

Positions of Leading European Parties Concerning the Migration Issue (The electoral processes in Europe)

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ABSTRACT

The scientific paper is devoted to migration flows as one of the most urgent and acute unresolved issues in Europe. Migrants and refugees have already become an integral part of European society, but quite often, this tendency leads to growing tensions and anxiety among the indigenous population. It is worth noting that not every state, not every political party, is prepared to implement and support an open migration policy. Therefore, the author describes the positive and negative consequences of migration policy as part of political parties' programmes in Austria, Germany, and France; analyses public attitudes to migration flows and the views of the aforementioned countries' leading parties on the implementation of a common migration regime. The shortage of migrants as 'cheap labour' during the COVID-19 pandemic may cause an economic downturn. The process of taking relevant measures to stabilize the situation will be discussed as well.

INTRODUCTION

Currently, the migration issue remains the most urgent unsolved political problem, especially for the Western countries. In 2015, Europe experienced a migration crisis as a result of the resettlement of more than 1.5 million refugees or so-called "people who are seeking international protection and assistance" from Syria, Afghanistan, and the Middle East countries, which are characterized by military and political instability. However, neither a state nor a political party was ready to carry out and support an open migration policy.

We are going to describe the positive and negative consequences of migration policy as part of political parties' programs and analyze how the shortage of migrants as a labour force influenced Austria, Germany, and France during the COVID-19 pandemic. The views of the leading political parties on this issue will be analyzed as well.

1. Literature Review

A significant contribution to the study of positions of leading European parties regarding the migration issue was made by such researchers as Ezhov D.A. (2018), Gosselin A. (2020), Hristova T. (2020),

Karolewski I.P. (2018), Rodionova M.E. (2021), Ruxandra P. (2020), Seleznev S.D. (2018), Schweitzer V. (2017), etc.

2. Materials and Methods

This article is an overview. That is why the main method of research is a comparative analysis of European political parties' attitudes towards migration flows and their influence on social and economic aspects of life. Methods of scientific description, comparative analysis, random sampling, and induction have also been used to conduct this research paper.

The main sources of statistical information analyzed in this article are International Organization for Migration (2020) and Europe's essential workers: Migration and pandemic politics in Central and Eastern Europe during COVID-19 (2020). Much attention is paid to the research carried out by a leading Russian university with a focus on electoral processes and migration flows – the Financial University under the Government of the Russian Federation.

3. Results

This scientific paper argues that, due to political disaffection from national politics, political parties have incentives to make migrant families their electoral targets even if this process involves tailoring exchanges and employing different electoral methods. In return, their expectation is for migrant families to respond favorably to these practices and to cast their votes for the targeting

party. The reasoning is quite simple. Either because the exchanged goods/favours bring migrant families economic gains or because these migration-exposed voters just need extra motivation to turn out to vote, electoral targeting should be effective among these voters. During COVID-19, pandemic migration systems played a double role in policy change: as structures for policy diffusion and as venues for migrants' agency.

The article is of interest to a broad readership, including candidates for political office, electoral campaign managers, party leaders, students studying in the areas of "Political Science," "International Relations," "Foreign Policy Studies," etc.

4. Austria's position concerning migration: analysis of regulation documents

Austria is a country with high social security, high standards of life and economic well-being, which is why it attracts citizens of other states. Therefore, Austria's migration processes are becoming interesting for research.

At the beginning of 2017, about 1,352,000 foreign citizens lived, and at present, there are 1,439,401 people, which is 0.43 percent more as compared with 2018. In the same year, Austria received 87 000 new immigrants, on a long-term or permanent basis (including changes of status and free mobility), -11.6 percent compared to 2017. This figure comprises 65.2 percent of immigrants benefitting from free mobility, 6.4 percent of labor migrants, 10.7 percent of family members (including accompanying family)

and 17.2 percent of humanitarian migrants. Around 3,800 permits were issued to tertiary-level international students and 8,700 to temporary and seasonal labour migrants (excluding intra-EU migration). In addition, 120,000 intra-EU postings were recorded in 2018, a decrease of 15 percent compared to 2017. These posted workers are generally on short-term contracts (International Organization for Migration, 2020).

