

Attitudes of the Czech Majority Towards Minorities — Comparison of Year 2006 and 2016

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Abstract: Migration represents a highly discussed topic in recent EU. With the flows of migrants from African and Near East countries, the European countries face many challenges, especially in aspect to maintain stability of territory and confidence of their own citizens. The Czech Republic, although it might be seen as a transfer station on the way to the West, is increasingly becoming a terminus and this trend will probably continue. However, in the case of the Czech Republic, which is formed by relatively homogeneous population of one nation, the relation of the Czech majority towards Roma minority is not yet sufficiently solved, therefore the arrival of other minorities might not be viewed as favorable by the Czech citizens. This article aims at attitudes of the Czech majority in the South Bohemia Region towards minorities and evaluate the attitude and its development within years 2006 and 2016. Last, but not least, it also provides a suggestion to solve problems among nations.

Key words: majority; minorities; comparison

JEL codes: Z18

1. Introduction

The European Union member states face sustained immigration flows of immigrants from totally different socio-cultural environment in recent years. Even if migration used to be a part of European history (Heřmanová & Faryad, 2012), only when state borders were defined, sharper distinction between citizens started, so between us and them, citizens of other states. However, with increasing integration of different parts of the world, these states lose control over migration flows and also the possibility to influence the composition and number of immigrants (Sales, 2007). In spite of current migration crisis, migration is viewed as a new challenge and also as a new opportunity considering demographic decrease, population ageing and declining of the European economy. In the future, it can be expected, that flows of migrants from different parts of the world will increase, with the growing population in these countries, global warming and further pressures (European Commission, 2017).

Civil disturbances, military conflicts or poor economic situation can be seen as significant pressures leading to migration (Pána, 2007). Migration crisis at such a level as it was in year 2015 is unprecedented until the time of the World War II. Growing terrorist attacks and range of immigration lead to citizens' concerns about safety and also to political debates regarding border management and free movement inside Europe, which result in reestablishment of checks at some of the border crossing points for the first time until the fall of Berlin Wall

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(European Commission, 2017). Massive strains of migration flows make European open society face a test (Pána, 2007). Even if ethnic diversity can be beneficial for the society because of the fact that individuals coming from different environment can bring unique contribution, it can also become a subject of misunderstanding and disagreement within such a society arising from differences in values and interests (Huo, Smith, Tyler & Lind, 1996).

It is therefore no surprise that there are different attitudes of politicians, academics, media and public considering acceptance of immigrants, which is on one hand viewed as inevitable considering population ageing and labor market with all the consequences including the effects on economic efficiency and pension schemes, on the other hand it can be viewed as undesired with focus on safety and cultural unity of European states (International Organization for Migration, 2009). Meanwhile people belonging to minorities often strongly identify with the relevant group and tend to be unwilling to assimilate to major society, majority members expect them to assimilate (Horenczyk, 1996). The attitudes of major society towards immigrants and minorities can significantly influence their willingness to assimilate (van Oudenhoven, Prins & Buunk, 1998). From the results of the public opinion survey in the Czech Republic results that mainstream society has no warm relationship with different ethnic groups living in the territory. Not receiving the Roma minority is significant (Burjanek, 2001). From the point of view of the current migration crisis, the Czech Republic, together with the other states of the Visegrád Group, is often criticized by the European Union, because of the negative attitude towards the immigrants and unwillingness to accept them. While the current situation is the reason why xenophobic parties and opposition groups become more popular even in other member countries for example in Sweden, the Netherlands or even Germany, in case of the Visegrád Group their governments carry anti-immigrant rhetoric and extreme opinions (The Economist, 2016).

In relation with problematic co-existence with minorities that have been living on the territory of the Czech Republic for a long time, mainly with the Roma minority, the negative attitude towards the new minorities is not surprising.

2. Methodology

The aim of this report is to compare attitudes of the majority of people in the South Bohemia Region towards minorities.

The analysis comes out from the data evaluation from 2016, from its following comparison with data from 2006 and final evaluation of the development of the attitude of the majority towards minorities. The data were obtained from a questionnaire within the South Bohemian Region. The technique of summary estimate and semantic differential was used to evaluate the attitudes of the majority towards minorities. The sample from 2016 dealt with 501 respondents, while the sample from 2006 dealt with 874 respondents. The respondents were people older than 15 years old.

3. Results

Not only the attitudes were examined within the questionnaire, but also experience with minorities regarding intensity and also the social and spatial framework.

The questions were chosen to cover all the varieties of possible attitudes from hostility, mistrust, unwillingness to accept minorities up to willingness to accept minorities, indeed even to respect usefulness and

benefits flowing from their adoption and inclusion into the majority. 91 per cent of the respondents had experience with members of minorities in 2006, while in 2016, 94 per cent of the respondents had the experience.

Regarding getting the experience, job and then neighbourhood were the most common spatially social framework in both examined years.

Job was the main source of experience with members of minorities for 33 per cent of respondents in 2006, while in 2016, 40 per cent of respondents introduced just the same framework. 22 per cent of respondents introduced neighbourhood as the second most significant category in 2006, but in 2016, 19 per cent of respondents chose this category. In 2016, categories shops (14 per cent) and school (12 per cent) were also significant enough. The majority of respondents, 85 per cent in 2006 and 86 per cent in 2016, had multiple experience, the rest of the respondents had only disposable experience.

From the point of view of overall evaluation of a personal experience with members of minorities rather negative category prevails. