masks indoors has been abolished. This was announced by RS Minister of Health Alen Šeranić on March 10, after a session of the RS Government. Similar to Brcko District, obligation to wear masks remain in the health institutions. Also, regular working hours of restaurants and bars are allowed, but this issue is allowed to be additionally regulated by local communities in RS. This effectively means that local communities in the RS are allowed to shorten working hours if they deem such measures necessary. Cultural institutions are also returning to the way they were working before the coronavirus².

Epidemiologist and Assistant Director at the RS Institute of Public Health, Jela Aćimović, said the same day that she was pleased that they were

¹ Brcko: The wearing of the mask indoors is abolished.
<https://www.glassrpske.com/cir/drustvo/panorama/brcko-ukida-se-nosenje-maske-u-zatvorenom-prostoru/401221>

² In Srpska, the obligation to wear masks indoors has been abolished.
<https://mondo.ba/Info/Drustvo/a1117823/Ukinute-mjere-u-Republici-Srpskoj.html>

dealing with good news. She emphasized that the time had come to lift the measures and remove the masks. Aćimović mentioned that it has been seven weeks since all epidemiological factors have been declining. "At the moment, we have a similar situation as last summer. There are about a hundred patients in hospitals, and ten percent of them are not on a respirator machine. The situation is much better than the one we had for two years. However, the virus has not disappeared", Aćimović said. She added that "measures no longer have to be respected", but that it is recommended that masks continue to be wear on crowded places, although this is no longer mandatory¹.

In the entity Federation of BiH, the Government abolished hitherto valid measures in the last week of February. These reasons are very similar to those already mentioned here. Goran Čerkez, Assistant Minister of Health in the Government of the FBiH, explained to media that the order to wear masks remains for social, health and penitentiary institutions and in public transport. However, for the sake of health of persons older than 60, the Čerkez appealed to that category to follow recommendations and continue wearing masks and keep the distance. Also, the decision applies to cinemas and theaters that will be able to operate at 50 percent capacity². The rule vaccinated-tested-recovered in the FBiH was repealed in March³.

Vaccination

One of the portals, which still updates the numbers from the beginning of the epidemic on a daily basis, noted that 363,555 cases of infection had

¹ Epidemiologist Jela Acimovic: The time has come to abolish measures and remove masks! <https://mondo.ba/Info/Drustvo/a1117897/Ukinute-mjere-protiv-korone-u-RS.html>

² The Federation of BiH is mitigating epidemiological measures: Here is what it means for large gatherings, theaters, sports events... <https://avaz.ba/vijesti/bih/719515/federacija-bih-ublazava-epidemioloske-mjere-evo-sta-to-znaci-za-velika-okupljanja-pozorista-sportske-dogadaje>

³ In FBiH, the rule vaccinated/tested/recovered was abolished. <https://www.glassrpske.com/cir/drustvo/vijesti/u-fbih-ukinuto-pravilo-vakcisanestiranprebolio/401691>

been recorded in BiH by March 19. 1,641,177 tests were performed, 191,286 recovered and 14,419 died. Viewed by territory, 239,595 cases of infection were recorded in the entity of the Federation of BiH, 126,105 recovered and 7,852 died. In the entity Republic of Srpska, 109,638 cases of infection were recorded, 55,033 were recovered and 6,042 died. Finally, there were 13,857 cases in the Brcko District, with 10,126 recovered and 511 dead¹.

And while measures have been liberalized, the degree of vaccination is not something anyone in this country can be satisfied with. BiH is among those states that got vaccines relatively late, thus began the vaccination process later than other countries in Europe. Therefore, many citizens took the opportunity to be vaccinated in neighboring Serbia². A journalistic survey from the beginning of 2022 presented worrying data. Since the beginning of mass immunization, about 830,000 citizens in Bosnia and Herzegovina have been vaccinated with both doses of the vaccine. After the difficulties that our authorities had in procuring valid and tested vaccines, the interest of the BiH population in vaccination has been drastically declining recently³.

Although the health institutions state that their reports do not record those who have been vaccinated outside the borders of Bosnia and Herzegovina or in other parts of our country that are not under their jurisdiction, it is worrying that more than half of our population has not yet been vaccinated. If we take into account that the 2013 census recorded 3,531,159 million people in BiH⁴, if we know that this number included a number of people

¹ CORONAVIRUS IN BIH. <https://www.klix.ba/koronavirus-u-bih>

² Free vaccination for BiH citizens from June 3 in Serbia, <https://www.slobodnaevropa.org/a/srbija-bih-vaccine-besplatna-vakcinacija/31286364.html>

³ Worrying data: The total number of vaccinated in Bosnia and Herzegovina is known. <https://okanal.oslobodjenje.ba/okanal/vijesti/zabrinjavajuci-podaci-poznat-ukupan-broj-vakcinisanih-u-bosni-i-hercegovini-725157>

⁴ Census results: There are 3,531,159 inhabitants in BiH. <https://balkans.aljazeera.net/news/balkan/2016/6/29/bih-danas-rezultati-popisai-iz-2013-godine>

who already lived outside BiH, and that the trend of emigration of people from BiH have been continuing in the years since the census, we are coming up with truly devastating results.

By the beginning of 2022, according to the data of the Department of Health and Other Services of the Government of Brčko District, in this part of Bosnia and Herzegovina the first dose of vaccine against COVID-19 virus received 18,454 citizens, the second dose received 17,572 citizens, and the third (or booster) the dose was received by 1,380 people¹.

In the period from March 8, 2021 to January 9, 2022, 539,670 citizens received the first dose in the Federation of BiH, 503,452 citizens were vaccinated with the second dose, and 46,022 people received the third (or booster) dose. The largest percentage of the adult population is incompletely vaccinated - 29.97 percent. 27.96 percent have gone through an immunization with two doses, while only 2.56 percent of the adult population has received the third dose so far².

According to the data available to the Institute of Public Health of the RS, by January 12, 322,973 adults in this entity were vaccinated with the first dose of COVID-19 virus, 309,428 with the second, and about 44,311 with the third. These data do not include those citizens who were vaccinated outside the territory of RS. The largest number of vaccinated are citizens between the ages of 65 and 79³.

The media also wrote about the trend of relaxation among citizens, as evidenced by the empty vaccination points. On the other hand, the health centers say that an additional problem is that the vaccines expire.

Conclusion

¹ Worrying data: The total number of vaccinated in Bosnia and Herzegovina is known. <https://okanal.oslobodjenje.ba/okanal/vijesti/zabrinjavajuci-podaci-poznat-ukupan-broj-vakcinisanih-u-bosni-i-hercegovini-725157>

² *Ibid.*

³ *Ibid.*

Bosnia and Herzegovina went through a difficult period in two years of Covid-19 epidemic. First, at the beginning of the pandemic, there was a complete closure of institutions, borders, shopping malls, small stores, etc. Schools were closed, public gatherings were banned, and curfew was in effect at one time. Then there was a long period of constant controversy in the public and on social networks about the expediency of the existing measures - including wearing masks outdoors and keeping the school online. Bosnians and Herzegovinians have shown a tendency to discuss things in which they are not experts, even though this virus of conspiracy has gripped humanity globally. Anyhow, that trend was followed by an even longer period of discussion on the delay in procuring vaccines, Later, when sufficient quantities of vaccines were procured, vaccination recorded devastating percentages which was shown here. Finally, on the eve of the new spring, the authorities are optimistic about repealing measures that have, however, yielded results and prevented a larger-scale catastrophe in a poor country that cannot really boast of conscientious citizens. There is strong hope that the virus will continue to weaken, because the citizens of BiH will obviously not overcome it by themselves.

Bulgarian Government Adopted A Large Package of Anti-Crisis Social Measures (May)

Evgeniy Kandilarov

Summary

According to a number of studies, Bulgarian consumers are more affected by rising food and energy prices than other citizens of the European Union, as low incomes in the country are further undermined by accelerating inflation. Indeed 83% of Bulgarians feel severely affected. Inflation since the beginning of the year (April 2022 compared to December 2021) is 7.8%, and annual inflation for April 2022 compared to April 2021 is already 14.4%. However, the prices of individual goods and services increased much more. Hundreds of thousands of Bulgarians are working poor, and income inequalities remain the highest in the EU. In order to compensate to some extent for inflation and social tensions from the rise in prices, last week Bulgarian government announced a package of anti-crisis social measures worth about EUR 1 billion.

According to the Bulgarian National Statistical Institute, the inflation since the beginning of the year (April 2022 compared to December 2021) is 7.8%, and the annual inflation for April 2022 compared to April 2021 is already 14.4%, but continuing to grow. In April 2022, compared to the previous month, the prices of goods and services in the consumer groups changed as follows:

- Food and non-alcoholic beverages - an increase of 4.5%;
- Alcoholic beverages and tobacco products - an increase of 0.2%;
- Clothing and footwear - an increase of 6.4%;

- Housing, water, electricity, gas and other fuels - an increase of 1.7%;
- Home furnishings, household appliances and accessories and routine maintenance of the home - an increase of 1.5%;
- Healthcare - increase by 0.1%;
- Transport - an increase of 3.5%;
- Communication services - increase by 0.4%;
- Entertainment and culture - prices remain at last month's level;
- Education - an increase of 0.2%;
- Restaurants and hotels - an increase of 2.6%;

In April 2022, the prices of goods and services from the small consumer basket for the lowest income population (about 20% of households in the country) changed compared to the previous month, as follows:

- Food products - an increase of 4.5%;
- Non-food products - an increase of 1.8%;
- Services - an increase of 0.2%.

The impression is that the prices of the main food products, such as coffee, meat, milk, raise the most. The price of the pork increased 7.8%, lamb meat - 12.9%, chicken meat - 10.2%, perishable sausages – 7.6% and mincemeat – 5%.

Flour increased by 4%, bread by 3%, whole milk - by 4.3%, cheese - by 4.4%.

Officially, the increase in fuel prices is over 40%. There is also a huge increase in electricity prices for all businesses. The increase in the price of electricity is the main reason for the overall increase in prices.

The reasons for this are complex. On the one hand is the war in Ukraine, and on the other - the rise in fuel prices. The COVID-19 pandemic can also be considered as a cause of inflation.

All this leads to a change in people's habits. They simply stop consuming certain products and services or reduce their consumption.

Rising prices in the country are causing huge social tensions, as both income and purchasing power in Bulgaria are the lowest in the entire European Union. This means that Bulgarian consumers are more vulnerable to sharp rises in the prices of goods and services compared to citizens of other EU member states with higher average income levels.

To compensate for the sharp rise in consumer prices and alleviate social tensions, last week Bulgarian government has adopted a package of anti-crisis measures worth about EUR 1 billion. Priority in the anti-crisis package is focused on fuels, food and citizens' incomes.

Three steps are set to control the price shock for fuels - among them the abolition of excise duty on gas as a motor fuel and a discount on refueling with petrol and diesel up to a certain limit.

According to the decision of parties from the ruling coalition in the government, **the pensions** will be updated from July 1 by an average of 20%, instead of the 6.1% set so far. This includes a firm increase in all pensions by BGN 60 (EUR 30) and an additional percentage increase. According to the so-called "Swiss rule" will recalculate the pensions of 770 thousand retirees from October 1, and from 2008 will recalculate each pension with 100% growth in average insurance income or 100% inflation, whichever is more favorable and what is the higher amount of the pension for the particular pensioner.

Thus, the decisions of the ruling coalition lead to a drastic increase of over 55% of the minimum pension, which at the beginning of last year was BGN 300, and from July 1 will be BGN 467. Calculations also show that for the

previous 12 years pensions have risen by an average of about BGN 100, while now only within a year the increase will be by BGN 167.

From October 1, the ceiling for the maximum pension will be equalized with the maximum insurance income - BGN 3,400.

The anti-crisis package also provides **compensation for high fuel prices**. All citizens until the end of the year will be able to take advantage of a discount of BGN 0,25/liter for petrol 95 and diesel, methane and propane-butane on each refueling. There is no limit on the amount of fuel refueled, but the compensation will not apply to premium fuels enriched with additives.

The social measures in the government's anti-crisis package envisage the introduction of a **differentiated VAT on a number of consumer goods**.

For a period of one year, the VAT on bread will be reduced to 0%, which is expected to reduce its price. The price depends on the bread producers and the retail chains, which determine the price themselves. As for the government, this 20% in the price of bread is no longer imposed as a tax. This measure is considered to be the most popular and aimed at the widest possible range of the country's population.

For the same period of one year the VAT on wine and beer will be refunded at 20%.

With regard to heating, VAT on heating and hot water is expected to be reduced to 9% within one year. It will also be reduced to 9% VAT on natural gas for end users / household needs for a period of 1 year. Electricity, natural gas and methane will be exempt from excise duty.

The VAT rate for books continues to be lower at 9%.

In **support of families with children**, as a long-term measure it is planned to increase the amount of tax relief for children from BGN 4,500 to BGN 6,000 per year, and it will be possible to use it every three months during

the year. Thus, annually the parents will receive back from their taxes 600 BGN for each child in the family.

The package of anti-crisis measures also includes increasing the threshold for mandatory VAT registration from BGN 50,000 to BGN 100,000; taxation of excess profits of electricity in order to compensate non-household consumers; electronic vouchers for the convenience of employees, as their total amount will be increased to BGN 1.2 billion; reduction of the interest rate to 8% for overdue payments to the state, municipalities, utilities, etc. All these measure will enter into force on 1 January 2023.

The government also announced that a recommendation would be made to the Energy and Water Regulatory Commission (which is responsible for all energy supply prices) for two rates for electricity, water, heating and gas, based on consumption per household, with the aim of introducing a reduced tariff for less consumption.

Most of the measures will be settled in the forthcoming budget update in the middle of this year, with different deadlines for entry into force and implementation. The necessary legislative changes will also be made. Most of the measures will enter into force from 1 July to the end of the year, and another part of the measures will be in force from 1 July 2022 to 1 July 2023.

According to the Minister of Economy, it is very rare in politics to have a solution that helps all citizens at the same time, and according to the government, this anti-crisis plan includes measures that should reach every Bulgarian family. A key goal of this plan is the measures to influence the most vulnerable in the crisis people - young families with children, retirees and the so-called working poor.