Large-scale migration results in the increase of unplanned state budget expenditures for supporting and helping refugees, which is an additional burden on the Austrian state since financial losses do not return. The social assistance system for refugees is based on several documents, for instance, the Agreement between the Federation and the Federal Länder on joint measures for basic assistance to vulnerable categories of foreigners (The Legal Information System of the Republic of Austria, 2021).

Based on this agreement, the standardization of the assistance-providing system has become known. Thus, it enumerates the maximum state costs for supporting refugees, which include housing, food, insurance, allowance, medical services payment, and others.

Dealing with the consequences of the migration crisis requires certain measures. Therefore, the Federal Agency for Refugees and Foreigners (BFA) has introduced Federal Act governing the general statements on political asylum. In addition, after the

mass flow of refugees, the Federal Agency personnel was forced to expand the number of its membership (Rodionova, 2021).

After the adoption of the "open doors" policy in the EU countries, the rate of crime committed by migrants began to increase, scaring away many tourists. At first, the Austrian government adopted this policy of Angela Merkel, but it was soon criticized, and Austria had to tighten ways of solving the migration crisis (Belokonev et al., 2018). For example, they introduced compulsory social work for unemployed migrants, attendance at language courses, etc.

It is believed that migration flows influenced the presidential election in 2016. As a result, some changes occurred, and federal chancellor, Christian Kern from the Social Democratic Party (SDPA), entered the political arena. This party, which held the position from 2016 to 2017, considered it necessary to cancel the country's participation in the distribution of quotas for the admission of foreign citizens. The Anti-Migration Austrian Freedom Party (AFP) under the leadership of N. Hofer came out as well and, standing for tightening up the control over immigrants, has begun to gain popularity since 2015, but it did not manage to get several votes, so the Green Party with Alexander Van der Bellen at the head won. He clearly expressed his position on refugees and agreed to accommodate a large number of immigrants in Austria (Rodionova, 2018).

In 2019, the Austrian People's Party (APP), with Sebastian Kurz at the head, won in the 27th parliamentary election (Rodionova, 2017). Antiimmigration issues became the main points in the programme of the incoming coalition, and pursuing the same tasks, and the Austrian Freedom Party found much in common with its policy. The key provisions in the country's domestic policy of the people's party about migrants were as following: improvement of control over immigration, acceleration of the migrants' deportation process, an increase of security in Austria, struggle with illegal migration and advancement of the effectiveness of the asylum operation for refugees.

After the interview with Sebastian Kurz, we have learnt that he is going to continue the policy according to the course that has been chosen in the field of migration before. Thus, the new Government pointed out the main migration measures such as obligatory knowledge of the language (German) by migrants, respect for the Constitutional Values of Austria, the fight against political Islam, and the requirement of obtaining citizenship to complete the integration process. Thus, even though every year there is a decrease in the number of subjects applying for refugee status (after the crisis against refugees in 2015), the European migration crisis remains critical not only for Austria but also for the EU as a whole. Therefore, stabilization measures in refugee countries and the introduction of a common

migration regime remain significant for all states (Gribovsky, 2019).

5. Positions of German parties regarding migration policy

The examples of German parties, such as CDU (Christian Democratic Union)/CSU ([Christian Social Union](#)), SPD (Social Democratic Party) and AfD (Alternative for Germany, *Alternative für Deutschland*), are used to study their attitudes towards existing migration policy, suggested ways of developing the migration sphere and tackling the urgent problems (Rodionova, 2018).

The analysis of German migration policy is extremely important since Germany is one of the leading states of the European Union. That is why many EU countries choose their migration policy following the actions and decisions taken by Germany. Germany influences significantly the adoption of decisions and legislation that extend over the entire territory of the European Union.

We should start with the ruling CDU/CSU party. Its programme concerning migration policy is linked to the Bundestag elections of 2017. The CDU promotes a relatively loyal migration policy; however, at the same time tightens it. For example, (Deutsche Welle, 2019) quotes an excerpt from a program that proposes a reduction of social assistance funds for immigrants from Syria and neighboring states (*Neue Regeln für die Einwanderung*).

The *DER SPIEGEL* magazine also provides information on Germany's migration policy, which is

characterized as loyally aggressive. One of the party's proposals is to resettle migrants in the transit zone outside the EU borders. Another one is to tighten the rules for obtaining a residence permit and political asylum. In addition, Germany requires every migrant to integrate into German culture in order to protect its national traditions and ensure the safety of the Indigenous population (Gribovsky, 2019). These measures are essential since some actions that are normal for refugees are considered inappropriate for Germans or forbidden by law. Integration is also necessary to mitigate religious conflicts and anti-Catholic sentiments among Muslim refugees.

Such migration policy is brought about due to the desire to get a majority of votes in the elections, and therefore is society- taking into account the mood of the society, the members of which are dissatisfied with the previous migration policy. That is why the ruling party at the time of the elections reoriented its policy in favour of the native population of Germany, reflecting a more loyal extent all the wishes of the society and its mood regarding refugees from Muslim countries (Belokonev et al., 2018).

As for the SPD, this party is quite positive for refugees. The party highly appreciates the principles of humanity, and because of this, its migration policy aims to help the distressed in Syria. Therefore, the websites of the fraction (party) frankly inform that the policy of this party will develop in the direction of preservation of social assistance to migrants. For

example, the article by Uta Vogt represented on the SPD official website refers to the development of special courses for integrating refugees into culture and society, as well as to the possibility of a later migration of the refugee family to Germany.

Besides, the SPD notes that the rights of forced refugees are determined by the general human rights provision and are equal with the rights of the indigenous nation, and the upper level of the number of immigrants cannot be limited as stated in the global declarations of human rights, including everyone's rights to political asylum. In its election campaign, SPD promotes loyalty to refugees, stating that all people are equal in their rights. In addition, according to its programme declared, this party insists only on the voluntary return of refugees to their homeland, without the legislative opportunity to deport those who have officially confirmed their refugee/distressed status (Gribovsky, 2019). As for the AfD party, its program is extremely radical in all areas of activity. Especially radical this fraction is in social and migration issues. That is why it is necessary to look upon this party in a more detailed way.

AfD calls for an extreme tightening of the migration order under the slogan "Schutz der Nationen" (protect the nation – *germ.*). Propaganda for the liberation of Germany from refugees is the main idea of the party, the name of which is translated as "Alternative for Germany" (Spiegel, 2019).

AfD suggests that social support should not be provided to people who, due to circumstances or military conflicts, have been forced to migrate to their country. The extreme radicalism of the party, as well as its foundation, is caused by several acts of violence by refugees against the native population of Germany.

It can be noted that the party reflects the opinion of radical society members regarding the migration and integration issues of Syrian refugees (Karolewski, 2019). It is no less importance than the party collected a sufficient number of votes not only to enter the final round of elections but also to seriously compete with the leading CDU party.

The CDU is currently the leading party, which means that the policy of loyally aggressive attitudes towards migrants and refugees has found public approval. However, German society is also prone to more explicit aggression towards the *Asylants* (from German *Asylant*), as evidenced by the relative number of votes for the AfD party (Gribovsky, 2019).

6. France's attitude towards migrants

As for the other leading state of the European Union – France – its migration policy can be observed in the example of the 2017 presidential election. Candidates from several political parties were represented in the elections, but candidates from the following three parties entered the second round: the Socialist Party, the Republicans and the National Front Party. The migration policy of these parties

should be considered in detail since all three parties are competing, which means that they partially determine the country's migration policy by voting at parliamentary sessions (Rodionova, 2021). In addition, they determine the EU's general policy on refugee issues, as these parties receive a certain number of mandates in the European Parliament.

The first party under consideration from the point of view of migration issues is the ruling party – the Socialist one. This party's programme by its migration policy is similar to the SPD party in Germany. It also promotes the idea of abolishing the right of admission for migrants and implies a strict restriction on the activities of migrants inside the country for a certain period at the beginning of their stay. That is, migrants are accepted as the working force and sent to vacancies that the main population does not apply for. These are usually low-paid jobs in the most important sectors of the economy or in industries that require development. Such policies allow the state to benefit from asylum providing, not only to bear the costs of social packages for refugees (Orehova, 2015). Therefore, for example, some industries are developing thanks to the influx of immigrants from Syria and Africa (Karolewski, 2019).

