A Missing Piece: The Absence of Discussion About Integration Policy in the Slovak Migration Discourse[1]

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Abstract

In the current paper, we will explain how and why Slovak politicians have been largely unwilling to articulate the topic of migrant integration in recent years, even though up until 2015, international migration was at least a marginal topic of public debate in Slovakia. To this day, this topic remains mostly unexplored by both Slovak politicians and voters. Since migration policy is a synthesis of immigration, asylum, and integration policies, we assume that the migration discourse will be equivalently structured. Although the integration of foreigners has traditionally been an important part of migration policy in the larger world, we have found that this topic has been marginalised in Slovak public discourse, i.e. it is usually not part of the political discussion here. Integration is a marginal topic of this political discourse because Slovak politicians prefer to articulate migration as a threat to public order, identity, culture, and religion. Slovak politicians reject migration because they assume that migrants are unable or unwilling to integrate. The debate on migrant integration began to emerge only in the context of the war in Ukraine and immigration from Ukraine. Still, state institutions have not yet presented a systematic approach to integrating foreigners into the autochthonous society.

Keywords: *Migration; migration discourse; immigrant integration; integration policy; Slovakia; security*

Introduction

Until 2015, the topic of international migration had been a marginal political discourse topic in Slovakia (Billý, 2012; Androvičová, 2015; Bacik et al., 2021; Letavajová, 2021; Privara, 2022). Until this period, scientists, academics, representatives of the third sector, or civil servants of institutions that primarily dealt with some aspect of migration (immigration, asylum, or integration) had usually commented on migration or migration policy. The small number of migrants and the low interest of refugees in applying for asylum in Slovakia can explain this phenomenon (Androvičová, 2015). The low number of migrants who come mainly from the Member States of the European Union or culturally-related countries and also their ability to integrate into society were the reasons why migration was a professional rather than a political issue (Přívara and Rievajová, 2021). Political actors were not interested in this topic. The election programs of political parties either did not offer ideas on this topic at all or only mentioned certain selected aspects of migration, usually asylum policy.

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A more significant shift in interest in international migration had not been recorded in Slovakia until 2015 when there was a large wave of migration on the European continent (Liďák, 2016). It was the case even though the actors of these migration processes were headed for the states of Western Europe rather than for post-communist countries. Although the territory of Slovakia was not used even as the main transit route, the topic of international migration significantly influenced the Slovak political discourse, especially several weeks before the parliamentary elections. These took place in Slovakia in March 2016. Politicians managed to grasp this topic so successfully that migration became the central topic of the election campaign for a while. Despite the considerable discussions immediately before the parliamentary elections, the attention later turned to internal societal issues (such as the social status of teachers and nurses). However, the issue of international migration remained present in the political debate, but no longer at such a strong intensity.

The migration situation in 2015 and 2016 in Slovakia was reflected not only in the presence of migration in political discourse but also in the increased interest of scientists and academics in research of this phenomenon. The academics naturally focused on political debate and decisions concerning this issue. Within government and related circles, views regarding migration took on a distinctly negative character. As in other V4 countries (Gruszczak, 2021), the anti-immigrant narrative in Slovakia has become a permanent part of public discourse. Slovak political leaders emphasised the dangers of migration processes, underlined the security risks, and directly identified Muslim refugees as dangerous to the domestic population. Not only were right-wing extremists hostile, but representatives of other relevant political parties from the democratic center represented migration as a factor threatening the security of society.

For this reason, it is understandable that academics dealing with the migration discourse turned their attention primarily to the security aspects of international migration. Security and threats have become the core of the Slovak migration discourse. As in other European countries much earlier (Huysmans, 2000; Belas et al., 2022; Demirkol, 2022), migration was also presented by Slovak political actors as a threat to public order, identity, culture, and religion (Androvičová, 2015; Goda and Ušiak, 2016; Bolečeková and Olejárová, 2018; Tabossa, 2020; Gavurova and Kubák, 2021; Štefančík et al., 2021). However, we consider it essential to move to the next level of migration research and, in addition to the security aspects, to examine the issue of immigrant integration. Our analysis aims to determine how Slovak politicians reflect on immigrant integration. We are interested in how the Slovak discourse on integration is formed and which topics Slovak politicians consider essential when discussing the integration of immigrants. We can assume that with the increasing number of foreigners residing in Slovakia, the issue of their integration should become relevant. Therefore, we are primarily interested in how the Slovak political elite perceives, interprets, and articulates the integration issue.