Approached by BTA, Labor and Social Policy Minister Georgi Gyokov said that the anti-crisis measures proposed Wednesday by the ruling coalition in support of citizens and businesses are not just anti-inflationary,

but mainly social and are supposed to support people at a time of crisis. He said that he agrees with a criticism of the opposition that the measures promote inflation but added that people cannot be left to cope on their own.

Conclusion

Inflation is likely to continue to pick up until mid-2022, after which it is expected to gradually weaken and decline in 2023, following the expected gradual decline in international oil and gas prices.

The high annual inflation in food prices in 2022 is driven by the sharp increase in the first three months of the year and the expected dynamics in international food stocks and energy prices. Inflation in services is driven by transport costs and catering services. Commodity prices in the non-energy industry will increase through cost pressures and higher prices of imported goods.

Bulgarian consumers are relatively more affected, compared to other citizens of the European Union, by higher food and energy prices. The reason is the low average income levels, which will be further undermined by accelerating inflation.

Finance Minister Asen Vassilev said there were three scenarios for the evolution of inflation by the end of the year. The state relies on averages - between the most optimistic and the most pessimistic.

Would Mandatory Military Service Do More Harm Than Good in Croatia? (April)

Stella Radojević

Summary

The war in Ukraine has reinvigorated the discourse regarding mandatory military service in Croatia. The conflict has certainly threatened the sense of security and safety for many countries worldwide. This is particularly true for newly independent countries or those whose sovereignty has, at some point, been disputed. Indeed, as a country which gained international recognition in 1992, it is understandable why this conflict has created a sense of unease in Croatia. This article will explore the advantages and disadvantages of the requirement of citizens to be militarily trained and the impact that this decision could have on the country.

Introduction

In order to understand the way in which mandatory military service might affect a country, it is important to consider the nature of the countries which already require some form of military training from their citizens. It is striking that the countries which do have mandatory military service, share little in common. Indeed, it is not an exclusive characteristic of a specific type of political system and is not inherent to countries whose regimes or cultures uphold certain values and ideologies. What is most noticeable is that mandatory military service is usually a feature of those nations which are either considered very democratic or very autocratic. For instance, Denmark, Norway, Finland and Switzerland¹ are all countries which

¹ <https://www.tportal.hr/vijesti/clanak/sve-vise-govori-se-o-uvođenju-obveznog-vojnog-roka-u-hrvatskoj-istrazili-smo-gdje-je-sve-obvezan-i-koliko-traje-foto-20220312>

require their citizens to undergo certain military training (the specifics of mandatory military service differ in each country). These countries have certainly been praised as some of most democratic and freest countries in the world. For instance, both Norway and Finland have a Freedom House rating of 100/100 with regards to their Global Freedom Scores¹. On the other hand, countries like North Korea, Azerbaijan and Russia, which also have mandatory military service, are all considered, albeit to different extents, autocratic nations whose citizens have limited rights and freedoms. Therefore, from this information alone, it is difficult to predict whether the introduction of mandatory military service would be beneficial for Croatia. It is important to note that Croatia is considered a free, but partly flawed, democratic country². Therefore, upon acknowledging the nature of the countries which require their citizens to undergo military service, it is clear that few of these countries are similar to Croatia (with regards to regime type and levels democracy, freedom and human rights).³

However, few countries share the specifics of Croatia's tumultuous past. Since 1102, with the formation of the Croato-Hungarian state⁴, until the early 1990s, Croatia did not experience true independence. War is a reality which many Croatian citizens endured in the past. Therefore, since there are some parallels between Russia's claim to the eastern part of Ukraine and Serbia's former claims on certain territories within its neighbouring countries, including Croatia, it is understandable why the conflict in Ukraine may have prompted unease. It is important to note that the current Serbian government has in no way suggested that they intend to threaten Croatia's right to sovereignty. Nevertheless, it is clear why mandatory

¹ <https://freedomhouse.org/countries/freedom-world/scores>

² *ibid.*

³ <https://www.tportal.hr/vijesti/clanak/sve-vise-govori-se-o-uvodenju-obveznog-vojnog-roka-u-hrvatskoj-istrazili-smo-gdje-je-sve-obvezan-i-koliko-traje-foto-20220312>

⁴ https://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/41146857.pdf?refreqid=excelsior%3Ad5c784d579c6cd54d442a47bcc869338&ab_segments=&origin,p382.

military service may provide a sense of security, considering that the current situation in Ukraine is reminiscent of Croatia's past to an extent.

Similarly, Croatia is a member of both the EU and of NATO. Although Russian aggression is currently directed only towards Ukraine, there is certainly hostility between Russia and the 'West' (as perceived by the Russian government). Russia, whether it is their government's genuine view or merely a justification for their actions, has blamed NATO's expansion eastwards for their actions in Ukraine to an extent¹. Therefore, as a NATO country, one might argue that the introduction of mandatory military service in Croatia might be beneficial.

With the aforementioned in mind, it is interesting to consider whether mandatory military service is something which is necessary for Croatia. Its reintroduction could potentially increase Croatian citizens' sense of security or, contrastingly, engender fear of war in citizens and perhaps promote nationalist sentiments.

Mandatory military service in Croatia-PROS

It is important to note that there are certain advantages of mandatory military service which are not directly related to war, defence or fighting of any kind. MP Stipo Mlinarić, an advocate for the decision to reinstate mandatory military service, has pointed out that military training could prove useful in instances other than war. He has argued that basic military training would be helpful in the case of, for instance, natural disasters². In his opinion, military discipline would train citizens to react to such occurrences in an organised manner³. Considering that, in the last two years,

¹ <https://theprint.in/opinion/why-blaming-nato-for-ukraine-war-is-vladimir-putins-biggest-lie/872350/>

² <https://balkans.aljazeera.net teme/2022/3/14/rat-u-ukrajini-pokrenuo-pitanje-obaveznog-vojnog-roka-u-hrvatskoj>

³ *ibid.*

Croatia has suffered two, major earthquakes which have had a profound effect on the country, this argument is somewhat persuasive.

Mandatory military service would arguably also be advantageous to Croatia because of the country's small army. Although sources vary, the Croatian army is estimated to consist of 15,000 active military personnel and 20,000 reserves¹. Regardless of the lack of consistency regarding the information of the size of armies, most statistics indicate that the Croatian Army is not large. To put this into perspective, Austria, whose population is only slightly more than twice that of Croatia's, is estimated to have an army of 23,000 active military personnel and 160,000 reserves². Therefore, Austria's army is more than five times larger than Croatia's, while its population is not drastically larger. Moreover, with this in mind, perhaps there is an argument for the reintroduction of mandatory military service.

Mandatory military service in Croatia-CONS

The aforementioned MP Stipo Mlinarić also emphasised that the cost it would take to run the mandatory military service programme does not compare to the cost of human lives and freedoms³ which could be threatened if Croatia's army proved too weak to withstand an attack⁴. While this is valid, it is clear that many of Mlinarić's arguments for mandatory military service are based on a hypothetical situation. Indeed, the possibility of war in Croatia is highly unlikely.

There are also certain negative connotations regarding Mlinarić's advocacy for mandatory military service. Indeed, the political party Domovinski

¹ https://www.globalfirepower.com/country-military-strength-detail.php?country_id=croatia

² https://www.globalfirepower.com/country-military-strength-detail.php?country_id=austria

³ <https://balkans.aljazeera.net teme/2022/3/14/rat-u-ukrajini-pokrenuo-pitanje-obaveznog-vojnog-roka-u-hrvatskoj>

⁴ *ibid.*

pokret (eng. Homeland Movement), of which he is a member, is a “right-wing populist”¹ party. While this, in itself, does not negate Mlinarić’s arguments, the nature of the party does suggest that there is an agenda behind their wish to reinstate military training for citizens. This is evidenced in that the perspectives of many party members and their ideal policies encroach on certain democratic rights and freedoms of Croatian citizens. For instance, in 2020, Domovinski pokret “voiced strong opposition”² against the European Union’s push for Croatia to “adopt a fixed number of ethnic minority deputies in its parliament.”³ While this is unrelated, this one instance encapsulates the general ideological stance of Domovinski pokret. Therefore, their desire to reinstate mandatory military training, considering that their views are sometimes extreme, is worrying. One might deduce that perhaps, for them, this desire is not driven by the idea that Croatia should be prepared to defend itself and to create a sense of ease in the country, but instead, to promote nationalist values and sentiments⁴. Nevertheless, this is merely an interpretation of the party’s agenda, based on the claims of Mlinarić and other Domovinski pokret party members.

More importantly, the main problem with reinstating mandatory military service in Croatia is that young people are largely against it⁵. Indeed in 2007, Croatia ceased the requirement of its male citizens to complete mandatory military service because of their lack of interest in it⁶. Many of those who were required to serve, opted to complete community service rather than military service⁷. The most recent polls all suggest that attitudes amongst young people have not changed. Thus, the investment of around

¹ <https://theloop.ecpr.eu/identity-versus-global-politics-euroscepticism-in-croatia-and-serbia/>

² *ibid.*

³ *ibid.*

⁴ <https://theloop.ecpr.eu/identity-versus-global-politics-euroscepticism-in-croatia-and-serbia/>

⁵ <https://www.jutarnji.hr/vijesti/hrvatska/anketa-jutarnjeg-treba-li-vratiti-sluzenje-obveznog-vojnog-roka-u-hrvatsku-15167438>

⁶ *ibid.*

⁷ *ibid.*

500 million HRK annually to realise this military service is too much considering that many would attempt to avoid the training¹.

Conclusion

Therefore, mandatory military service could have both positive and negative effects on Croatia. Citizens would be better prepared in case of an attack on the country and Croatians would be able to better defend their nation and right to independence. Nevertheless, an attack on Croatia is unlikely and there is no indication that any country intends to question Croatia's right to sovereignty by using force. Therefore, considering the disinterest of young people to be involved in military service, mandatory military service may do more harm than good. Aforementioned, the militarization of young people might engender nationalistic sentiments. Nevertheless, the enforcement of military service for people who have expressed their opposition to the idea, may also breed antipathy towards the Croatian government. Although, in this time of global unease, Croatia should be open to discussing the possible advantages of some form of military training for its citizens, evidence suggests that mandatory military service is not necessary for Croatia to reinstate.

¹ *ibid.*

State of the Czech Liberal Democracy: Discrimination & Censorship (March)

Ladislav Zemánek

Summary

The social atmosphere in the Czech Republic has become tense as a result of the Ukrainian crisis. The Russian nationals have been increasingly discriminated against and attacked. The political, media as well as public discourse is dominated by the events in the Ukraine. The lack of unbiased information contributes to nervousness, even hysteria that is stimulated by campaigns conducted by some interest groups. The present analysis uncovers concrete cases of discrimination and related measures aimed against the dissemination of „disinformation“, particularly the blocking of chosen media that makes public deliberation and reasoning hardly possible in the present day.

Introduction

The Russians are exposed to discrimination and assaults. Verbal attacks in the streets, schools, universities, shops, restaurants or on social media have become increasingly frequent. There is a lot of cases of vandalism and damaging properties. Even though political representatives have warned of anti-Russian sentiments, such appeals are denied by concurrent political decisions aimed against the Russian Federation, Russian citizens as well as the Czechs who cooperate with Russian partners or oppose the official state policies. Appeals to the public for avoiding Russophobia would have to be much stronger to overcome the existing hysteria provoked predominantly by media, journalists, commentators and political NGOs that are all complicit in discrimination of the Russians and instigation of hatred against them.

Universities and science

Russian pupils and students have become targets of bullying.¹ Attacks appear not only at primary or secondary schools but also at universities that have, paradoxically, more and more ostentatiously invoke the values of freedom, tolerance and human rights while suppressing students and academicians with alternative views. In response to the launch of Russia's military operation in the Ukraine, several professors at Prague University of Economics and Business attacked Russian students. Martin Dlouhý, who is also a local politician of the government, right-wing TOP 09 party, declared that he would not „teach citizens of an enemy country“, cooperate with Russian scholars and participate in any event or project connected with Russia.² Although asking for support from the university, he did not receive it and was forced to offer apologies.³ Nevertheless, universities are co-responsible for such cases since many of them criticise Russia's „aggression“ and „war crimes“ and last but not least suspend cooperation with their Russian counterparts. Minister of Education Petr Gazdík did not hesitate to call upon all education as well as research institutions to reconsider bilateral cooperation with Russian subjects and multilateral cooperation if Russian institutions are included in such formats. According to the Minister, cooperation with „aggressors“ is excluded for both political and moral reasons.⁴

¹ Kramlová, J. (2022, March 03). *Mluviš rusky, takže jsi Putin. Rusové v Česku odnáší zlobu a nenávisť za válku Kremle.* Aktuálně.cz. <https://zpravy.aktualne.cz/domaci/mluvis-rusky-takze-jsi-putin/r~868371069a0f11ecab010cc47ab5f122/>.

² Šopfová, K. (2022, February 24). *Profesor VŠE vyzval k bojkotu ruských studentů, pak příspěvek smazal.* Novinky.cz. <https://www.novinky.cz/domaci/clanek/profesor-vse-vyzval-k-bojkotu-ruskych-studentu-pak-prispevek-smazal-40388270>.

³ *Vyjádření VŠE ke slovním excesům vůči ruským studentům* (2022, March 04). Vysoká škola ekonomická v Praze. <https://www.vse.cz/zpravodaj/vyjadreni-vse-ke-slovnim-excesum-vuci-ruskym-studentum/>.

⁴ Gazdík, P. (2022, March 02). *Ministr školství ke spolupráci ČR s Ruskou federací.* MŠMT. <https://www.msmt.cz/vyjadreni-ministra-skolstvi-ke-spolupraci-cr-s-ruskou>.

Universities, nevertheless, did not wait for such a political statement and began cancelling contracts with Russian partners of their own accord.¹ The Czech Rectors Conference, an association of rectors of almost all universities in the country, issued a sharp statement, whereby condemning Russia's „violent and conquest policies“ that „removed Russia from the community of civilised European states“. Moreover, rectors compared Russian rhetoric to that of the Nazis.² It is more than clear that joint research projects will thus be at least suspended and mutual exchanges minimised. Given the strengthening pressure against academicians cooperating not only with Russian but also Chinese counterparts, a hard decision on how to develop scientific ties and continue in research activities under the circumstances of incessant political and ideological pressure will be on the table sooner or later. It is not excluded that a part of students, academicians and scholars will opt for leaving for those countries that can provide more favourable conditions for research and science. The Czech science would then become more provincial.

Hateful rhetoric

Cases of discrimination could be observed at universities, medical facilities, hotels or restaurants. Some restaurants conditioned the provision of services by public distancing from Vladimir Putin or Alexander Lukashenko and their policies. One of the members of the board of directors of the Czech Dental Chamber Milan Řezáč announced that the dentist's office would not treat the „Russian rabble“.³ The Public Defender

¹ *Vědecké sankce vůči Rusku* (2022, March 04). Vědavýzkum.cz. https://vedavyzkum.cz/ze-zahranici/ze-zahranici/vedecke-sankce-vuci-rusku?fbclid=IwAR22ovTYRm9Ttgs7EDDKY_9nsh1L9SesTcXG_GHStRIF1OITcriGACEdwf8.

² Bareš, M. (2022, February 24). *Statement of the Czech Rectors Conference on the War in Ukraine*. <https://www.crc.muni.cz/en/documents/resolutions/crc-statement-on-the-war-in-ukraine>.

³ Hradcová, O. (2022, March 09). *Kvůli Ukrajině nechtěl vrtat zuby Rusům. "Byla to blbost, byl jsem plný emoci," říká zubař*. Ohře Media. <http://www.ohremedia.cz/clanek/13105-kvuli-ukrajine-nechtel-vrtat-zuby-rusum-byla-to-blbost-byl-jsem-plny-emoci-rika-zubar>.

of Rights and former long-term social-democratic deputy Stanislav Křeček confirms that he has already received motions regarding possible discrimination.¹ The ombudsman himself was exposed to attacks both from ministers and journalists, for he dared to point to the widespread practice of discrediting and defamation of those who expressed alternative views regarding the crisis in the Ukraine, and criticised the Ukrainian President for inappropriate statements towards the Czech Republic.² There are commentators and even experts and academicians who resort to hateful rhetoric, for instance, that Russia's leaders have „aggressive imperialism in their genes“.³ One of the most well-known Czech actors and dramatists Zdeněk Svěrák, in turn, made a video calling the Russians „thieves“ who „steal foreign lands and expel people from their homes“. The video was produced with the support of the Ministry of the Interior.⁴

Much more tough were the words pronounced by Pavel Rychetský, Chairman of the Constitutional Court that is to protect the liberal democratic system and fundamental human rights of the citizens in the country. Despite moderation which is being expected from the highest representative of the judiciary, Rychetský called the military operation a „tragedy“, and Vladimir Putin a „personification of the worst evil that we were witnesses of over the last decades“, a „murderer“ and „criminal“ who

¹ Novotná, K., Fořtová, K. (2022, March 10). *Rusové k nám nemohou, hlásí podniky i lékaři. Případy prověřuje inspekce.* iDNES.cz. https://www.idnes.cz/zpravy/domaci/diskriminace-rusove-rusko-ukrajina-valka-invaze-odmitani-sluzby-obchody.A220307_114547_domaci_knn.

² *Lišíte se v názorech, tak jste agent Putina. Ministři mě okřikli, míní Křeček* (2022, March 09). iDNES.cz. https://www.idnes.cz/zpravy/domaci/stanislav-krecek-ombudsman-kritika-zelenskyj-rusko-invaze-ukrajina-valka-putin.A220309_103929_domaci_pmk.

³ Gazdík, J. (2022, March 03). *Kreml má agresi v genech. Historik srovnává okupaci v srpnu 1968 s útokem na Ukrajinu.* Aktuálně.cz. <https://zpravy.aktualne.cz/zahranici/srovnani-ruska-invaze-do-ceskoslovenska-1968-a-na-ukrajinu-2/r~6954695a988411ecbd0ac1f6b220ee8/>.

⁴ Svěrák, Z. (2022, March 02). *„Rusové kradou kufry a cizí území“, věděl to už malý Kolja.* Aktuálně.cz. <https://video.aktualne.cz/rusove-kradou-kufry-a-cizi-uzemi-to-vedel-uz-maly-kolja/r~3412169899f611eca9b1ac1f6b220ee8/r~7a8f5e5093f711ec8a24ac1f6b220ee8/>.

„massacre people both in Russia and the Ukraine“, threatening the „all civilised world“. The constitutional judge expressed his conviction that the Russian President should be charged with war crimes and brought to the International Criminal Court.¹ Such statements are not exceptions in the public discourse whatsoever. At a press conference convened by the Prime Minister Petr Fiala a day after his return from Kiev, President of the Confederation of Industry of the Czech Republic Jaroslav Hanák labelled Vladimir Putin a „madman“ and „evil beast“ and appeal to the Government for the elimination of „webs of enemies“ and strict control of those who are allowed to present opinions in public.²

Politicians and media warn against the possible Russian invasion of the European Union, falsely link the present events with the invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968, emphasise over and over again that fight against Russia is a common cause of all Europe and „free world“ and resort to such misleading arguments such as an alleged imminent threat of nuclear strike or malicious damage of Ukrainian nuclear power plants. It leads to strong social tensions, even hysteria. It manifests itself, for example, by buying up iodine which is used in case of radiation.³ People also started to call for the reintroduction of obligatory military service (abolished in 2004) while the number of applicants for admission to the voluntary Active Reserve of the Czech Army increased tenfold in response to the Ukrainian crisis.⁴ Similarly, more than 600 persons made a request for approval of joining

¹ Pokorný, J. (2022, February 25). *Rychetský: Putin je válečný zločinec. Sankcím se směje, jeho režim vraždí obyvatele suverénní země.* iROZHLAS. https://www.irozhlas.cz/zpravy-domov/pavel-rychetsky-rozhovor-rusko-ukrajina-valka-invaze_2202250859_ako.

² *Česko je na hraně počtu uprchlíků, který je schopno absorbovat, řekl Fiala* (2022, March 17). ČT24. <https://ct24.ceskatelevize.cz/domaci/3456124-zive-brifink-po-jednani-tripartity-k-valce-a-uprchlikum>

³ *Přádová, D. (2022, March 04). Jódové tablety preventivně neberte. K jejich otevření by v nouzi vyzval stát. Seznam Zprávy.* <https://www.seznamzpravy.cz/clanek/domaci-zivot-v-cesku-jodove-tablety-preventivne-neberte-k-jejich-otevreni-by-v-nouzi-vyzval-stat-191882>.

⁴ *Zájem o aktivní zálohy se zdesetinásobil, česká armáda posílí kurzy* (2022, March 15). České noviny. <https://www.ceskenoviny.cz/zpravy/zajem-o-aktivni-zalohy-se-zdesetinasobil-ceska-armada-posili-kurzy/2177601>.

the international legion in the Ukraine.¹ All these facts show that the massive anti-Russian campaign has been successful so far.

Blocking media

The substantial part of the campaign is the criminalisation of alternative interpretations and repression against „dissent“ including prosecution and blocking of „disinformation“ media. Interestingly, security services, as well as the Ministry of the Interior, have announced that those who will use the symbol „Z“ would be prosecuted since the state authorities do not differentiate between this ancient Slavic symbol and Nazi swastika.² I have already pointed to the unprecedented blocking of media and servers.³ The details of the repressive action are rather unclear at this moment, for both the Government and security bodies do not claim responsibility. The blocking was carried out by CZ.NIC, a Czech interest association of legal persons founded by leading providers of Internet services. This act might be a serious encroachment on the freedom of business and speech, bearing obvious attributes of censorship. Some of the affected have already taken legal action against the private association and PM Petr Fiala who accused the blocked entities of being financed by Russia and serving „Russian propaganda“.⁴

¹ Tomšů, K. (2022, March 12). *Na Hrad se obrátilo 600 Čechů, kteří chtějí bojovat na Ukrajině*. Novinky.cz. <https://www.novinky.cz/domaci/clanek/na-hrad-se-obratilo-600-cechu-kteri-chteji-bojovat-na-ukrajine-40390157>.

Participation in foreign military is illegal, nevertheless, President is authorised to make individual exceptions.

² Soukeníková, E. (2022, March 08). *Symbol invaze „Z“ jako hákový kříž? Je to důvod ke stihání, varují úřady*. Seznam Zprávy. <https://www.seznamzpravy.cz/clanek/domaci-symbol-ruske-propagandy-z-je-duvod-ke-stihani-varuji-ceske-urady-192530>.

³ Zemánek, L. (2022, March 15). *Unprecedented Measures: The State's Response to The Ukrainian Crisis*. China-CEE Institute. <https://china-cee.eu/2022/03/15/unprecedented-measures-the-states-response-to-the-ukrainian-crisis/>.

⁴ Beranová, K. (2022, February 27). *Fiala: Zablokování dezinformačních webů bylo odvážné a možná trochu na hraně*. Novinky.cz.

It is worth noticing that a wide array of both left- and right-wing politicians and experts published their texts in the blocked „disinformation media“, including President Miloš Zeman, his predecessor Václav Klaus, former PM Jiří Paroubek, former ministers Jan Kavan and Daniela Kovářová, or incumbent deputies from the Freedom and Direct Democracy.¹ It was only this euro-sceptic movement that dared to criticise the censorship measures in the Parliament while all other parties support or tolerate infringement of fundamental rights and freedoms. Journalists, NGOs, politicians and other public figures who frequently lambast „autocracies“ for alleged violations of human rights and censorship, remain silent when such measures are aimed against domestic opposition and dissent. Some lawyers, nevertheless, consider blocking a „radical, groundless restriction of democracy and rule of law“.² Alarming is that deputy chairman of the managing board of the CZ.NIC association is Marek Antoš, a renowned jurist, deputy dean of the leading Faculty of Law who was also a member of the administrative board of Open Society Fund Prague, financed by George Soros. Former PM Jiří Paroubek, therefore, concludes that the liberal cabinet has introduced censorship and have doubts about whether the Czech Republic remains to be a democratic country.³

Conclusion

The Ukrainian crisis has led to multiple consequences in terms of the political, economic and social life of the Czech society. It is beyond any

<https://www.novinky.cz/domaci/clanek/fiala-zablokovani-dezinformacnich-webu-bylo-odvazne-a-mozna-trochu-na-hrane-40388544>.

¹ Výborný, K. (2022, March 03). *Vypnuté weby: Tyto všechny umlčeli. Smutná tečka za svobodnou dobou*. Parlamentní listy.cz. <https://www.parlamentnilisty.cz/arena/monitor/Vypnute-weby-Tyto-vsechny-umlceli-Smutna-tecka-za-svobodnou-dobou-694940>

² *To se bude opakovat. Je to nelegální. Právník k blokování webu* (2022, March 03). Parlamentní listy.cz. <https://www.parlamentnilisty.cz/arena/monitor/To-se-bude-opakovat-Je-to-nelegalni-Pravnik-k-blokovani-webu-694650>.

³ Paroubek, J. (2022, March 15). *Vraťte nám svobodu slova*. Parlamentní listy.cz. <https://www.parlamentnilisty.cz/arena/nazory-a-petice/Jiri-Paroubek-Vratte-nam-svobodu-slova-696000>.

doubt that a majority of people take a side with the official state policy that is typical of strong anti-Russian sentiments since those who initiated such a policy managed to connect the present military operation with the invasion of the Warsaw Treaty Organisation of Czechoslovakia in 1968, creating an emotional narrative that works. Moreover, the current campaign builds upon the last year's Vrbětice affair that was unprecedented in terms of its seriousness and impacts.¹ Discriminatory actions against the Russians are an inevitable consequence of these preparatory steps.

¹ Zemánek, L. (2021, June 15). *Czech RussiaGate: Contemporary McCarthyism in Practice*. China-CEE Institute. <https://china-cee.eu/2021/06/15/czech-republic-political-briefing-czech-russiagate-contemporary-mccarthyism-in-practice/>.

Towards A Establishing A Policy on Ukrainian War Refugees (March)

E-MAP Foundation MTÜ

Summary

By the end of March 2022, the turbulence of the process made it possible to speculate that Estonia would likely to receive about 40,000-45,000 Ukrainian war refugees within the first 5-6 month from the beginning of the ‘heated’ chapter of the Russo-Ukrainian War (24 February 2022). On the top of that, presumably (and in reality), there would be a comparable figure of those Ukrainians who used Estonia as a transit country to continue their journey to the other places. With necessity, objectively, such a process is destined to trigger a big debate in Estonia, because the country’s society is irreversibly changing, its ethno-political composition wise. Interestingly enough, as noted, “[e]fforts to help refugees have the support of 92 per cent of Estonians and just 51 percent of non-Estonian-speakers”¹.

The foundation for that is directly associated with the fact that, as argued, the Estonian society’s “attitude toward Ukraine before the war was the same as for any other democratic country that is not too far”, because “[s]ome visited and found it nice, while others were more critical but realized they were still dealing with a friend”². At the same time, when the country plans to accept about 2,000 refugees³, but the apparent number of the people in need becomes twenty times more, a new policy is urgently required. Gradually, a certain level of understanding, in both political and normative senses, has been formed in Estonia. Some of the procedural

¹ Sergei Metlev, ‘Ukrainian refugees and our Russians’ in *ERR*, 5 April 2022. Available from [<https://news.err.ee/1608555355/sergei-metlev-ukrainian-refugees-and-our-russians>].

² Metlev.

³ ‘First Ukrainian refugees arrive in Estonia’ in *ERR*, 1 March 2022. Available from [<https://news.err.ee/1608516074/first-ukrainian-refugees-arrive-in-estonia>].

examples on how the process for Ukrainian citizens and their family members who left their home to seek refuge in Estonia are as follows. **Firstly**, in accordance with the order of the Head of the Police and Border Guard Board (from 24 February 2022), Estonia established a visa free entry for those Ukrainian citizens who possess biometric passports or valid travel document¹.

Secondly, those Ukrainian citizens who already managed to get into Estonia and whose basis for stay (for example, visa) has expired or will be expiring soon may continue staying in the country on the temporary basis. In the capital city of Tallinn (at the local bus station) as well as in Tartu, Pärnu, and Jõhvi, there are informational booths being opened up to work in 24/7 regime to provide a prospective refugee with plenty of information on possibilities of staying in the country². **Thirdly**, Estonia provides for short-term accommodation to war refugees, also supporting them in the challenging process of finding a long-term place to reside at³. There is a provision for those who have received temporary protection and decided to move from a temporary residence (for example, ship/ferry, hotel, or, as it is described in the documents, the care of kind people) to a permanent accommodation, there is an entitlement to receive a lump-sum benefit, so it will be assisting the person in covering the costs of concluding the first lease/rent agreement – it is already known that, from 1 June 2022, the maximum amount of the aforementioned lump-sum benefit is going to be EUR 1,200.00⁴.

Fourthly, since the newly arrived ‘Ukrainian segment’ of the Estonian society is, with the time, expected to start contributing to the country’s economy, those, who arrived in Estonia from Ukraine after 24 February,

¹ ‘Coming to Estonia’ in *KRIIS* (managed by the Government Communication Unit). Available from [<https://kriis.ee/en/security-situation-europe/ukrainian-war-refugees/coming-estonia>].

² ‘Staying in Estonia’ in *KRIIS*. Available from [<https://kriis.ee/en/security-situation-europe/ukrainian-war-refugees/staying-estonia>].

³ ‘Place of residence’ in *KRIIS*. Available from [<https://kriis.ee/en/security-situation-europe/ukrainian-war-refugees/place-residence>].

⁴ ‘Place of residence’.

can apply for temporary protection that is also interlinked with receiving a residence permit¹. Correspondingly, with the latter document, a refugee can get registered as unemployed at the Unemployment Insurance Fund, so he/she will be entitled for an unemployment allowance later on, provided that at least 180 days of being an employed person (in the 12-month period before registering as unemployed, including a period of working in Ukraine) precede the request on the unemployment allowance². This situation makes a Ukrainian refugee becoming **nearly equal** to the locals when it comes to having access to the labour market in Estonia. In addition to the monetary side of the theme, the unemployment allowance in Estonia is currently EUR 292.00 per month, and the payments can be installed for nine months; from another angle, a Ukrainian refugee, on equal terms with a local employee, must not receive less than EUR 3.86 (gross) per hour for his/her work in 2022³.

Finally, on education, there is a counselling services for Ukrainian children to be established in Estonia by the beginning of summer, and it is where both youngsters and their parents are to be offered help on a range of learning opportunities at very different levels of education⁴. Procedure wise, the main point is that “the child must be admitted to the school at the time of the application”⁵. Predictably, there will be some moments when the newcomers in Estonia maybe feeling as existing in some kind of an informational blockade, but, objectively, the approach that Estonia is taking in responding to the crisis is appearing to be comprehensive. Even one of the country’s most popular newspapers, *Postimees*, has now established its Ukrainian language-based version⁶. This will be of significant assistance for all circles of policy-makers in Estonia, because

¹ ‘Working in Estonia’ in *KRIIS*. Available from [<https://kriis.ee/en/security-situation-europe/ukrainian-war-refugees/working-estonia>].

² ‘Working in Estonia’.

³ ‘Working in Estonia’.

⁴ ‘Education’ in *KRIIS*. Available from [<https://kriis.ee/en/security-situation-europe/ukrainian-war-refugees/education>].

⁵ ‘Education’.

⁶ *Postimees*. Available from [<https://ukraina.postimees.ee/>].

the Ukrainian segment of the country's society will have a powerful channel of communication as well as a framework to reflect on what goes on.

What is the next step for the society? In principle, Estonia is in full understanding of an irreversible aspect of the development. In the country, historical memories of multiple deportations that, consequentially, pushed thousands of Estonian citizens to leave the country in search for safer places, – for example, the one that occurred in 1944 when 80,000 Estonians left their homes after the Soviet Union reoccupied the region of the Baltics¹, – are getting 'employed' as a point of departure for creating a new set of collective memories. What are these collective memories to be 'sewn up' by? Speculatively, some of the major elements of that imaginary 'thread' can be as follows. **Firstly**, there is a common aggressor then and now; therefore, as argued, "Ukraine has it all to be seen by the Baltic countries as a sister struck by events repeating themselves", keeping in mind that this common enemy managed to make the European continent (and especially, its central-eastern part) acting in a more unified and cohesive way than ever before.

Secondly, the destructions that the Baltics were left with after the so-called 'liberation' by the USSR are still well remembered – this is "because the generations that have experienced the occupation are all still alive", [...] [a]nd those who have not lived through it but were born in three free countries, carry within themselves the collective memory of what their families have suffered"². **Thirdly**, many experiences of living under occupation – nearly all parents and grandparents of the younger generations of Estonian people grew up in the country that was ruled by the Kremlin – were 'compressed' into a set of traumatic feelings, which are still

¹ Tania Lestal, 'Remembering Estonia's WWII refugees' in *Estonian World*, 19 September 2021. Available from [<https://estonianworld.com/life/remembering-estonias-wwii-refugees/>].

² 'Collective memory and the war in Ukraine as seen by Baltic twentysomethings' in *ERR*, 7 April 2022. Available from [<https://news.err.ee/1608557296/collective-memory-and-the-war-in-ukraine-as-seen-by-baltic-twentysomethings>].

memorable – the relevance of the trauma to the present crisis is directly interlinked with the fact that “just some kilometres away from their capital cities, Baltic twentysomethings look with concern at what is happening in Kharkiv, Mariupol, Kyiv”¹.

Fourthly, there is a strong linguistic factor within this current crisis, because, as noted, “in Lithuania the Russian speaking population is around 5 per cent of the total, [but] in Estonia and Latvia the proportion rises to about one person in four”². The majority of Ukrainian war refugees who have arrived or are arriving into Estonia are fluent in Russian (for some of them, the Russian language is the prime choice when it comes to communication). It means that not only the entire Estonian society is experiencing plenty of changes, but the societal segment of the Ukrainian newcomers will, with necessity, significantly adjust the Russian speaking cluster of Estonia. **Finally**, Estonia as a society is no longer a source for a number of waves of refugees, but a developed host-country that is willing to protect many people in need. In a way, it is a sign that the country belongs to another world – a recent commentary argued that “Here is Estonia and not the Russian Empire”³.

¹ ‘Collective memory and the war in Ukraine as seen by Baltic twentysomethings’.

² ‘Collective memory and the war in Ukraine as seen by Baltic twentysomethings’.

³ Ilmar Raag, ‘This is Estonia and not the Russian Empire’ in *ERR*, 18 March 2022. Available from [<https://news.err.ee/1608535933/ilmar-raag-this-is-estonia-and-not-the-russian-empire>].

Ukrainian Migration Crisis and the Greek Response (March)

Evelyn Karakatsani

Summary

The briefing presents the Greek response to the Ukrainian migration crisis. The Greek government, since the start of the Russian invasion of Ukraine, took measures to support the Ukrainian refugees crossing the Greek borders. In addition, the Greek society, NGO's, international organizations as well as the private sector mobilized in order to assist the Ukrainians. This massive wave of support will help mainly in shorth-term. Careful planning is required for addressing the long-term effects of the crisis and the wellbeing of the people in need.

Introduction

The Russian invasion of Ukraine and the associated war conditions generated a vast humanitarian crisis and a mass wave of Ukrainian refugees to neighboring countries including the EU member states. In order to understand the magnitude of the current crisis and its future impact, it needs to be considered that Ukraine is one of the largest Eastern European countries and in terms of population the eight most populous country in Europe, with a population of 43 million.

On the onset of the Ukrainian refugee crisis, the response of the Greek society as well the Greek government was immediate. The state implemented measures and policies to assist the displaced people from Ukraine crossing the Greek borders. The support provided includes the entrance of the refugees to Greece and their short and long stay in the country. Most importantly the decision of the EU member states, including Greece, to activate for the first time the Council's 55/2001 directive, offering one-year temporary protection in the event of mass influx of displaced person, will provide the refugees fleeing Ukraine better

conditions of living to the host countries without delays and bureaucratic procedures. Moreover, other measures in place as well as the support from NGOs and international organizations will play a positive role. However, the evolution of the war in Ukraine will determine whether all the measures taken are sufficient for the effective management of this refugee crisis.

Ukrainian refugees in Greece

Greece since the 1990s, after the collapse of USSR and the declaration of independence of Ukraine in 1991, was one of the first EU host states to migrants from Ukraine. According to the Embassy of Ukraine in Greece, in 2020 the population of Ukrainians living in Greece was more than 25,000 people (1). Since the start of the current crisis more than 3 million refugees fled Ukraine and as per the announcement of the Greek Ministry of Citizens Protection on 20 March 2022, more than 12,354 Ukrainian citizens crossed the Greek borders, from the total of which 4,007 are minors. It should be mentioned that on 19 March 2022, just in one day, 487 Ukrainian refugees crossed the Greek borders. The majority of the Ukrainian refugees entered from the Promachonas border station and are mostly women and children (2). It was reported that only a small number of the refugees entering Greece used the facilities of the state. The majority of the Ukrainian refugees are staying to relatives or friends already living in Greece. However, this may quickly change in case the refugee flow increases (3).

Ethnic Greek Community of Ukraine

More than 150.000 ethnic Greeks live in Ukraine, especially in Mariupol and the south borders. These areas are severely damaged from the war actions of Russia. The Minister of Foreign Affairs N. Dendias stated that Greece is making every possible effort to ensure the protection of the ethnic Greeks in Ukraine. In cooperation with the Greek consulates in the Ukrainian cities, the government has launched “Nostos” operations in order to evacuate Greeks from Ukraine. The latest operation was Nostos 6 which

successfully evacuated from Ukraine 11 members of the Greek community, who were accompanied by the Consul General in Mariupol, Manolis Androulakis (4). All Nostos operations were also very successful, such as Nostos 3, where 82 Greeks successfully crossed the borders of Ukraine. However, at the present moment many ethnic Greeks of Ukraine declare that they are not willing to leave their homes.

Furthermore, during the last couple of weeks many protests against the Russian invasion of Ukraine have been held in Athens and Thessaloniki. The protests demonstrate the Greek support to the Ukrainian people and the demand to stop war atrocities. On the 25th of February thousands of people protested outside the Russian Embassy in Athens. The protests were called by the communist party of Greece (KKE) and the main opposition party SYRIZA (5). It should be further mentioned that in addition to the public support of the Ukrainian people from the Greek society, there are no parties in the Greek parliament declaring their objection to the support of the people in Ukraine, as well as the war refugees.

Measures taken by the Greek government

The Greek government responded to the current humanitarian crisis by taking measures for the entry of Ukrainian refugees in Greece, as well as their staying in the country. The Minister of Migration and Asylum, Notis Mitarachi, stated that “Greece actively supports the displaced Ukrainian and welcomes them in a coordinated, efficient and harmonized way with Europe and the Western world”.

Upon the arrival of the Ukrainian refugees in the country, local authorities provide them with health care assistant and basic commodities. Moreover, the people arriving in the county receive the necessary documents, which will ensure them a legal staying and access to the labour market. According to the Ministry of Migration and Asylum, the refugees have so far arrived exclusively at legal points of entry. They present their passports, or in a few cases other legal documents. Those who hold biometric passports enter

without a visa. Those with old passports receive a visa free of charge at the border from the Hellenic Police (6).

In addition, Greece will offer to the Ukrainian refugees a 12-month residence and work permit. This permit will be issued digitally after an electronic pre-registration. The platform activated on the 28th of March, will provide the opportunity to all potential beneficiaries to receive an individualized attendance appointment at the Offices of Asylum Service in order to complete their registration. The procedure for providing temporary protection will start on the 4th April at the Regional Asylum Offices of Thessaloniki, Attica, Patras and Crete. Further points will be created in case there is a need. A Social Security Number (AMKA) and a Tax Registration Number (AFM) will also be given to the refugees in order to help their adaption to the Greek society during their staying in the country (7).

Concerning the above policy, it should be noted that since 2001 the Council of the European Union, in the framework of establishing a common EU policy on asylum, had issued the 55/2001 directive, offering one-year temporary protection in the event of mass influx of displaced person and measures promoting a balance of efforts between the EU member states in receiving the refugees (8). Following the recent Ukrainian crisis, this directive came into force for the first time. Thus, the EU urgently mobilized in order to assist its member states to the current humanitarian crisis and create a space of security and freedom to those who legitimately seek protection in the EU.

Moreover, in Promachonas, the main entry point at the north borders, the Reception and Identification Authority created a special reception team, utilizing the existing facilities and offering 24-hour a day support. For example, the refugees are informed in detail, through a brochure translated into Ukrainian and with the option of tele-interpretation. Food, hot drinks and a waiting area is provided, until the identification procedures are completed in the Passport Control Department. The welcome facilities are renovated, with the creation of a reception station, which will include special rooms for the care of infants, a children's playground, showers and other facilities for the basic needs of the Ukrainian refugees. Furthermore,

at the borders the local authorities and a special team of the National Public Health Organization carry out checks on the vaccination certificates, as well as random COVID-19 tests.

In addition, in order to assist the Ukrainian refugees, since the beginning of the crisis, a call center with a help desk line and an online information portal for easy online access to information, via a Q&A section and the ability to ask questions by an e-mail address, were put in place. The call center has received and answered more than 1,500 calls, while in the form of e-mails more than 200 questions have been answered. The Greek authorities also cooperate with the consular authorities of Ukraine in the country in order to solve problems that appear in the identification process of the Ukrainian refugees, reducing bureaucracy and making the process less time consuming. Concerning the cars of Ukrainian displaced persons, a simplified procedure was established for the issuance of the necessary customs formalities. Also, simplified procedures for the pets of the Ukrainian refugees are activated and the authorities do not examine the health passports of the animals (6).

According to the Minister of Migration and Asylum, regarding the accommodation facilities, the system has been redefined. In particular, the new structured facility in Sintiki center in Serres, is approximately 5km from the borders and is used for the short-term accommodation of those arriving in Greece from Promachonas. Furthermore, the Minister declared that the hosting system of the country has 15,000 beds available, which can gradually be increased so required (6).

Another major factor contributing to the efficient management of the refugee crisis is the assistance provided by the international organizations and NGOs, as well as private sector initiatives. The refugee organizations in Greece already have the means and the experience to support the Ukrainian refugees, since they were the ones operating in the field to previous migration crisis, such as the one in 2015. Characteristically, PM Mitsotakis, called all the NGOs of the country to assist the state during this humanitarian crisis as they have already done in the past. In addition, the Ministry of Migration and Asylum has created an online platform called

“Help Ukraine” accepting donations for helping the Ukrainian citizens in Greece (9).

Conculsion

Since the Russian invasion of Ukraine and the mass flee of Ukrainians to the neighboring countries as well as the EU member states, a tuned cooperation between the Greek state and the civil society has been occurred. On the one hand the Greek government implemented measures to ensure the effective management of the crisis and the support of the Ukrainian refugees and on the other international organizations as well as NGOs contribute to this effort. However, the war operations of Russia and the time period of the attacks will determine the numbers of the displaced Ukrainians and the future conditions of their repatriation. Consequently, these events will determine the effectiveness of the support measures taken, as well as the additional policies that the states will need to consider in order to assist the Ukrainian refugees.

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Labor Market in Hungary in the Midst of Growing External Challenges (March)

Csaba Moldicz

Summary

The International Labor Organization (ILO) has downgraded its labor market forecast for 2022. In its "World Employment and Social Outlook Trends 2022," the ILO justified the negative outlook by citing "uncertainty regarding the future course of the pandemic". The statement did not refer to the global price increase and the resulting decline in global demand that will follow the wave of inflation. It should be added that the decline in demand will not take place in the product groups where the consumption of the particular products cannot be postponed and replaced by other goods, but it is still a general trend. The report, published in January 2022, of course, could not take into account the uncertainty of the market due to the war in Ukraine and its impact on the labor market.

Introduction

In addition to the inflationary pressures and global uncertainty mentioned above, we can mention two immediate effects of the war on the Hungarian labor market: (1) During the two years of the global pandemic, global supply chains were disrupted and before the war we could hope that they would be restored by midsummer (2022), but the crisis in Ukraine has triggered a new wave of disruption and Hungary, as Ukraine's neighbor, is particularly affected by this factor. At the same time, we believe that technological changes are more important elements for change in the labor market than the influx of refugees. (2) Nevertheless, we are in the middle of a migration crisis that will affect the Hungarian labor market in the short to medium term, even if the majority of refugees do not want to stay in Hungary but go to Western European countries. This Social Briefing will

try to identify the main factors behind the recent changes in the labor market, also considering geopolitical factors.

Labor market data

According to the Hungarian Central Statistical Office (HSCO), the average number of employed persons in the period November 2021-January 2022 was 4 million 676 thousand, which is 75 thousand persons more than in the corresponding period last year. It is important to emphasize that the number of private and public sector employees increased, while the number of public sector employees decreased. During the same period, the overall employment rate increased to 73.9 percent and by 1.9 percentage points compared to November 2020-January 2021, with the male employment rate at 78.4 percent and the female employment rate at 69.5 percent.

The number of unemployed in January 2022 was 201 thousand and the unemployment rate was 4.2 percent. Both figures reflect a slight deterioration of labor market conditions in the Hungarian economy, because if we look at the figures for three months, the average for this period was better. In November 2021-January 2022, the unemployment rate was 3.8 percent and the number of unemployed people was 183 thousand in the same period. The slight deterioration in the numbers can be partly explained by seasonal effects, as demand for agricultural labor is usually low during this period. The main question is to what extent the trend can be explained by a more cautious behavior of companies, which put their investments on hold and put their expansion plans on hold for a few months until it is clear how the geopolitical changes might affect their business. Other data point to an improvement in the labor market, and the increase in wages in particular is impressive. In December 2021, the average gross wage of fully employed workers was HUF 492,888, while the net wage was HUF 327,700. Both figures are 9.7 percent higher than in December 2021. Both growth rates are above inflation, so real wages have also increased.

International comparison

In January 2022, the average unemployment rate in OECD countries was 5.3 percent, the lowest level since 2001. While the average unemployment rate in the eurozone was 6.8 percent in January 2022, well above the OECD average, Hungary fared better than the OECD average at 3.8 percent. The same figure was 6.5 percent in the EU. Greece and Spain have the worst unemployment rates, at 13.3 percent and 12.7 percent, respectively. In their case, the situation is critical, with less than a third of Spaniards and Greeks under 25 out of work. The youth unemployment rate (between 15 and 24 years old) is much lower in Hungary. (11.4 percent)

Table 1. Unemployment rate (%)		
	January 2021	January 2022
EU	7,5	6,2
Belgium	6,5	5,6
Bulgaria	6,2	4,7
Czechia	3,2	2,2
Denmark	6	4,7
Germany	4	3,1
Estonia	7,3	5,3
Ireland	7	5,3
Greece	16,2	13,3
Spain	15,8	12,7
France	7,9	7
Croatia	8,1	6,5
Italy	10,3	8,8
Cyprus	7,3	6,1
Latvia	7,7	7,3

Lithuania	7,9	7
Luxembourg	6,3	4,7
Hungary	4,6	3,8
Malta	4,2	3,1
Netherlands	4,7	3,6
Austria	7,7	4,9
Poland	3,6	2,8
Portugal	7	6
Romania	6	5,7
Slovenia	5,4	4,2
Slovakia	7,1	6,4
Finland	8,1	7,1
Sweden	9,1	8
Source: Eurostat		

Labor market impact of the Ukrainian war

So far, more than 200 thousand refugees have arrived in Hungary, having received temporary protection status. We must add that this status in the European Union means 1-3 years of residence, work permit and access to social services. Since there is no end in sight to the war in the near future, we have to ask ourselves whether the arrival of the refugees could give the Hungarian economy a respite from the tensions in the labor market. It is estimated that before the war, about 60 percent of the foreign labor force in the Hungarian labor market came from Ukraine. In response to the war, the majority of the 60 thousand people asked Hungarian employers to provide more job opportunities and accommodation for relatives and friends from the war zone in Ukraine. According to estimates of Hungarian HR agencies,

about 100 thousand people from Ukraine could easily find a job in Hungary, as the Hungarian labor market has a need for workers. Especially in the construction sector, it is easy to find work because the sector is booming, Hungarian language skills are usually not required, and the level of education required is also usually relatively low. There is no problem on the demand side, but there could be serious problems on the supply side for various reasons:

Language skills are much easier to acquire in Poland or the Czech Republic, as these languages are close to Ukrainian, while Hungarian is a separate, isolated language that has no links to Slavic languages.

Wages and salaries are slightly higher in the above countries than in Hungary.

There are already 1 million Ukrainians in Poland, who actively help each other, forming a larger diaspora.

Estimates suggest that only 10-20 percent of refugees from Ukraine will find housing and work in Hungary. By March 14, 2022, more than 200 thousand war refugees crossed the Hungarian-Ukrainian border, but the final number of Ukrainians leaving the country is unknown. According to various estimates, the final number of refugees could be 4-5 million people. (In March, the number was 2.6 million, based on figures from the UN Refugees Agency. The agency expects 4 million Ukrainians to leave the country). The result for the Hungarian labor market will be a growing supply of workers, especially in low-skilled occupations, because regardless of how we interpret the data, tens of thousands of people could be looking for work in Hungary in the coming weeks and months. The Hungarian government has adopted a state aid scheme specifically designed to meet the needs of employers who can hire workers from Ukraine. Under the scheme, the employer receives 50 percent of the employee's travel and living expenses, not to exceed 60 thousand forints per month (+12 thousand per child). The other 50 percent of the travel and living expenses must be borne by the employers, who subsequently receive the state subsidy.

Summary

The Hungarian labor market has now fully recovered from the economic shock triggered by Covid 19, but at the same time the structure of the labor market changed significantly during the global pandemic. As labor shortages were a constant feature of the Hungarian labor market, the sectors affected by this problem and the new demand were able to efficiently absorb the laid-off workers from the sectors affected by the Covid 19 pandemic.

The influx of Ukrainian refugees can only partially solve the long-term problems of the Hungarian labor market, although the Hungarian government's scheme to provide incentives for the employment of Ukrainian refugees may provide some help on this issue. In our opinion, modernization of the economy (robotization, digitalization) and a more effective education system can solve these problems in the long run. Digitalization and robotization are much stronger factors for changes in the labor market than the influx of Ukrainians into the Hungarian labor market.

Impact of the Pandemic and War in Ukraine on the Psychological Well-being of Latvian Youth (April)

Institute of Economics at the Latvian Academy of Sciences

Summary

In course of numerous studies, about 70% of young people in Latvia have recently experienced mental health problems and complications - depression or depressed mood, obsessive and disturbing thoughts, loneliness, exclusion from others and condemnation. Of these, only about one-fourth of young people consider their emotional well-being to be satisfactory. Adolescents indicate that they crave healthy support from their parents. In Latvia, consultations are offered by state-paid psychiatrists, psychologists, and psychotherapists, but waiting in line can last up to six months or more. It is planned to solve this problem with additional state funding, which will increase every year.

Introduction

The prolonged period of isolation caused by COVID-19, the intense debates over vaccination, and the ongoing war in Ukraine have highlighted several integration issues in Latvian society. Negative changes in young people's behaviour and habits have been noticed by both teachers and youth workers - young people have become more closed, socialize less with classmates, and avoid greeting other peers. Thus, the incidence of mental disorders among young people is consistently increasing. Just before May - Mental Health Awareness Month – in numerous countries around the world, this month's Society briefing will look at the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic and the Ukrainian war on the mental health of Latvian

children and young people, as well as the support options provided by the state.

I Mental Health Indicators

To analyse the mental health of young people and young people's perception of society in Latvia, an extensive survey¹ was conducted among Latvian youth. Only 35% of young people believe that Latvia has an inclusive society. For 74 % of young people, it is important that their views are accepted. However, a significantly smaller share (47 %) of the surveyed admits that they are particularly good at accepting that others may have a different opinion or belief. The second largest - 50 percent - is only partially able to accept the difference. There are topics where the other's point of view is harder to accept. Young people are freer to express their opinions among friends and at home (84 and 83 percent, respectively), while 61 percent can express their opinions freely among their peers, and 54 percent at school.

Regarding the mental health of young people in general, there are no significant improvements compared to the same survey conducted in 2021. Still, **two thirds (66%) of young people admit to having experienced mental health problems in the last two weeks.** In addition, an equivalent rate is observed in all age groups. The main mental health problems faced by young people are depression; difficulty learning or performing daily tasks; obsessive thoughts; irritability; feeling lonely or abandoned, among others. Compared to the previous year, physical health problems are significantly more often mentioned as one of the consequences of the pandemic period. Overall, the results show that only a quarter (26%) of

¹ The survey was conducted by then international motivation program "MOT" together with the research agencies "Forta Research" and "Norstat" in February and March 2022

young people surveyed consider their mental health to be good or exceptionally good. The vast majority are negatively affected.

In addition, a new study by the Adolescent Resource Centre of Latvia (ARC) shows that 70% of adolescents' well-being depends on mutual trust in the family. Experts say **mental health is a problem for about one in three young people**, which means there will be at least three adolescents in each school and class who would benefit from specialist support.

When researching the functioning of young Latvian families, 75% of young people said that they feel very good at home, believing that the family is perceived as a resource that can help them in difficulties. Studies show that young people who did not have difficulty before the pandemic, even later, during the pandemic, were not able to continue their daily life normally. For young people in difficulty, their functioning quickly became critical. Mental health is a problem for about one in three young people, and one in three young people seek medical help.

When opening new branches in the ARC, long queues of teenagers for help are immediately formed,

the situation is described by the head of the ARC, Anete Masalska.

The service of the ARC was designed in such a way that no referral is required, a call is enough, often the adolescents call themselves. Girls make up 75% of all calls, while boys make up about 25%.

There is a growing debate in the public sphere that isolation, distance learning and distress caused by global issues are having negative health effects on young people. The ongoing hostilities in Ukraine also cause internal anxiety and panic among the people of Latvia. Unfortunately, one way, how the youth choose to ease stress, is drugs, and current observations are worrying. Specialists observe that young people in Latvia are increasingly using drugs - against the background of European countries, data and surveys show that young people aged 15 and 16 in Latvia use illicit drugs more often than the average in European countries combined, as well

as the use of other drugs and over-the-counter medications is ever more increasing among young people, which poses a large-scale socio-economic issue.

II State-provided Support

To solve the above-described challenges of our time, the following types of state support are available in Latvia. First of all, there are consultations of a family doctor, who also has the right to give advice in case of mental illness and prescribe appropriate medications. Also, currently in Latvia, state-paid consultations of a psychologist and a psychotherapist with a referral from a family doctor are available, although in some cases one has to wait in line to see this specialist.

As the pandemic and the war prolong and exacerbate mental health problems, children and young people also have access to free psychiatric care. A psychiatrist is a direct access specialist, and a referral is not required, but a referral from another doctor is required for the first visit to be free. The state pays for health care services for the diagnosis, treatment, and medical rehabilitation of a person with mental and behavioural disorders according to the ICD-10¹ classification, including home visits by a psychiatrist to a psychiatric profile for patients who cannot visit a medical institution due to their health condition. Latvia has all medicines available in the EU for the treatment of depression and other mental disorders, including the most recent ones, which are also available with 75% state compensation.

In total, the Ministry of Health of the Republic of Latvia is receiving additional funding starting from 2021 to increase the availability of psychological assistance and mental health care services by reducing the

¹ International Classification of Diseases, 10th Revision

negative impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and related socio-economic phenomena on the mental health of the population.

Additionally, in cases when a child or adolescent has difficulties at school or with studies, it is also possible to use the services of a school psychologist. The school psychologist can also give counselling to the family and the adolescent, helping to assess the situation and choosing the most appropriate support. However, such a specialist is not available in all Latvian schools. Municipal social services can offer a range of support options, including psychological counselling, participation in adolescent groups and parental training. Adolescents and parents often have a negative attitude, fearing (often unreasonably) about the leakage of information at school between teachers and classmates, as well as from high-risk clients in social services.

Psychological support for adolescents is provided by the ARC - a free psychologist service administered by the Children's Hospital Foundation, as well as the crisis centre "Skalbes". In crisis situations, there is a hotline for children and adolescents, which can be used by adolescents in crisis situations as well as by families or other professionals. The phone works around the clock, even on weekends. Consultations are available in Latvian, Russian and English.

Conclusions

Thus, young people consider modern issues as pressing, feel the challenges of mental health issues and give less and less importance to social contact. Research shows that young people with very good mental health are more likely to fully accept others, so parents, friends and peers have a key role to play in the inclusion process. Additional attention should be paid to the peer environment, as the study reveals that only one in four young people feels fully accepted there. In the last two weeks, 2/3 of Latvia's young people have experienced mental problems, which is a worrying indicator,

including young people who are afraid to seek help and try to find peace in the wrong ways like drugs, which can have a serious impact on the young person, parents, and society. State support is satisfactory compared to the current situation in Western European countries, but state-paid services tend to be of variable quality and with long waiting times. In 2021, the Ministry of Health decided to provide additional funding for the psychiatric sector, so the shortage of specialists and their competencies will potentially be resolved in the coming years.

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The Standard of Living is in Focus Again (February)

Vojin Golubovic

Summary

Events on the global scene show that the consequences are felt in a small open economy such as Montenegro. The rise in prices of many products is drastically affecting the living standards of the population. Also, despite the fact that international impact on rising prices and high inflation is inevitable, the populist program that has currently provided higher wages seems to have further affected inflation, which was at a record high in January for the past decade. However, it seems that some politicians are further hampering the possibility of lowering the prices of some basic goods, such as fuel.

Introduction

The prices of food and non-alcoholic beverages in January this year, compared to the year before, according to Statistical Office of Montenegro (MONSTAT) are higher by 11.3 percent, and the price of oil has risen the most by more than 40 percent. Rising prices of basic foodstuffs are a consequence of rising fuel prices, which have risen by over 50% in Montenegro in the last year. Fuel prices continued to rise in February, breaking record levels in Montenegro from week to week. Expectations regarding future fuel price developments are not optimistic and the growth trend should be expected to continue due to developments in Ukraine. However, if there was political will, those prices could be curbed, and consequently the prices of other basic products. Certainly, current events adversely affect the living standards of citizens in Montenegro.

The populist project further contributed to high inflation

Although the citizens recklessly thought that they would only feel better from the announced increase in wages through the populist project "Europe Now", the negative consequences of such a reckless endeavour are slowly being felt. Inflation during the first month of the program reached as much as 1.3% on a monthly basis, while in December last year it was 0.2%. By comparison, inflation in Montenegro largely followed the inflation trends in the Eurozone. However, a different trend was recorded in the Eurozone in January - lower monthly inflation in January (0.3%) compared to December 2021 (0.4%). Thus, the drastic rise in prices is not only the result of "overflow" of inflation from abroad, but is largely created by an ill-considered program. Although wages have risen, continued high inflation in the coming months could very quickly offset the positive effects of rising citizens' incomes. If similar inflation as in January continues in the coming months (even higher inflation is expected in February), it could reach double digits at annual level. Such inflation is difficult to control and threatens to turn into hyperinflation. In any case, it will affect the standard of living of citizens, because it is difficult to expect new wage increases, especially in conditions of low productivity. Thus, the anticipated positive effects of the "Europe Now" program could be neutralized in the short term, while the burden of financing wage increases would remain. Reckless implementation of a populist project designed by people who think of gaining political points before the election rather than the long-term consequences of their decisions could affect very vulnerable public finances and a lack of funds in the central budget, health fund and pension and disability insurance fund. In that way, the payment of pensions would be questioned, as well as basic health care. Even an International Monetary Fund report from February this year indicates that the 2022 budget deficit will grow once again. According to the assessment of this institution, "the rise in the deficit relative to 2021 is primarily due to the fiscal implications of 'Europe Now' ". A possible solution in such a situation is new borrowing or an increase in certain taxes, which will again be paid by citizens and the enterprises. In this way, the burden of reckless moves by bad government

economists would fall on the citizens again and further endanger their standard of living.

Mitigating the situation depends on the political will

Only after the vote of no confidence in the government, the Minister of Finance and Social Welfare stated that oil is the most expensive since 2008, that additional price increases are expected, and appealed to members of parliament to vote on changes to the Law on excises. In this way, the Government would be given the opportunity to reduce the amount of excise duties by 20 percent due to rising fuel prices, and thus limit further increases in the price of oil products.

However, such appeals again show all the hypocrisy of Montenegrin politicians, because the same minister had the opportunity to vote on such a request earlier. Namely, the initiative for lowering fuel prices existed during the previous year, when some opposition parties pointed out the need to reduce excise taxes on fuel in order to contribute to more favourable prices and prevent a spiral of inflation. Consequently, the living standard of citizens would be preserved to a certain extent. However, such initiatives did not have support. More precisely, the Government of Montenegro and the then parliamentary majority repeatedly rejected the proposal of the Social Democratic Party to reduce excise duties on fuel. The proposal was denied despite the rising oil prices and endangering living standards. Since then, the price of fuel registered increase 19 times and the proposal to reduce excise duties is still on hold.

Today, most parties are in favour of reducing excise taxes, but there are still barriers of a political nature. Namely, after the vote of no confidence in the government and after the removal of the Speaker of Parliament, the current Deputy of Speaker of the Parliament does not want to convene a session to discuss the reduction of excise duties. The reason is too selfish - the party to which he belongs fears that this session could be used to

convene a session at which a new government (which will not include this party) could be elected. The proposal to reduce excise duties on fuel is still awaiting adoption, and Montenegro is the only country in the region that does not yet have a legal solution that would allow it to influence the prices of basic foodstuffs in the event of a market disruption. The government could also pass a decree or some "lex specialis" without waiting for the adoption of amendments to the law, which is also missing. And so, political arbitrariness continues to be ahead of the general state interests and the interests of the citizens of Montenegro.

Other social issues

As the pandemic slowly weakens, new global developments caused by the war in Ukraine have greatly affected Montenegrin society. A large part of the citizens oppose the war, so in most Montenegrin cities, rallies in support of the Ukrainian people were organized, and several humanitarian actions were organized with the aim of collecting aid for the endangered inhabitants of Ukraine. It encourages the willingness of a large number of citizens to allocate funds for humanitarian aid to those most affected by the war. That, for a moment, brings humanity back to the fore. However, in parallel with these rallies, rallies in support of Russia and in support of the war were also organized. Those gathered at a rally in support of Russia blocked roads in Montenegro and war was supported mainly by extreme Serbian nationalists carrying flags of Russia and Serbia, church symbols, as well as flags of radical paramilitary structures that cooperated with fascists in World War II¹. This indicates an additional division of Montenegrin society and the dangers of Serbian nationalists² who do not

¹ It refers to the Chetnik flag with the inscription "Freedom or Death" with a skull.

² The title on the banners was: "Serbs in Montenegro, Russians in Ukraine" and "Pray to God, stick to Russia".

promote peace and tolerance and call for conflict. Many analysts in the Western Balkans see the hotbeds of new conflicts (especially in Bosnia and Herzegovina, while Montenegro is prone to internal divisions in society). In any case, threats from these nationalists who would like to provoke internal conflicts to make Montenegro part of the so-called "Serbian world" should be considered seriously. Nationalists are obviously not so preoccupied with problems as living standards.

The increase in the prices of basic foodstuffs and fuels in Montenegro was caused by international trends, which significantly undermined the short-term effect of a better standard followed by the increase in wages envisaged by the "Europe Now" program. The implementation of that program could have been better designed, because the first results indicate that the program itself has contributed to the creation of additional inflation, but also to difficulties in public finances. This could jeopardize living standards in the long run. The current situation requires a reaction from politicians, who could abolish or reduce excise taxes on fuel and thus prevent the rise in prices of other products and services. However, such a reaction is lacking. Political disagreements deepen such problems. Politicians should put aside party interests and preserve the living standard of citizens.

The Socio-economic Causes and Consequences of the Increase in the Minimum Wage (March)

Gjorgjioska M. Adela

Summary

Starting from April 1st 2022 the minimum wage will be MKD18,000 or €293, which is an increase of 18% compared to the previous minimum wage of MKD15,194 per month. The measure will affect 80,000 citizens and will be subsidized by the Government. The move comes in the midst of a stagflation, which has threatened to push more of the population below the poverty line. Given the high rise in energy and basic food prices, low-income citizens will continue to be trapped in extreme poverty in spite of the increases in the minimum wage.

Since the beginning of 2022, the Federation of Trade Unions has demanded an immediate increase in the minimum wage by 18,000 denars due to rising living costs and the energy crisis.¹ They drafted the amendment to the Law on the Minimum Wage specifying the terms of the changes. The proposal stipulated that the minimum wage should never be below 60 percent of the average salary, so that with increases in the average salary the minimum wage will also increase, but if the average salary decreases, the minimum

¹ “The negotiations on the minimum wage at a dead end - who will give in?”, published on 04.02.2022, available at

<https://www.dw.com/mk/%D0%BF%D1%80%D0%B5%D0%B3%D0%BE%D0%B2%D0%BE%D1%80%D0%B8%D1%82%D0%B5-%D0%B7%D0%B0-%D0%BC%D0%B8%D0%BD%D0%B8%D0%BC%D0%B0%D0%BB%D0%BD%D0%B0%D1%82%D0%B0%D0%BF%D0%BB%D0%B0%D1%82%D0%B0-%D0%B2%D0%BE-%D1%9C%D0%BE%D1%80%D1%81%D0%BE%D0%BA%D0%B0%D0%BA-%D0%BA%D0%BE%D1%98-%D1%9C%D0%B5-%D0%BF%D0%BE%D0%BF%D1%83%D1%88%D1%82%D0%B8/a-60667737> accessed on 15.04.2022

wage will remain at MKD18.000.¹ Unconditional support for the legal changes proposed by the Union were given only by two political parties, the Left and Dom. “SDSM, which is the holder of the government coalition, does not have an explicit position in support of the proposal for the legal changes that we submitted to the Parliament. Deputy Prime Minister Fatmir Bytyqi, at the meeting we had in the Government, talks about the changes in the minimum wage that will happen sometime in the future. But the people need an increase in the minimum wage immediately. DOM and the Left explicitly said that they will support our proposal for legal changes”, said the president of the Federation of Trade Unions Darko Dimovski in early February following several protests organized demanding the increase.

The amendments to the Law on Minimum Wage were originally submitted to the Parliament by Dimitar Apasiev and Borislav Krmov from the political party “Levica” (the Left). Then on the 10th of February, with 101 votes in favor, Parliament accepted the proposal of the Government to adopt the amendments to the Law on Minimum Wage in a shortened procedure. Commenting on the changes, Jovana Trenevaska, Minister of Labor and Social Policy stated: “After three sessions of the Economic and Social Council and the constructive discussion, together, in partnership, we brought the most sustainable solution for determining the minimum wage.”² The Amendments change the criteria for the annual harmonization of the minimum wage with 50 percent of the annual growth of the average wage and 50 percent of the growth of the cost of living. It is envisaged that

¹ SSM: Only Left and DOM give unconditional support to our proposal for minimum wage, published on 02.02.2022, available at

<https://www.slobodenpecat.mk/en/ssm-samo-levica-i-dom-davaat-bezuslovna-poddrshka-na-nashiot-predlog-za-minimalna-plata/> accessed on 10.03.2022

² “The law on the minimum wage was passed in the Parliament”, published on 10.02.2022, available at

<https://www.mkd.mk/makedonija/ekonomija/zakonot-za-minimalna-plata-pomina-vo-sobraniето-martovskata-kje-bide-18000> accessed on 15.03.2022

the minimum wage can not be lower than 57 percent of the average wage published by the Statistical Office for the previous year.¹

Prime Minister Dimitar Kovačevski emphasized that the minimum wage is now double what it was in 2014. “We become leaders in Europe with the amount of the share of the minimum wage in the average wage”, the PM stressed, although initially the Government showed reluctance to adopt the changes.² The government will subsidize the difference between the contributions for the current and the new minimum wage until the end of the year. An employer who meets the conditions for the payment of the minimum wage will be provided with financial assistance from the state budget, and for this purpose for 2022, 939,645,000 denars (15 million euros) have been provided. If we take into account that the Government, through measures that were previously in force, annually provides subsidies to employers in the amount of about 48 million euros to cover contributions to increase the salaries of about 130,000 citizens, it becomes clear that new legal changes further burden the state budget. Such economic policies by which the state finances wage increases for the most vulnerable groups, instead of employers doing so through a more equitable redistribution of profits, are unsustainable in the long run. Namely, the Macedonian budget can no longer maintain liquidity without new loans, and public debt is at over 60% of GDP and constantly growing.³

¹ According to the latest data by the national statistical office, the average net wage stood at 29,130 denars in November.

² “Kovacevski: Minimum salary 18,000 denars, promised-fulfilled”, published on 10.02.2022, available at

<https://vlada.mk/node/27692?ln=mk> accessed on 10.03.2022

³ Pyrrhic victory for Macedonian workers, published on 21.03.2022, available at

<https://www.bilten.org/?p=41472> accessed on 04.04.2022

In spite of the strain on the budget, the increase in the minimum wage is unlikely to bring major improvements in the living standards of the poorest in the country. In January 2022, domestic consumer prices grew by 1.5% on a monthly basis (0.4% in the previous month), mainly due to rising energy prices, primarily due to higher electricity prices for households. An additional contribution to this was made by higher fuel prices, in line with rising prices of petroleum products on world stock exchanges. Also, a significant contribution was made by increased food prices (with a significant increase in the prices of vegetables, fruits and items that are classified in the price category "bread and cereals"). The rising prices are intensifying the inflation. According to the National Bank, inflation was 6.7% in January (4.9% in December), with accelerated annual growth in prices in the energy and food components, where deviations from the October projections are the largest, while slightly lower in basic components. What is characteristic is that the rise in inflation is noticeable in conditions when the Government has frozen part of the prices of basic foodstuffs. Namely, on December 4, 2021, the Government made a decision to freeze the prices of basic food products (bread, sugar, flour, sunflower oil, milk, fresh meat and cured meat products, cheese and cottage cheese) at the level of 1 December. The list of products on December 14 was expanded to include prices of rice, eggs and pasta. The decision to freeze the prices of basic foodstuffs was temporary and was valid until February 28, 2022.¹ Despite the freeze, the National Bank continued to record an increase in the prices of the total food category, mainly due to the growth of other product categories not covered by the decision to freeze prices. These prices are likely to further increase due to the war in Ukraine. The National Bank has already reported that the upward trends in wheat are largely due to investors' concerns about possible disruptions in supply channels in the Black Sea region due to the situation in Ukraine, while corn reflects expectations of lower corn production in Argentina and Brazil.