As for the Republican Party, its policies are similar to those of the CDU/CSU, as this party is promoting policy tightening to some extent. The main point in the case of the Republican fraction is to limit the number of refugees and strengthen the instruments

for their integration, including the provision of social assistance (however, reducing social payment per person compared to the present) and the provision of vacant jobs and housing. In general, its politics duplicates CDU decisions in some way, however, taking into account the sentiment and mentality of the French communities (Migration: Schützt die Nationen, 2019).

The National Front Party, in its turn, is moderately radical depending on the sectors of party ideology. It means that this is a right-wing party, and therefore it upholds the significance of the nation and national values. That is why the migration policy of this party is extremely radical. The party expresses its striving to close the EU borders for refugees, including the tightening up of the arrival in the EU (especially in France). Migration policies are so radical that they concern not only Syrian and African migrants but also migrants from European Union countries. This is proved by the point of the programme, which is aimed at abolishing the Schengen zone of the EU. The policies of France's leading parties also reflect the mood of the society regarding refugees, as well as the EU's general policy, which follows the principles of humanism (Rodionova, 2021).

Many EU parties consider migration and the probability of the spread of HIV to be important political issues. According to the French Collaborative Institute on Migrations, 58 percent of sub-Saharan migrants who acquired HIV after migration were infected during the first six years in

France. HIV acquisition during settlement was found to be linked to short/transactional partnerships and lack of a resident permit. Forty-two percent of migrants had contracted HIV after settlement. After settlement, HIV acquisition was associated with short/transactional but also with concurrent partnerships and not with social hardship. (Gosselin et al., 2020).

The majority of HIV post-migration acquisition occurs during the settlement period: comprehensive combination prevention programmes among recently arrived migrants are needed. However, long-term migrants are also at risk for HIV through multiple partnerships. Prevention programmes should address the different profiles of migrants at risk for post-migration HIV acquisition. Undoubtedly, the indigenous population is concerned about these statistics, leading to growing tensions and anxiety due to the constant influx of migrants (Gosselin et al., 2020).

7. The COVID-19 pandemic and migration flows in the EU

The COVID-19 pandemic has exposed failures of European integration and employer-employee relations that preceded the virus. Temporary and seasonal workers had suffered from exploitation, abuse, and contract violations before, but their precarity had often gone unnoticed. The pandemic transformed poor and overcrowded accommodation, unequal or no access to medical care, and inhumane work conditions into a major risk to public health for

many migrant workers. Some argue that European labor market integration creates “a rift in the geography of production and social reproduction” where “tasks of sustaining health, social networks, and social security are relegated to the home country” (Hristova, 2020).

Despite rising unemployment, Germans, Austrians and French were in no hurry to accept jobs vacated by the departure of migrants. When employers in these countries tried to recruit students and people who had lost their jobs in restaurants and bars, they realized that many of them were interested in part-time work and were not prepared to work 12 hours a day like many migrants (Ruxandra, 2020). France projected a shortage of 200,000 agricultural workers; Germany needed 400,000.

Until now, during the COVID-19 pandemic, the costs of caring for Europe's essential workers have disproportionately fallen on Central and Eastern European countries. The situation will likely continue to deteriorate. The COVID-19 pandemic exposes our profound dependence on migration, even in times of lockdown and border closure. Besides, it also reveals what disasters can result from governments' failures to cooperate (Hristova, 2020).

Conclusion

Broadly speaking, migration policy in Europe is linked to the electoral process in countries by reflecting the general opinion of the masses on migration issues. It is also important to bear in mind that migration policies differ for citizens of Union

states, EU member states and external states that are not associated with the EU.

It is important to note that the main goal of election campaigns is to gain audience loyalty and increase the number of voters for the party or candidate. And this is achieved only by reflecting the thoughts of the chosen target audience, which determines the orientation of the party's ideas.

The party policy depends on the layer selected. For example, radical parties and their programmes are designed to be supported by the middle and the working class because, firstly, this class makes the majority of the population, and secondly, because the government, with a loyal migration policy, gives refugees jobs, rightfully belonging primarily to the population, to ensure a decent standard of living in the host country.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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