The integration of migrants is a natural part of the migration discourse in Western European societies (van Dijk, 2018), as is the subject of immigration and asylum procedure. In addition to immigration and asylum policy, integration policy is an area of migration policy (Schulte, 2016; Stojarová, 2019; Gavurova et al., 2021a). By analysing the migration discourse, we soon discover that the integration of foreigners in Slovakia has been marginalised and neglected by political actors. At the same time, the overall outcome of the process of coexistence of the majority society with allochthonous minorities depends on the ability of migrants to integrate,

speak the language, accept the culture of the society of the destination country, and, conversely, on the ability of the indigenous society to accept foreigners as equal citizens. However, the integration process's result depends not only on the factors mentioned above but also on the nature of the integration discourse.

Methodology

In this part, we present the results of a discourse analysis of excerpted political texts since 2015, when international migration began being discussed more intensively in Slovakia. Thus, our focus is on political language, political vocabulary and political discourse as the totality of all speech acts used in political debates and on the rules of public policy, verified by tradition and experience (Dulebová, 2012). According to Ľubomír Guzi (2016, 140), "political discourse is a part of political communication with its specific language, usually referred to as the 'language of power'." Jana Lauková and Eva Molnárová (2018, 26) see it as "a wide range of methods that are selected according to the research objectives. Discourse analysis consists of several methodological steps, and there is no restriction as to which of these steps is necessary." Therefore, the authors present it in Foucaultian terms as "looking at and examining the points at which texts (systematically) open up into different semantic spheres."

According to Van Dijk (1997), two method groups can be observed in discourse research: qualitative and quantitative. The first group includes methods such as context, gestures, sounds, syntax, meaning, rhetoric, speech acts, interaction, conversation, narrative, argumentation, or genres such as news reports or parliamentary debates. The second group includes corpus linguistic methods to study vast text corpora, experimental methods in the psychology of discourse processing, or ethnographies for studying discourse in its social and cultural contexts. The same division is also applied in the case of migration discourse. There are many ways to engage in qualitative discourse analysis. Specialised studies may directly focus on just one aspect of discourse, for instance, the structures and uses of pronouns, metaphors, or argumentation. As presented here, a more general methodology for studying migration discourse proposes a comprehensive, systematic introduction to various levels and dimensions of discourse structure and its uses and functions in the social and political context (van Dijk 2018, 231). Our research uses political discourse analysis as a qualitative analysis of published texts. We focus on the content of political outputs. We are interested in what politicians say about migration and integration, in what situational context they use the topic of migration and integration, what they specifically express, which issues of migration policy (immigration, asylum, integration) they consider essential, and which topics they do not articulate at all. The corpus of the examined text consists of parliamentary speeches, program documents, including election programs, and public statements of political actors published in various types of media (print media, social networks, television discussions) or on the websites of various state institutions. The statements of politicians, who were politically active at that time, on the subject of migration and integration were published on the websites of public institutions. An important tool of our research is the digital archive of the Slovak Parliament. This archive allows searching the speeches of MPs by keywords such as integration and integration policy, but also migrants, immigrants, migration policy, and foreigners.

The main actors in political discourses are holders of public offices, such as the prime minister, president, members of government, or parliament. Therefore, it is understandable that the

analysis's main object will be the different types of political expressions, written or expressed verbally. These statements become political "if they and their talk are contextualised in such communicative events such as cabinet meetings, parliamentary sessions, election campaigns, rallies, interviews with the media, bureaucratic practices, protest demonstrations, and so on" (van Dijk 1997, 14). It may be questionable what the adjective "political" means in this context. By this, we mean politicians primarily pursue a power interest by presenting this kind of topic. They aim to acquire a share in political power to promote their (party) interests. Since spoken and written texts are a form of social and political action, we perceive political discourse as a political act, as part of a political process. At the end of this process, it is not only the acquisition of power but also its maintenance and defence in the next election.

According to van Dijk (1997), not only professional politicians are involved in the political process. Political processes affect a wide range of citizens. "All these groups and individuals, as well as their organisations and institutions, may participate in the political process, and many are actively involved in political discourse. A broad definition of politics implies a vast extension of the scope of the term 'political discourse' if we identify such practices by all participants in the political process" (van Dijk 1997, 13). Due to limited space, we decided to focus on the statements of professional politicians. We analyse public statements of Slovak politicians on the integration of migrants. The corpus of texts under study consists of parliamentary speeches of MPs and statements published on the websites of public institutions, on YouTube, on social networks and the websites of political parties. We quote some text fragments to illustrate some Slovak MPs' thinking better. These politicians come from different types of parties, ranging from radical left-wing (Smer-SD) and right-wing parties (ĽSNS, Republika), through liberal parties (SaS) to conservative parties (NOVA) and Christian Democrats (KDH). The party affiliation is indicated in parenthesis next to the parliamentarian's name.

