

Our Responsibilities Towards Refugees

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Topic

It is possible that EU countries, including the Czech Republic and Slovakia, will see more refugees in the coming years.

What responsibilities do people, organizations, and governments have towards refugees? More specifically, what responsibilities does your community (whether you define that as your town, your region, your nation, or otherwise) have towards refugees? What are the best approaches for dealing with the situations of refugees?

Once you have defined the responsibilities toward refugees, what work will need to be done to fulfill those responsibilities in your community?

Refugees and citizens in our country? Why not? Look at London!

What I thought in the very first moment of thinking of foreigners who want to live in our country was a clear statement-question: Why should not they? The source of confidence in my idea lay in last year's and still very fresh experience of multicultural society of London, the capital of England.

Imagine a long wide boulevard stretching itself beyond your eye-level, overcrowded with people. I am speaking of the Oxford Street, the well of all possible versions of human faith and the color of skin. However, the atmosphere of the rush-hour street quickly embraces all passers-by and pulls them in. Nobody is watching you, everybody is caring of their own affairs and privacy. But that is a subject of an other debate.

Have you ever discussed a topic, anywise day-to-day, with a foreigner? Could you ever pray the beauty of the daughters of the Pyrenees peninsula? Talking to and being with strange people you will definitely find the great truth the meritorious quotation „As many languages you are able to speak with, so many times you are a man.“

From my personal view, contact with foreign and strange people in general is somewhat a challenge that enriches me by suggesting different ways of behavior and thinking, a challenge that finally changes into something I like and haunt.

The majority do not want them here Why do I? A change of mind of the youth....of the world? Globalization?

Before I touch the nub of the problem I will make a note on the innate inter-generation antagonism on the question of social progress, which can be more simply called the question of accepting new trends. As I have already stated aliens in the state are welcome by a considerable part of people. These I identify mostly as young and educated people as well. I think the young people (teens, 20, 30...) are those who may recognize and in-a-way accept new trends in company, even with particular lack of education.

The trend is closely connected to certain ideas: globalization and the power of money and the others which can be understood as consequences of the globalization (then the globalization is the recent all-mighty power moving the world) or stand-alone phenomena, namely the global job market, unifying of symbols of success and popularity (worldwidely respected brands of clothes and food, representatives of popular culture followed by the youth all around the world, famous wealthy persons), tendencies leading to the world domination of one language - English, yet unthought-of future of the Internet and mighty of computers that set their rule over the Planet with absolute confidence and with no exception or step-aside, shifting of personal values of man and a great many of others.

From the wide scope of the meanings of „values“ I choose this one: the role of the

state, nation and tradition.

I think only some people see the fact that times have changed. Next time it will be common experience to see different people (color of skin) in the streets, on the other side of the desk, next to you in the bus and in the row of applicants for a job.

Modern world: question of role of nation and state in organizing the peoples lives.

It is eminently important to learn that the nation and state as general terms evoke different connotations than it did in the second half of the nineteenth century. As I said, young and educated people are those I identify as those who grasp it.

How is this manifested? Indications of putting less personal importance on state & nation can be observed in following phenomena. Spending a three-day weekend in Alps is not perceived as a rare achievement of the upper 10.000 rich or brave ones. Travelling abroad many times a year is accepted as a standard, vice versa. (Czech) people like the foreign countries and the people there, they want to acquaint with them. Global business force customers, i.e. all of us not to feel any borders. Travelling in the European Union is extremely comfortable (the Euro currency, uniform documents). Studying and working abroad is going to become as routine as it is in your country.

What I want to say is that the number of people who are willing to cling to values such as Czech nation, endearment to the traditional folk habits and custom, to the folklore, belief in the singularity of the Czech character & hands & historical deal steadily decreases. Instead, multitude of people who regard these values as irrational, irrelevant and even redundant gets in weight. Probably, they do not see them. But they like (even enjoy!) them, however, they do not treat them in a particular way, which means they are not willing to fight for them. There are other things to be done.

Things are not so easy. Give people three days without bread and your state will face revolution. Let some aliens of relatively less attractive appearance take on a bus and watch the reaction of co-passengers. The sensation of being threaten by an intruder who definitely wants to damage *our* state and a sudden feeling of a strong inter community and similarity among yet disaffected group of people takes a rapid increase.

Clash of ideas of refugees and migration in general

As I have shown, theoretically there are almost any obstacles to aliens living or settling down there in the Czech Republic. *Dear friend, live where you want, I don't care...*

But not so in practice. Whenever a numerous group of foreign people appears a natural psychological reaction takes its place: we are afraid of them, we want to define ourselves from them. This affect maximizes when the other group does not want to assimilate (different language, clothes). Secondly and at the same time, nobody desires to pay for living to a foreigner who they have absolutely none connection to. The question of money is a really complex problem.

Yet I have not open out fully the term of aliens. In particular, these are refugees. In 2003 they were mainly from the Russian federation (including Chechnya), Ukraine, the Slovak Republic and from some Asian countries¹; there were 11296 asylum seekers altogether in the Czech Republic in 2003², from which 208 persons were accepted - that is 105 persons more than in 2002.

However mature the epoch is, still it has stayed beyond dispute that people who are forced to flee their homes from some appalling reasons (war, civil conflict, political strife, human rights abuse) could rely on the Czech refugee system. Grants of settlement - a government decision to allow someone to permanently remain in the Czech Rep. – are quite rare.

Stable points in discussion and an integrated view.

The sure facts of any debate on refugees are:

The people of the host country are not willing to spend enough money on refugees. Czech people have the experience of having been helped by a foreign state (people escaping to exile during communism), i.e. they have a moral duty to help the others now when the situation got up.

The Law of Nature says that members of one group have to be similar (language, life manners and basic values of the community).

It is either necessary to cooperate within the framework of the international organizations (e.g. UNHCR³) treating refugees and follow the common politics of the EU⁴, both in order to keep peace and the world sure-footed.

A refugee is a person who "owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality, and is unable to or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country..."⁵ Probably majority of us is not able to imagine the dread of being a refugee. Nevertheless, some applicants are not in such a situation they would deserve a special care by the Czech state (*mere* economical reasons).

Conclusion

The definition of refugee according to the *1951 Convention*⁶ has been already mentioned. Refugees are in grave need, they can only hardly turn back to where they have just got away from (note: Sure there are some who belong rather to the category of economical

¹ <http://www.mvcr.cz/uprchlici/statvse.html>

² http://www.unhcr.cz/czech_stats.htm

³ United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, <http://www.unhcr.ch>

⁴ http://www.europa.eu.int/pol/justice/index_en.htm

⁵ <http://www.unhcr.ch> – Protecting refugees - FAQ

⁶ <http://www.unhcr.ch/1951convention/>

travellers) and they ask us: Can we stay here, in the Czech Republic⁷?

Why should we do anything? It costs money and time, does not it? But think it out.

It was not until 1918 when the Czech state reached its independence and regrettably this merry period took no longer than 20 years. Czech people had to face out another 40 bitter years of the communist rule. In both examples Czech politicians, artists and citizens found support in abroad. It is not only the expression of good will to accept a refugee. It may be regarded as the expression of historical memory⁸.

From the perspective of international politics it is very dangerous to let grow a flashpoint into a place where friction among people produces war, in fact. To provide against this some treaties are being concluded.

The resultant, groundbreaking, 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees subsequently helped millions of civilians to rebuild their lives and has become “the wall behind which refugees can shelter,” says Erika Feller, director of the Department of International Protection of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). “It is the best we have, at the international level, to temper the behavior of states.”⁹

The Czech Republic has covenanted itself to abide rules set by many conventions it has signed.

The very up-to-date trend is that with respect to the resistant decline of number of inhabitants of the Czech Republic not only the demographer but newly also the politics ring the bell for attention to a bumper menace: there is no working power on the market and soon there will be less than 6 mil. of the Czechs.

Facing this danger, the system of selective granting permits of living and working in the Czech Republic was launched. Missing professions (usually requiring higher education) are highly sought-after.

Our responsibility towards refugees is to accept refugees. The question is on the number of them, which depends on the will of politicians who work in keeping with the feelings of citizens, whose views, on the other hand, are elicited from their practical experience with refugees. The experience is basically directed by the steps of the Government.

In the number of accepted refugees the Czech Republic should not project out of the proportional standards of the EU or the Visegrad Group.

In relation to its last 100 year past the Czech Republic should focus on several states where human rights are being disaffirmed and help the people who fight for freedom.

Regarding the lack of workers on certain positions (and not only workmen! Some

⁷ For further information about refugees in the Czech Republic log on <http://www.mvcr.cz/uprchlici/>

⁸ The Czechs become known in the EU for their sympathizing with the Cuba dissidents. Especially the former Czech president Václav Havel has got his reputation as a human-rights fighter and Mr Pilip and Mr Bubenik as *important persons* drew world's attention to Cuban regime being kept in Cuban prison for some time. I hope Czech politicians never forget what it means to live under the rule of totalitarianism and will help either refugees of the state, either people suffering from the totality there in the state.

⁹ <http://www.unhcr.ch/1951convention/timeless.html>

hospitals, for example, face a deep insufficiency of physicians and fix this by taking on doctors from Near East) and constant diminution of inhabitants Czech authorities should roll out a system of offering a form of *green cards*¹⁰ on the base of active selection of desirable candidates – it means accepting those candidates who satisfy set conditions.

Decision-making over the ought to be quite strict, i.e. clear distinction between a refugee and a person seeking better life (they are treated in a different way). Some groups of applicants should be favoured: young couples, students and families.

What I regard as very important are the programs of assimilating the accepted ones into the society. Nor the Czechs nor the individual will not live in calm if they do not understand each other. The foreigners should tolerate and appropriate at least a part of Czech lifestyle, including our typical yet unusual extent of secularisation, for example. Czech authorities should introduce job-seeking and educational programs for those who need it. The result of this could be the positive reaction of Czech majority in society.

¹⁰ "What Rights Does A Green Card Give ?" A "Green Card" gives you the legal right to live and work in the United States, permanently. You may apply for many government jobs. You have the right to sponsor some relatives for Green Cards. You may keep your present citizenship, and you may apply for U.S. citizenship at a later time. Green Card holders also receive health, education, and other benefits.
From: <http://www.usagreencard.com/faq.htm>