¹ Ibid

According to the Central Bureau of Statistics, the cost of living in February 2022 compared to February 2021 increased by 7.6% and the price index by 8.6%. In February this year, compared to January, more than 50 food products and services rose in price, and the minimum monthly decrease was recorded for only a few, such as beer, mineral water, carbonated beverages, passenger air transport and travel arrangements. The Federation of Trade Unions of Macedonia (SSM), one of the institutions that fought for a minimum wage of 300 euros, publishes the value of the minimum union basket each month. footwear, culture and health care. According to the SSM, the value of the minimum basket for December 2021 was MKD 35,042. According to the latest data from the Central Bureau of Statistics, 21.6% of the total population in N. Macedonia lives in poverty. Observed by types of households, the poverty rate of households consisting of two adults with two dependent children is 19.3%, the rate of poor employees is 8.5%, while the rate of poor pensioners is 7.7%.¹

If we take into account the recent increase in the price of food, electricity, petrol and other basic products, it becomes clear that raising the minimum wage to 18,000 denars will not mean much to families living on minimum wages. The price increase of those 50 euros of increase in the minimum wage, which would come into force with the payment of the March salary, are unlikely to affect the overall state of poverty in the country. Indeed, in view of the worsening economy following the 2-year long pandemic, followed by the war in Ukraine, means that the number of people living in poverty will surely rise amidst ongoing stagflation in the country.

¹ Ibid

The Impact of Ukrainian Migration on Polish Society and Economy (April)

Konrad Rajca

Summary

Since the beginning of the war in Ukraine, Poland has received over 2.8 million refugees from that country (data as of April 19). This is about 7 percent of the population of Poland, which has a population of about 38 million. At the same time, 756,000 Ukrainians - mostly men - left Poland. Poland took in the majority of Ukrainian refugees who left the country as a result of the war. This migration - the largest in Europe since World War II - has had a huge impact on Polish society and economy. Under Polish law, refugees from Ukraine, after obtaining a PESEL identification number, have been granted educational and social rights analogous to Polish citizens. This is a very courageous policy. It is very costly, but it can have a positive impact on Polish society in terms of demographics and labor market shortages, as well as strengthen Poland's position and image in the region. Ukrainians are a nation culturally related to Poles, so migration does not currently provoke loud objections of the Polish society.

Introduction

Most Ukrainian refugees do not intend to stay in Poland, and only 7 percent of them plan to settle in Poland permanently, according to the report "Refugees from Ukraine in Poland," prepared by the EWL Migration Platform and the Eastern European Studies at the University of Warsaw. As soon as possible - meaning after the end of the war - 56 percent of Ukrainians want to return home, but before that happens, they would like to stay in Poland for some time. 18 percent declare that for several years, 6 percent that for about a year. The study involved only people who came to

Poland after the outbreak of war in Ukraine. They were asked, among others, about their education, language skills, plans and fears.

Refugees in Poland are mainly educated women with children

The report shows that relatively few respondents are thinking about traveling further west. Only 12 percent of them will go further (or plan to do so). Most - 26% - think of Germany as a potential direction of further emigration, 16% would like to go to the United States, 11% to Great Britain, 10% to Sweden and 8% to Slovakia. - Slovakia. They were followed by Canada (7 percent) and Spain (6 percent).

Statistics show that 93.5 percent of those who fled Ukraine to Poland were women children - this data was confirmed at the points of assigning PESEL identification numbers to refugees, which allow Ukrainian refugees to acquire educational and social rights analogous to those of Polish citizens (until 13 April, 846 thousand PESEL numbers were issued. 96% of them were given to women and children).

From the report one can learn that the statistical refugee woman is 38 years old (5 percent of refugee women are of retirement age) and left Ukraine with a child. The data shows that 37 percent of them have one child, 18 percent. - 18 percent have two children, while 8 percent have three or more. Almost two-thirds of them have a university degree (53%) or incomplete university education (8%), 16% have secondary education and every fifth refugee (22%) has completed a vocational school. The majority of refugees (17 percent) are highly qualified professionals, 15 percent are teachers and other education professionals. Next are those working in the service sector (14 percent) and those employed in trade (13 percent). They are followed by manual and office workers (7 percent each) and the unemployed (6 percent). 5 percent of those surveyed are in management positions, 3 percent. - entrepreneurs.

Two-thirds of refugees (63%) want to take up employment in Poland, one in five (20%) want to support themselves without work, and only 6% intend to apply for refugee status. 11% said they would support themselves in some other way or that they do not intend to take up employment in Poland.

The report shows that almost half (45%) of refugees do not speak Polish at all or know only basic phrases in our language, while another 29% assess their knowledge of Polish as at best poor. Only 5 percent feel that they communicate with Poles on a good level, and 4 percent that their Polish is very good or excellent. Polish is the third language, which people fleeing Ukraine indicate that they know at least at a communicative level. The first is Russian - indicated by 90% of respondents - English (55%), the fourth - German (6%).

Ukrainians may fill the gap on the Polish labor market

- The work of Ukrainian citizens is an opportunity to eliminate the deficit of employees in certain industries. Filling the gap in the labor market can be beneficial for the Polish economy - believes the Minister of Labor and Social Policy Marlena Maląg. According to the current data from employers have already received more than 62 thousand (data from mid-April) notifications on commissioning work to Ukrainian citizens and their number is constantly growing. The majority, nearly 30 thousand people, were employed to perform simple work. Less than 9 thousand people were industrial workers and craftsmen. But in this group there were also over 6.4 thousand service workers and salesmen, nearly 5.4 thousand office workers and nearly 2.5 thousand specialists.

The Polish market is capable of absorbing about 300 thousand Ukrainians in a short period of time, according to the report "Ukrainians on the Polish labor market - experiences, challenges and prospects" prepared in 2018 by EWL Group, which deals with recruitment of top-class specialists from Eastern markets. Currently, according to experts, the Polish economy is

able to absorb half a million workers from Ukraine within six months. Ukrainian refugees may fill the gap on the labor market in the trade and services sector, but not only.

Economists at PKO Bank Polski expect that about 3 million refugees from Ukraine will settle in Poland this year, of which about 30 percent will be economically active. "This would mean an increase in labor supply in Poland by as much as 5-6 percent. According to us, the wave of refugees may also generate as many as 200,000 additional jobs this year." - economists estimate in the bank's quarterly Economic Winds of War. In turn, a survey conducted by the Polish Economic Institute in early March showed that 14% of companies in Poland planned to increase their employment levels within three months.

Women arriving to Poland will find employment most rapidly in such market sectors as HoReCa, tourism, agriculture and horticulture. In the prepared by Personnel Service S.A. Polish Labor Market Barometer as much as 60 percent of entrepreneurs in the HoReCa sector declared their willingness to hire staff from the East. The survey conducted by Randstad Research Institute in cooperation with Pollster Research Institute confirms that most jobs for refugees will be found in the catering and hotel industry (47 percent), as well as in construction (33 percent) and industry (30 percent).

The Polish medical and elderly care industry has a high demand for employees. There is a shortage of nurses and doctors in Poland and the Polish society is ageing very quickly. However, the barrier is the knowledge of the Polish language. Another industry that in principle can absorb "everyone" is the very broadly defined IT sector. In this case, Polish language does not seem to be so important. However, there are other barriers - related to work with data, for which security clearance is required.

Working refugees can also help the Polish pension system. In an interview with the Rzeczpospolita daily, the President of the Social Insurance Institution (ZUS), Gertruda Uścińska, admitted that everything should be

done to legally employ the newcomers from the East in Poland as soon as possible, as the more people work, the more efficient the pension insurance system is.

Rental housing is getting more expensive, new educational placements needed

Gaps in the Polish labor market will also appear with the influx of refugees: more doctors or psychotherapists who speak Ukrainian will be needed, for example. On the other hand, workers with a communicative knowledge of Polish are currently in demand. Therefore, there is a need for free Polish language courses (especially for those who have the opportunity to work in health care and education) and industry-specific trainings. Minister of Education and Science Przemyslaw Czarnek stated that about 3.5 thousand teachers from Ukraine have applied for employment in Polish schools.

The presence of Ukrainian refugees in Poland has already influenced many areas of life, e.g. the situation on the market of apartments for rent, changes on the labour market, if only in the context of regulations facilitating employment of Ukrainian women and men. It is necessary to prepare a larger number of places in nurseries, kindergartens and schools, which is already happening through the efforts of the institutions themselves and local governments, but will require well-considered systemic solutions in the long-term perspective.

More than 160 thousand students from Ukraine, who fled the war, are already attending schools in Poland. More than three-quarters of them are in elementary schools. Among the districts where Ukrainian children study the most, large cities predominate. Since the beginning of the Russian aggression against Ukraine, about 700-800 thousand school-age children have come to Poland.

Will Ukrainians leave for the West?

Polish employers have so far employed Ukrainian migrants usually as Uber drivers, on construction sites, in stores at the checkout and seasonally in agriculture at harvest. For most of them it was good for a while. Even now, many refugees looking for quick employment will grasp similar jobs. But among the current migrants there are mostly people with higher education and most of them are women with children. It is by no means certain that the Ukrainians coming to Poland will be content with casual work and will be eager to apply for jobs that are not of interest to Poles because of their professional aspirations.

A large part of current war refugees from Ukraine are specialists and entrepreneurs, who may not want to take up simple manual work, and if they do, they will choose higher wages in the West," indicates an analysis prepared by Ukrainian publisher and journalist Vyacheslav Butkaliuk . It shows that Poland has mostly vacancies in industries and positions designed for men. It takes time and often investment to adapt them to women. Another problem that both potential employees and employers in Poland point out is the lack of knowledge of the Polish language. This, for example, stops doctors from treating patients in Polish hospitals.

Will wage growth slow down?

According to analysts at PKO Bank Polski, the influx of Ukrainian refugees to Poland may slow down wage growth in Poland, but will not worsen the situation of Polish workers. "We estimate that the composition effect alone may slow down wage growth. We expect a significant reduction in labor shortages, primarily in the service sectors, noteworthy that the severity of the skill shortage barrier in many industries has already fallen in March. We estimate that the influx of refugees into the tight labor market will not worsen the situation of domestic workers. The wave of refugees will generate increased demand for work in public services (even 200,000

additional jobs in education and health care), and, given the simplification of procedures, this demand will be met by incoming refugees," economists at PKO Bank Polski write in their analysis.

Conclusion

The influx of nearly 3 million Ukrainian refugees to Poland creates enormous challenges for Polish society and economy. In the short term, it is a considerable cost, but in the long term, according to experts, it may help the Polish economy, in particular by filling the gap on the labour market and being an answer to demographic problems. However, it will be possible with a coherent, prudent and planned social policy, which will use the potential of such a large but culturally close migration.

Serbian Orthodox Church Reaction to the European Parliament 9th March Resolution (March)

Ivona Ladjevac

Summary

At its session held on March 9, 2022 the European Parliament has adopted the resolution “Foreign interference in all democratic processes in the European Union”. Among many dubious parts, there is a segment of the resolution blaming the Orthodox Church to “promote Russia as a protector of traditional family values and fortify relations between state and church”. As expected, such content caused widespread odium in Serbian society and especially within the Serbian Orthodox Church which promptly reacted.

Introduction

The European Parliament Resolution on Foreign Interference in All Democratic Processes within the European Union ¹ , including Disinformation, condemned the Russian Federation's attempt to exploit ethnic tensions in the Western Balkans in order to support conflicts and divide communities, which could destabilize the entire region. The European Parliament sets out several key factors of concern.

First, the European Parliament expressed concern over the activities of the Orthodox Church in the Republika Srpska to promote the Russian

¹ Foreign interference in all democratic processes in the European Union, European Parliament resolution of 9 March 2022 on foreign interference in all democratic processes in the European Union, including disinformation (2020/2268(INI)), https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-9-2022-0064_EN.pdf, accessed on 27/03/2022.

Federation as a “protector of traditional family values, including the promotion of strengthening ties between church and state.”

According to the Resolution, the same processes are taking place in Serbia and Montenegro, and Bosnia and Herzegovina's eastern neighbor has been identified as an aide, along with Hungary, in helping achieve Russian and Chinese geopolitical goals.

Second, disinformation has been explained as a threat to the Western Balkans, and the resolution envisions tools that could counterbalance it. Dialogue with civil society in the region and the private sector was recommended in order to coordinate anti-disinformation activities, with a focus on research, analysis and inclusion of regional experts.

The European Parliament also called on the European Commission to build the infrastructure needed to produce evidence-based disinformation responses. Responses would be focused on short-term as well as long-term threats of misinformation.

The European External Action Service is called upon to take a proactive stance and focus on building the European Union's credibility in the Western Balkans, rather than focusing on its defense, through the expansion of StratCom¹ monitoring that monitors misinformation threats across EU borders. from the countries of the Western Balkans.

Apart from the Orthodox Church, other religious institutions are also subject to foreign influence, more precisely Turkish and Saudi. The European Parliament concluded that foreign influence could be exercised through influence in religious institutions and the instrumentalization of such institutions as Russian influence in the Orthodox Churches in Serbia, Montenegro, Bosnia and Herzegovina, especially in the Republika Srpska, Georgia and to some extent in Ukraine. This includes creating divisions

¹ StratCom or Strategic Communications is a body of the European Union, i.e. the European External Action Service, which is focused on “effective communication and promotion” of European Union activities with a focus on Eastern Europe.

among the local population, developing a one-sided understanding of history and promoting the anti-EU agenda.

The influence of the government of the Republic of Turkey is realized through mosques in France and Germany, and the influence of Saudi Arabia through Salafi mosques throughout Europe in which radical Islamism is promoted.

The European Parliament called on the European Commission and all members of the European Union to ensure better coordination in the protection of religious institutions from external influences and to increase the transparency of funding for these institutions. EU members are invited to closely monitor the activities of religious institutions and, with appropriate evidence, to become active by canceling funding or revoking the licenses of related institutions.

Serbian Orthodox Church on Resolution

The Serbian Orthodox Church (SOC) reacted strongly to the European Parliament's Resolution on Foreign Interference in All Democratic Processes in the European Union, stating that the mention of the SOC “based solely on deep historical prejudices and tendentious stereotypes is not surprising, but certainly deeply disappointing”¹. As it characteristically commented, this resolution “does not come as a surprise, but it is deeply disappointing for us”.

Further, “putting the Serbian Orthodox Church into the role of the cause of “tensions between ethnic groups in the Western Balkans in order to inflame conflicts and divide communities” is completely contrary to the facts and the commitment of the Church in everyday life”. Such notions are vicious

¹On the Resolution of the European Parliament, Serbian Orthodox Church, March 14, 2022, http://www.spc.rs/eng/resolution_european_parliament, accessed on: 27/03/2022.

and intentionally especially, when one knows that SOC prays incessantly for peace, builds peace and encourages its faithful people to heal the early past, promotes trust and builds bridges of cooperation with neighbors, regardless of how they pray and what nation they belong to.

The Serbian Orthodox Church stated that it is “surprising to put in a negative context the issue of protection of traditional family values, which the Serbian Church stands for in the same way as the Russian Orthodox Church and all other local Orthodox churches without exception, but not in the least different, and the Catholic Church, as well as some Reformation churches”. This is evidenced, for example, by the joint statement of Pope Francis and Patriarch Cyril, given in Cuba, and through the statements that Pope Francis, like his predecessors, gave together with Patriarch Bartholomew, which both Catholics and Orthodox reaffirm the family as a natural center of human life and society. Similar principles about marriage can be found in Islam, as well as, and of course, in Judaism. For the Serbian church, family is the elementary and universal human value on which not a nation, state or union survives or falls, but human civilization. As such, it definitely is not the matter that can be changed depending on the opinion of any political forum or social group.

Additionally, in its reaction SOC specifically underlined that is “equally difficult to understand why the resolution mentions the relationship between the state and the church as controversial. Anyone who is interested in this issue knows that the Serbian Orthodox Church is committed to mission, for the principle of cooperative separation of church and state”.

Reacting to the European Parliament condemnation of Russia's efforts to use ethnic tensions in the Western Balkans “in order to inflame conflicts and divide communities”, which could destabilize the entire region, SOC stated that ultimately there neither is nor will be any interference, either from the East or the West. At the center of the SOC's interest, work and engagement are fundamental issues of peace and coexistence.

The resolution is first and foremost hostile to the Serbian Orthodox Church and the Serbian people. The mere fact that the Serbian Orthodox Church was almost marked as an actor in the conflict between Russia and Ukraine according to that resolution is meaningless and malicious. The Serbian Orthodox Church did not declare itself on the occasion of the war, unless it is for humanitarian reasons, to help everyone who is suffering. The resolution intends to put pressure on the Serbian state in Belgrade, Banja Luka and the entire Serbian people through pressure on the Serbian Orthodox Church.

The European Parliament also express concern “about the spread of foreign state propaganda, primarily from Moscow and Beijing, as well as Ankara”, and convincement that the Confucius Institutes, which are based at numerous European universities, serve as a lobbying platform for Chinese economic interests and Chinese intelligence services, as well as for the recruitment of agents and spies. Further, the EP is “concerned about the Orthodox Church's attempts in countries such as Serbia, Montenegro and Bosnia and Herzegovina, and especially in its entity, the Republika Srpska, to promote Russia as a protector of traditional family values and strengthen state-church relations.”

European Commission and member states are called on “to closely monitor activities in religious institutions and, if necessary and if there is evidence, to take measures, inter alia, by denying financial resources or revoking licenses to related institutions.”

Conclusion

In its Resolution on Foreign Interference in All Democratic Processes in the European Union, European Parliament with its assessments on Serbian Orthodox Church, practically have brought the Republic of Serbia and the entire Serbian people into the position of actors in the events in Ukraine, while deliberately ignoring the fact that Serbia holds neutral position,

respects Ukraine's territorial sovereignty, and at the same time does not want to impose any sanctions on Russia. When comes to the Serbian Orthodox Church, main Serbian religion, its attitude was confirmed not only in the statement reacting to the Resolution, but also during the meeting of Serbian Patriarch Porfirije and Head of the EU Delegation to Serbia, Mr. Emanuele Giaufret when discussed the Ukrainian crisis. They agreed that churches, religious communities and their leaders can play a beneficial role, because they are committed to peace, dialogue, tolerance and have the opportunity to contribute to overcoming the great problems facing today's Europe. In this regard, the Patriarch pointed out that the Resolution of the European Parliament does not correspond to reality. Serbian Orthodox Church is committed to and is working for peaceful and fruitful coexistence and cooperation of all peoples, and for it peace is an imperative that has no alternative.

The State of the Slovenian Society Just Before the April's Parliamentary Election and the Ukrainian Refugee Situation (April)

Gašper Pirc

Summary

After the start of the Russian invasion of Ukraine, the social, economic, and political life in the member states of the European Union has been heavily affected by the situation in the Eastern Europe. Alongside the already visible political and economic effects of war, the social effects in form of the flow of refugees and humanitarian aid have also already affected Slovenian social life. While the aid given by the Slovenian people, non-governmental organizations, and the government itself can be regarded as welcoming and constructive the Slovenian government voiced concerns over some problematic offers of help which might feature the danger of inappropriate requests and even human trafficking. At the same time, in the final days before the April's parliamentary election the protests against the current Slovenian government continue and so do the warning against the issues in the Slovenian media space.

Background: the Easter amidst the recovery period after COVID-19 crisis and the Russo-Ukrainian war

In the middle of April, most Slovenians celebrate the most important Christian feast.

On April 17, the Easter morning, the resurrection processions with Easter Masses took place in the churches in the morning, during which priests announced that Jesus had risen from the dead, which was marked by solemn Easter alleluia. According to Christian belief Jesus overcame death

by rising from the dead, thus opening the possibility for all people to receive eternal life after death. This is also why the atmosphere at Easter among Christians is festive and solemn.

The Slovenian bishops wrote in their Easter greeting Easter morning is a turning point and the beginning of a new state regarding the future of humanity. According to them, Jesus rose to live in us and to share in God's life. The latter will be fully realized in eternity, they added.

This year, the Easter comes in a very problematic times when Europe is only starting to recover from the long-lasting COVID-19 epidemic – only a few days before the holidays, the requirement to wear protective masks in most closed spaces was lifted – and the new humanitarian, social, and economic crisis has just started with the outbreak of the Russo-Ukrainian war due to which many Ukrainian refugees are seeking shelter in member states of the EU.

On the other hand, while the current political coalition emphasizes family values and Christian tradition and is thus heavily involved with Easter proceedings, the political and public opposition continues to make public warnings and protests in regards to the prevailing social and political issues only a week before the parliamentary election on April 24, 2022.

The Ukrainian refugee situation and the Slovenian response

With millions of Ukrainians on the move, many member states of the European Union offered to help accommodate the refugees.

On Thursday, April 14, the Slovenian government adopted a decision to relocate part of the orphanage from Lugansk to Slovenia. 20 orphans, aged one to seven, will be accommodated in the village of Slavina near Postojna. They will be accompanied by 18 companions.

While the orphans currently in Lviv will be housed in a house in Slavina, which is owned by the Postojna municipality, the accompanying staff will be housed in the Postojna Student Home.

Director of the Government Office for the Care and Integration of Migrants Katarina Štrukelj stated that the orphans can have a guardian, but adoptions will not be possible in Slovenia.

After Thursday's correspondence session of the government, the government's communication office announced that they were orphans and children unaccompanied by their parents. If they are granted temporary protection, Slovenia will guarantee them all the rights deriving from the law on temporary protection of displaced persons, they claimed.

So far, 18415 registrations of Ukrainian refugees have been made in Slovenia, while 4718 have been registered in Slovenia, as most of them only cross our country. According to unofficial data, 1225 of them currently have the status of temporary protection.

Štrukelj stated that according to police data, around 5000 Ukrainian citizens are currently registered in Slovenia, adding that some are already returning home.

According to her, about 10 new people are admitted to accommodation centers a day. Currently, there are 325 Ukrainian refugees in Logatec, 95 in Debeli Rtič and ten in the Maribor Integration House.

On March 10, the law on temporary protection of displaced persons came into force in Slovenia, which introduced temporary protection for persons who fled the country after February 24, when Russia invaded Ukraine. Refugees can apply for temporary protection in accordance with this law.

Just over 1000 citizens in Slovenia have so far obtained this status and that the Office has received 198 applications for assistance. If the person resides at a private address and does not have his/her own resources, he/she can

apply for financial assistance for private accommodation and financial assistance intended for survival.

It is said that there were about 40 complete applications on the basis of which they were able to recognize one of the forms of financial assistance, while others were sent for completion and will be resolved as soon as they receive the missing documents. For example, data such as the tax number and the unique personal identification number (EMŠO) were missing.

The Ministry of Education, Science and Sport has meanwhile announced that currently 578 refugee children from Ukraine are enrolled in 188 primary schools across Slovenia, and 52 in 30 kindergartens. Most Ukrainian children are enrolled in primary schools in the Osrednjeslovenska region (208), followed by Podravska (86), Obalno-kraška (56), Gorenjska and Savinjska regions (49 each).

With the acquisition of temporary protection status, Ukrainian refugees also gain the right to free access to the labor market, which means that they can register at the employment office.

Damjana Košir, director of employment at the institute, revealed today that just over 30 Ukrainians with temporary protection, aged 18 to 61, have registered with the unemployment register. Most of them are women between the ages of 30 and 40, but they have very different professions and work experience, she added.

While many people offer assistance to the citizens of Ukraine, including accommodation in private premises, employment and transport, the Ministry of the Interior however warned that trafficking in human beings could also be hidden behind certain offers of apparent help.

According to the latest figures, about four million people have had to leave Ukraine, most of them women and children, who are particularly vulnerable to human trafficking, they said.

According to them, in the accommodation centers in Logatec and Debeli Rtič, cases have already been detected when individuals were looking for or trying to establish contacts with refugees.

The Inter-Ministerial Working Group on Combating Trafficking in Human Beings therefore draws attention to the risks posed by the crisis in Ukraine in relation to trafficking in human beings.

The state of the Slovenian society just before the parliamentary election and the issues in the Slovenian media space

In the final phase of the pre-election campaign, the regular Friday protests and the professional syndicates continue to publicly expose the problematic actions of the current government. The protests increased in intensity before the parliamentary elections in April 2022.

On March 18 2022, protesters gathered in the Republic Square for the 100th Friday protest and once again drew attention to what they considered to be undemocratic, unconstitutional and corrupt activities of the current government.

After several meetings and press releases of the journalists and the political opposition in regards to what they feel to be unwelcome political pressure on the work of national radio and television broadcasting organization, the opposition issued further warnings about the issues in the Slovenian media space and the problematic communicative atmosphere. Thus, LMŠ MP Jani Möderndorfer announced that he would file a criminal complaint against Telekom Slovenije, SDS, NovaTV24.si and several natural persons on suspicion of abusing his position and damaging a state-owned company. The issues concern the connections between the Hungarian investors, Nova24TV and SDS.

Due to the public interest, he felt obliged to inform the public about what the commission of inquiry into the alleged illegal financing of the SDS was

doing. He emphasized that on the basis of the documentation received by the commission from various sources, it is possible to establish the disputed operations of NovaTV24.si. In a detailed presentation, he outlined how money from Hungary and the role of Telekom Slovenije in financing NovaTV24.si flowed into NovaTV24.si through various companies in the first years of its operation. He reminded that in April 2020 NovaTV24.si started acquiring a domain from Telekom Slovenije for the distribution of its television program. With this, Telekom became the main financier of NovaTV24.si, which means that today its business is financed by Telekom's Slovenian subscribers instead of Hungarians, he said.

With the parliamentary inquiry, the Members of Parliaments intend to establish the factual situation regarding the political responsibility of public officials due to the suspicion of influencing the alleged money laundering in the NKBM of foreign citizens and related legal and natural persons. The investigation also established the political responsibility of public officials due to suspicion of illegal financing of SDS and suspicion of media publishers owned by this political party and related individuals and legal entities before the early parliamentary elections in 2018.

Just before the parliamentary election, the issues of problematic governmental (public) communication and the intention of politicization of the Slovenian media space have thus once again become an important topic of discussion which may continue to be relevant given the election results.

In one of the final polls before the election, the agency Ninamedia showcased that the Svoboda movement would receive 26.6 percent of the vote at the coming elections, while the SDS would receive 24.3 percent. They would be followed by the Left (9.6 percent), SD (9.5 percent), NSi (7.2 percent), LMŠ (4.3 percent) and the Connect Slovenia movement (4 percent).

Conclusion

As the Russo-Ukrainian war also represents a danger of a larger humanitarian crisis which has already been recognized in form of the millions of refugees entering the European Union, the offers of humanitarian assistance might also be recognized as form of political campaigning. While the added value in regards to the refugee situation should overcome the concerns, it is still prudent to see how the new Slovenian government will provide the assistance to the Ukrainian government and people themselves. So far, the Slovenia has been very supportive in regards to their struggle against the Russian invaders.

On the other hand, the ongoing issues in media space and the concerns over the possible politicization of public media and inappropriate pressure that might compromise media freedom appears to remain an important topic during the last days before the election and the new government might be under the watchful eye of the public for some time.