Integration policy as part of migration policy

In scholarly discourse, we encounter several definitions of what integration actually means. In this part, immigrant integration will be understood, as defined by the National Partnership for New Americans, as "a dynamic, two-way process in which immigrants and the receiving society work together to build secure, vibrant, and cohesive communities, with several components that focus on including immigrants' access to mainstream institutions." Most Western countries now favour an approach that sees the integration of immigrants as a process of mutual accommodation between immigrants and the host society (van Riemsdijk and Basford, 2022). On the receiving state's side, many state and non-state actors are involved in the integration process (local government, non-profit organisations, educational institutions, and media) (Dixon, Bessaha and Post, 2018).

According to van Dijk (2018, 13), "one of the prominent properties described in the semantics of discourse is the way the actors or participants are referred to and described. Indeed, such discourse may mention "migrants", "immigrants", "refugees" or "foreigners", in general, or "Syrians" or people of other nationalities, in particular. The references may be generic (all migrants) or specific (a particular migrant), whether or not with proper names." Within the Slovak political migration discourse, we observe the absence of content differentiation between the terms migrant and refugee. Originally a neutral term, "migrant", under the

influence of the securitisation of international migration, has taken on a new connotation and is now mainly perceived negatively.

As the correct use of the terms "migrant" and "refugee" is absent, there is also a lack of interest in distinguishing between migration and asylum policy or a lack of interest in distinguishing between different levels of migration policy. We are aware that the definitions of migration policy vary. Gary P. Freeman (1992, 1145) defines migration policy as "state efforts to regulate and control entry into the national territory and to stipulate conditions of residence of persons seeking a permanent settlement, temporary work or political asylum." However, the definition thus conceived shows a particular deficit. It presupposes only a one-way movement of the population, while the provisions governing the opposite direction also fall within the context of migration policy. These include, for example, the rules of the host state for returning refugees to the country of origin if the circumstances for leaving the country of origin cease or support measures to motivate migrant workers to return home unless their employment is more profitable for the original employer. In the paper, we understand migration policy as a common name for the three sub-policies associated with addressing issues in the field of international migration, namely immigration policy, asylum policy, and integration policy. Under migration policy, we, therefore, understand a complex of state instruments regulating the entry of foreigners into its territory, the conditions of their residence, and their integration into society (Stojarová 2019).

Freeman, in his definition of migration policy, combines the issue of immigration and asylum. Although this definition does not explicitly mention integration issues, we can see that he is also aware of the issues related to integration (Freeman 1992, 1155). It is, therefore, essential to know the complexity of the state tools used to support the integration of foreigners into the society of the destination state as a crucial part of migration policy. In this article, we understand integration policy as a complex of state procedures aimed at successfully integrating and adapting immigrants to the new environment. It presupposes the creation of adequate conditions associated with housing, employment, career growth, the possibility of further education or retraining, and access to health, social and other services the state provides. The content of the integration policy is aimed at integrating foreigners into society so that after some time, they are no longer dependent on state support, can respect the legal and political system, culture, customs, and traditions, and master the official language of the members of the majority of autochthonous society (Goodman 2010). It means that the successful integration of migrants presupposes the active participation of both parties in a state that, through active politics, creates suitable living conditions for immigrants who, with a view to rapid integration, adopt, or at least respect, the legal and cultural traditions of autochthonous society.

Integration policy includes various strategies and instruments such as labour-market integration, living conditions, provision of healthcare, suppression of discrimination, promotion of education, and professional and language skills (Zubikova, 2021; Gavurova et al., 2021b; Přívara, 2021). Current national integration policies in Western Europe are based on the requirement of language proficiency and acceptance of the cultural identity and political values of the host country by foreigners (Millar, 2013; Joppke, 2017; Gavurova et al., 2021c). Knowledge of the language is one of the primary conditions for granting a narrow range of political rights. Mastering the host society's language has become the alpha and omega of successful integration. A wider range of political rights, i.e. opportunities for civic and political

participation, can be granted even without mastering the host country's language. However, granting political rights is, first of all, preceded by the guarantee of economic and social equality. Freedom to access the labour market is the starting point for a successful integration process. By active participation in the labour market, the foreigner gets rid of his/her dependence on state aid. The working team can be a suitable environment where a foreigner learns the language of the domestic society. In the work environment, a foreigner also creates close ties to the social environment and, according to colleagues' behaviour, creates a picture of the culture of domestic society.

Integration policy in migration discourse

According to Sara Wallace Goodman (2010, 769), "immigrant integration is, without doubt, one of the most pressing policies and social challenges that liberal nation-states currently face, and civic integration is an important and revealing response to this problem." One of the central themes of the integration discourse was the thesis of "failure of multiculturalism", i.e. "failure of integration". Also for this reason, "civic integration has been singled out as an alternative or an altogether new strategy of integration" (Goodman 2010, 754).

