

Report from the event

Trans European Debate on migration, Bratislava

The event, organised by the Trans European Policy Studies Association (TEPSA) in cooperation with its Slovak member the Faculty of Social and Economic Sciences at Comenius University, took place at the Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs of the Slovak Republic on 18 September 2019.

The event was attended by more than 40 participants, including university students, high school students, representatives of NGOs (IOM, Globsec), state sector representatives (from the ministries and foreign police office), and interested citizens.

The debate opened with welcome words by TEPSA's Chairperson, Ass. Prof. Lucia Mokrá (Dean of the Faculty of Social and Economic Sciences at Comenius University). She noted that Bratislava is certainly a great place to discuss current migration and mobility due to its territorial position, the national agenda and national European discourse, and also due to the research done in relation to migration within the Slovak academia. The overall event was structured to cover the topic from different perspectives and also to involve different actors in the discussion.

a) Panel discussion

In the panel discussion, four speakers talked the issue of migration from different perspectives. Ambassador in charge of migration from Slovakia, H.E. Peter Stano presented ongoing discussion in the EU on migration, how this agenda is present in the creation of the new Commission, what this would mean for countries such as Slovakia and more broadly for Central Europe.

Secondly, TEPSA's Secretary-General Prof. Jaap de Zwaan (Erasmus University in Rotterdam) presented the state of play of the EU migration and asylum policy, with a focus on achievements and shortcomings.

Clarissa Tabosa (Comenius University in Bratislava) presented her research results focused on immigration policies in the V4 countries. She discussed restrictiveness in policies and the current securitized discourse on migration. Based on discourse analysis, she presented the two cases of the Czech Republic and Slovakia, where the main articulations of both countries reflect a two-level game of being critical towards the Union, but at the same time, reaffirming they belong to Europe.

Finally, Lucia Najšlová (Charles University in Prague) looked at the position of V4 and Slovakia towards wider questions of European solidarity, rights and responsibilities. She discussed in particular the case of Turkey, through which we can see how blurred the boundaries are between foreign and domestic policy.

After the presentations, participants engaged in a moderated discussion on the factors of dual behaviour of the CEE countries, on the historical concept of migration in these countries and on the concept of solidarity.

b) workshop on sensitive attitude to migration

An interactive workshop on attitudes to migrants discussed the differences between the socialisation, inclusion, and refusal of migrants. Participants had the opportunity to work in groups, to elaborate possible solutions and concrete policy recommendations for the government and other actors with the aim to improve the situation, to build policies based on facts and scientific evidence, instead of the subjective feelings or personal opinions.

c) topical workshops:

1. Myths on migration – The discussion focused on myths and hoaxes in relation to migration in media, social media and ongoing debates. The discussants concluded that a more responsible approach of the journalists and media should be applied and even the other actors (ministries, NGOs, experts etc.) should contribute to a more evidence-based discussion on the topic.

2. Migration and V4 – The discussion was connected to the inconsistency of the V4 countries in relation to migration policy, the system of “flexible solidarity” presented within the Slovak presidency in the Council, the refusal of the redistribution quotas and following steps from Commission against Hungary and Poland, and the one from Slovakia when suing the EU.

d) individual discussions on migration with diplomatic representatives – The initial findings of research on migration were presented. The ambassadors from present countries, diplomatic staff and trainees from embassies talked about the need of research on migration in cooperation with the political implications as well.