Political actors do not only address the question of who is to be admitted to the territory of a state, and under what conditions and for how long, but also how the state will support their integration process, access to the labour market and real estate holdings; the education system's efforts to absorb immigrants; under which conditions it will provide immigrants with citizenship; the extent to which the state will accept the cultural patterns of behaviour of allochthonous minorities; and, ultimately, how political actors will communicate their decisions to the public. Finally, the debate on integration is not only about what conditions migrants have to meet to be included but what attitude is to be taken by domestic society towards the possibility that migrants will be a permanent part of society. Integration is not a one-way process but presupposes the active participation of the domestic population (Grip 2020).

Compared to immigration discourse, the integration of migrants as part of the political discourse is more recent. Some countries, such as Germany and Austria, initially based their immigration policy on the assumption that invited workers would return after some time (Thränhardt 2005). As the stay of the invited workers was to be time-limited, there was no need for the state to take a systematic approach to integration. However, the assumption that the foreign workers would return after a certain period was not fulfilled. For this reason, the topic of integration came to the same level of importance as the topic of immigration. Specifically in Germany, the issue of integration got into the migration discourse to the same level as immigration only with the recognition of Germany as an immigration country and the adoption of the so-called Zuwanderungsgesetz in 2005, in which the state formulated a requirement for the integration of foreigners for the first time in legislation (Oberndörfer 2016).

In Western European countries, immigrant integration discourse was initially characterised by the question of which integration model to apply. In this geographical area, we could meet with different divisions of integration policies. Most were based on three basic models: French, British (Dutch or Swedish), and German. The German author Dietrich Tränhart (2005) distinguished only two basic types of integration policy in the European environment – French (assimilation) and British (multicultural), because Germany, based on the minimal

contact between migrants and the domestic population, practically did not address the issue of integration. In the assimilation model, migrants were perceived as equal members of the original society, provided that they adopted the cultural patterns of the host country.

On the other hand, the multicultural model did not presuppose pressure on immigrants to adopt cultural patterns of domestic society but instead recognised the legitimacy of different cultures and the equality of ethnic minorities. However, since the late 1990s, the model of civic integration has been promoted in Western Europe. Civic integration policies express the idea that successful incorporation into a host society rests not only on employment (economic integration) and civic engagement (political integration) but also on individual commitments to characteristics typifying national citizenship, specifically country knowledge, language proficiency, and liberal and social values" (Goodman 2010, 754).

According to Joppke (2017, 3), three elements characterise this model. Firstly, migration is perceived as an ongoing process, so "zero immigration" is no longer the leading political goal of national migration policies. The goal of stopping immigration is usually articulated only by right-wing populists (Kumorová, 2022; Halaskova et al., 2021; Zvada, 2022). Instead of asking how to stop migrants, they are looking for an answer to how to integrate them. Integration thus becomes a central theme of the migration discourse. Second, the model of civic integration is perceived as a retreat from multiculturalism. Some political leaders have described this model as an incorrect model of integration, which resulted in the creation of parallel societies. Instead of integration, migrants were marginalised. Finally, according to Joppke (2017, 3), in its initial phase, this model focused mainly on undesirable family migration, mostly from Muslim countries, which has long constituted the most significant chunk of migration into Western Europe. Despite similar trends and the application of the civic integration model, migration discourses differ from one Western European country to another. The nature of the discourse depends on several aspects, inter alia the nature of the previous integration policy, the goals of political actors, the presence of anti-immigration political parties, the demographic structure of allochthonous minorities, or the performance of the domestic economy. However, not every integration discourse has positive effects. The integration discourse, in which attitudes that disparage migrants prevail, can hurt the integration process (Kontos 2017; Galstyan, Grabowska and Bačiulienė, 2021).

## Overview of migration data and integration policy

We first present primary migration data to understand the integration policy's importance better. Until Slovakia joined the European Union in May 2004, there were not enough pull factors for immigrants. With Slovakia's accession to the European Union, the standard of living, as well as the average monthly wage started to rise, and favourable conditions for the employment of foreigners began to emerge. These economic factors contributed to the gradual growth of migrants living in Slovakia. Despite this, Slovakia is still the country with the lowest number of immigrants among the European Union countries and "the attitudes of the Slovak public toward immigration and refugees are some of the most hostile in the EU" (Findor et al., 2022, 79).

The number of migrants grew extraordinarily until 2019. In 2020, also under the influence of the global pandemic of the COVID-19 disease, the growth of the number of migrants slowed down (Přívara and Kiner 2021; Ganji and Metzker 2021). As of December 31, 2021, there were 167,519 foreigners with legal residence in Slovakia. Until 2014, migrants originating from

European Union member states predominated. In 2015, the trend changed, and the number of migrants from third countries gradually increased. In 2021, the total number of migrants with regular residence in Slovakia included 111,427 migrants from outside the European Union. Of these countries, the most significant share (49,131) had migrants from Ukraine, followed by citizens of Serbia (16,331), Vietnam (7,235), Russia (6,389), and Great Britain (2,795). In 2020, migrants originating from China were in fifth place. There is no public debate about how foreigners from these five countries should be integrated into society. However, there is also no information about the poor integration of these immigrants.

Given the war in Ukraine and the large refugee wave, these figures will change dramatically in 2022. Most Ukrainian refugees emigrated to Poland (Zawadzka-Paluektau 2022), but thousands of Ukrainians also sought asylum in Slovakia due to its location as a neighbouring state. On 10 August 2022, there were 84,752 residents of Ukraine registered in Slovakia who had applied for "temporary asylum" in Slovakia. Thousands of other Ukrainian refugees passed through Slovakia to other European countries. Since refugees from Ukraine arrived on the territory of Slovakia legally through border crossings and not through the green border, the exact data will be published by the state institutions in 2023.

Figure 1. Number of valid residencies for foreigners as of 31.12. until 2021 and as of 30.06. 2022
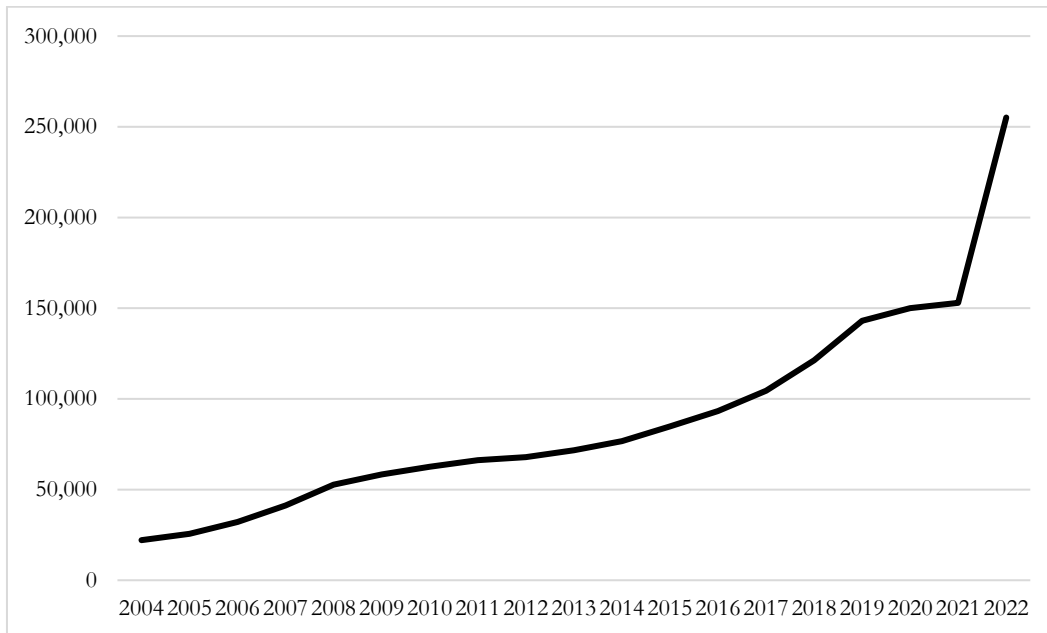
Source: BBFP – Bureau of border and foreign police, 2022.

Despite the gradually increasing number of migrants in Slovakia, state institutions have not paid sufficient attention to the development of integration policy. Integration policy has long been a neglected area of public policy. The process of integration policy-making only began in 2009 with the adoption of the first document regulating the integration of immigrants. Slovakia was one of the last European Union member states to adopt the concept of integration of foreigners. The previous legislative norms were outdated and did not correspond to the requirements of the European Union. The new concept of integration

policy was based on the necessity to harmonise legislation with EU legislation and to create a common EU integration policy. Given the membership in the Union, it was necessary to name a partner who would communicate with the institutions of the Union and the representatives of the Member States in this area of public policy. The concept of an integration policy did not emerge as a response to articulating the demands of individual migrant communities or public debate but as a demand from the European Union.

In 2021, the Government approved a document entitled "Migration Policy of the Slovak Republic With a View to 2025", which includes principles on the integration of migrants. In the document, the government defines integration as: "a continuous, long-term and dynamic reciprocal process of mutual respect and reciprocal recognition of the rights and obligations of all inhabitants." The government defines an integration model according to which immigrants are to comply with Slovak legislation and respect cultural realities, language, and traditions. Slovak authorities expect that immigrants will be able to integrate into the labour market, they will be able to speak the Slovak language, and they will have access to education, health care, social services, and housing. There is no update on the concept of integration policy: the valid document still remains from 2014, which does not correspond to the current situation on the issue of foreign migration to the territory of Slovakia (Seresová 2022).

Lack of discussion about integration policy in the Slovak migration discourse

We also attempted to identify the content of integration discourse in Slovakia within the analysis of migration discourse. We expected that if the country has the prerequisites for the growth of the number of migrants from year-to-year and migrants are interested in staying in Slovakia for a long time, then there is a demand for integration policy and discussion about the ways to integrate immigrants as effectively as possible into society. Despite the preconditions for further growth in the number of migrants living in Slovakia, the integration discourse exists. Still, it is in a marginal position compared to the immigration or asylum discourse, and its actors are mostly academics and NGOs dealing with migrant integration. This group also includes the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs employees responsible for creating an integration policy in Slovakia. However, they do not usually enter the public debate.

The reason for this situation is the neglect of the integration policy process. The integration of migrants in Slovakia has long been a marginal topic of public debate. The current document regulating the integration policy is from 2014 (Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Family, 2014), so it does not correspond to the current situation in the field of international migration.

The international research portal MIPEX (Migrant Integration Policy Index) in the report from 2019 indicated a slightly positive shift by two points. Still, with 39 points on the MIPEX 100-point scale, Slovakia is well below the average of all observed countries (the average MIPEX country scored 50). MIPEX ranked Slovakia 46th out of 52 evaluated countries. According to this assessment, Slovakia has very poor indicators in areas such as political participation, education access, labour market access, and citizenship. In contrast, it is best assessed in the area of anti-discrimination legislation (MIPEX 2019). MIPEX emphasises that if politicians present migrants as a threat, this will be reflected in an increase in distrust and fear among the local population. On the other hand, it leads to the social exclusion of the immigrants themselves. MIPEX thus also states the opinion presented above that a negatively tuned immigration discourse hurts the integration process.

MIPEX thus confirms our opinion, which we identified in the case of the Slovak migration discourse. Migration is presented as a threat by several politicians, which in turn complicates the integration process. At the same time, politicians do not usually talk about integration. In Slovakia, talking about integration is considered to be approving immigration. And the approval of immigration is perceived by a part of the public as damaging the interests of Slovakia culturally, economically, and politically. In such circumstances, it is challenging to discuss integration publicly and to raise the issue of migration as a topic of political discourse.

In the immigration discourse, there is an opinion that Slovakia cannot accept refugees because we cannot integrate them into Slovakia. The example which serves as proof of this statement is the socially excluded Roma community, many of whom live in poor conditions in Slovakia, segregated from the majority population.

> *"Slovakia has not been able to integrate the Roma who live here for a long time, and we are simply not able to integrate thousands to tens of thousands of people with completely different cultures and other life habits"* (Ľubomír Galko, SaS, 2015).

> *"We are not able to integrate our own Roma, of whom we have hundreds of thousands, how we can integrate people with a different way of life and religion"* (Robert Fico, Government of the Slovak Republic, Smer-SD, 2015).

> *"As if it is not enough that we have a gipsy problem here, hordes of Muslim immigrants are already pouring in on us"* (ĽSNS, 2016).

Slovak politicians also discuss integration. However, politicians lack personal experience with the implementation of integration policy. They present various stereotypes about the problems with the integration of migrants in Western Europe or the USA. Issues with integration in European countries serve as an argument concerning immigration policy. As politicians anticipate problems in the integration process, they support restrictive immigration policies and are negative about immigration.

> *"What are these areas? But today they are called no-go zones. But I dare say that these are normally annexed territories. […] This is not about integration. This is not integration at all. This is ordinary segregation"* (Igor Hraško, OĽaNO, 2015).

> *"These migrants [migrants from European countries in the US] have integrated into society. Experience with many Muslim communities in Western Europe shows that these migrants are not able to integrate"* (Daniel Lipšic, NOVA, 2015).

It follows from the above quotations that politicians in Slovakia also reflect on the topic of integration, but usually only as a supporting argument for their anti-immigration attitudes. The quoted statements have in common that when politicians talk about integration, they typically mean members of other cultures or religions, usually refugees. For this reason, the discussions often argue that multiculturalism has failed, so Slovakia cannot accept migrants. We also find in the professional literature that multiculturalism has failed (Kymlicka 2012; Ossewaarde 2014). However, politicians do not say that multiculturalism is no longer the current concept of integration of foreigners but that the model of civic integration is the dominant integration approach today. Likewise, politicians do not reflect at all on the fact that the integration policy can apply to all migrants interested in long-term residence in Slovakia, regardless of ethnicity or religion.

> *"We are a small and ethnically homogeneous Christian nation. If multiculturalism fails in places like Paris and Brussels, why should we try it here?"* (Ľuboš Blaha, Smer-SD, in Lerner, 2016).

> *"The countries of Western Europe have already learned bitterly from the failure of multiculturalism, which has changed their ethnic, religious and, above all, security situation"* (Milan Uhrík, ĽSNS, 2017).

> *"This means a total threat to the Slovak labour market, Slovak employees and it also means a huge risk to the demography in Slovakia in general and to the ethnic composition in general. If half a million refugees arrive here, and it does not matter what country they come from, it will completely change the structure of Slovak society and could really threaten us as a state and as a nation"* (Rastislav Schlossár, ĽSNS, 2022).

In the communication of Slovak politicians, migration is often associated with the migration of Muslims. For this reason, the term "*Islamisation*" often appears in political discourse. In this context, the migrant is depicted as a person who is unwilling to adapt to Slovak or European traditions, resulting in the creation of closed immigration communities in large cities. From this perspective, Islam can be seen as a symbolic image of "foreignness," threatening a homogeneous domestic society with a foreign culture, as well as an image of a violent foreign power. Although the argument that migrants disrupt the ethnic and cultural homogeneity of the majority community, i.e. "homogeneous demos" (Wodak 2016), is used mainly by right-wing extremists, the representatives of other political parties have similar views on migrants.

> *"Islamic culture will gradually and step-by-step occupy Europe, and Europe will become an appendix to the Arab and Muslim world"* (Peter Muránsky, KDH, 2015).

> *"Muslim immigrants do not know and do not want to adapt to our laws and social norms. They commit many crimes and are a huge burden on the indigenous population"* (ĽSNS, 2016).

Discussion about integration issue after Russia's military attack on Ukraine

The need to integrate immigrants was discussed more intensively only in the context of the immigration of Ukrainians after the Russian military aggression in Ukraine. According to Teke Lloyd and Sirkeci (2022, 528), the sudden and rapid growth of Ukrainian migration has been facilitated by the availability of safe-exit options, a welcoming attitude in Europe, and the existing culture of migration. Ukrainians have also fled to Slovakia to escape the war, although there is no tradition of a welcoming attitude towards migrants in Slovakia. Despite this statement, the Slovak population and most politicians have taken a much more welcoming approach to help Ukrainian immigrants than refugees, mainly from Syria, in 2015 and 2016. There are several reasons for this approach. The first is that the Slovak population may have felt the threat of war much more intensely at the beginning of the war. The Russian attack on Ukraine was a shock. Even Slovak analysts did not anticipate Russia launching a military attack on Ukraine. Slovakia is Ukraine's immediate neighbour, and some of the targets of Russian attacks at the beginning of the war were located only a few kilometres from the Slovak border. In the early days of the war, Ukrainian and Slovak policymakers regularly repeated the narrative that Russian troops would continue westward after victory over Ukraine. Thus, Slovakia could also be militarily attacked. The second reason for the welcoming attitude of the Slovak population towards Ukrainian immigrants is the proximity of cultures and

languages. Both Slovak and Ukrainian belong to the group of Slavic languages. Since Russian, a language close to Ukrainian was taught in Slovakia before 1989 as a compulsory first foreign language, communication borders were blurred.

Assistance to Ukrainian refugees was spontaneous and initially uncoordinated by the state. In particular, various charitable NGOs, local and regional governments, universities, and individuals were active. As it was assumed that the war in Ukraine would not end so soon, discussions began on how to involve Ukrainians in the labour market, how to place Ukrainian children in pre-school and school facilities, how to teach Ukrainians the Slovak language as quickly as possible, how to provide Ukrainians with access to healthcare and psychological assistance, and how to involve them in the coronavirus vaccination process. After this surge in Ukrainian immigration, it became apparent how deeply deficient the Slovak Republic is in developing an effective integration policy. Until the war in Ukraine, integration policy had focused primarily on the integration of asylum seekers. Still, in this case, it was confronted with refugees who were allowed to integrate immediately into the labour market or the educational process. The problem, however, was that Slovakia had not developed a systematic approach to the various aspects of the integration process. Previous approaches show that foreigners were more likely to depend on the help of their immediate environment (Štefančík 2010, Zakova 2019) but not on state institutions in the integration process.

The spontaneous wave of solidarity typical at the beginning of the war has been replaced by increasingly sceptical statements about Ukrainian migrants as the conflict has dragged on. The authors of the sceptical views were mainly radical populists, both on the left and the right. At first, these political groups did not believe Russia would attack Ukraine. Later, after the Russian attack on Ukraine, they expressed a negative attitude towards the Ukrainian president, rejected military aid to Ukraine, and never criticised Vladimir Putin. During the Russian military aggression in Ukraine, there were even opinions that Slovak politicians were to blame for the victims of this war or that the government was stealing from Slovak citizens because it was sending weapons to Ukraine:

> *"Just today, the war in Ukraine turned out to be one gigantic hoax invented by the Americans to annoy and frighten Europe ... No, no Russian troops are not coming to Ukraine, it is American troops that are coming to Slovakia"* (Ľuboš Blaha, Smer, 16.02.2022).

> *"This government is robbing the Slovak nation of hundreds of millions of euros. They tell people that there is no money for pensions, for the salaries of health workers and teachers, but there is always money for Zelensky's Ukraine"* (Milan Uhrík, Republika, 2022).

Slovak radical populists also presented their particular view on the issue of immigration of primarily Ukrainian women, children, and seniors. In addition to the inhabitants of Ukraine, foreigners who were in Ukraine for various reasons, such as international students at Ukrainian universities, also migrated from the war-stricken country. As these were foreigners with different skin colours from the native Ukrainian population, they immediately came to the attention of both left-wing and right-wing radical populists. Some radical populists have argued that persons accused of criminal activities are coming to Slovakia from Ukraine.

> *"I personally don't see any mothers with children here. I see one Africa here. ... This is the absolute end of all European civilisation. All this is an absolute negation of what we have achieved here in*

the two thousand years of our European civilisation. I'm shocked, I'm disgusted" (Stanislav Mizík, ĽSNS, 2022).

"They can't even protect Slovakia from the thick-skinned mafia that comes here from Ukraine" (Ľuboš Blaha, Smer-SD, 2022).

Even the war in Ukraine and the immigration of Ukrainian refugees did not motivate Slovak state institutions to approach integration more systematically and practically. The previous concepts of integration policy were proclaimed goals without the use of specific tools that would help immigrants in the process of integration into the autochthonous society of the destination state of migration. After a few months, the war in Ukraine, as well as the presence of Ukrainian citizens on the territory of Slovakia, have become part of reality without much interest in discussing these facts publicly. Problems in international security were crowded out by turbulent relations within the Slovak government coalition, and migration and integration issues remained on the margins of public interest.

Conclusions

In the current paper, we analyse integration discourse in Slovakia. We point out that international migration was a marginal issue of the public debate in Slovakia, but in 2015 and 2016, it became one of the central topics of the public debate. These are two critical years from the point of view of migration discourse in the overall political discourse. Politicians are still articulating the topic of migration, but usually only in the period before the elections (mainly parliamentary, but also regional and municipal) as a means of mobilising voters. However, in the case of Slovakia, this is only an abstract problem because most of the population has minimal opportunities to confront their views with everyday experience. For this reason, the migration discourse in political competition is easily replaced by another discourse if a topic proves to be more severe and directly related to the daily life of the voter.

Although the migration discourse in Slovakia is dominated by the search for answers on how to stop migration, we tried to take our research to the next level and decided to study the integration discourse. If we consider integration policy as an inseparable part of migration policy, it is possible to perceive integration discourse as part of migration discourse. In the field of research about integration discourse, we have identified a significant research gap in this field of Slovak science. We explain that the reason for this situation is the low interest of Slovak politicians in this topic. The analysis of available political opinions shows that Slovak politicians articulate the integration of migrants, but only as a marginal topic of public discourse. A more comprehensive view of Slovak policy actors on this issue is lacking. Only some political parties addressed this topic in their election programs, but it was usually not until 2016. However, there is no discussion about the integration model. Some politicians use stereotypes about integration problems in Western European countries as an argument for refusing immigration to Slovakia. The rejection of migration is thus supported by examples where integration policies in Western Europe have failed.

The comments of the relevant political actors on the integration of migrants have some common features. The first is that when it comes to integration, it usually means the integration of members of different religions or more distant ethnic groups. These are usually those migrants who came to Slovakia only in the current period. Politicians typically do not

pay attention to those migrants who have lived in Slovakia for several years. Thus, the content of the integration discourse is usually the question of how to integrate third-country nationals.

The question of how to deal with migrants from the Member States of the European Union is absent. This phenomenon can be explained by how politicians understand terms such as migration and migrant. The term migration originally had a neutral meaning. Still, after the great migration debate in 2015 and 2016, the term is mainly associated with the migration of Muslims or members of culturally different ethnic groups. The lack of knowledge of the field of immigration policy is subsequently reflected in the lack of knowledge in the field of integration policy. Another characteristic feature is that if a politician starts talking about the need to integrate migrants, part of the public perceives him as a person with a positive attitude to immigration and thus as a person who threatens security, cultural traditions, national identity, political sovereignty, or the labour-market in Slovakia. So far, mainly academics and representatives of non-governmental organisations remain actors in the integration discourse in Slovakia, however, without a real impact on political discourse.

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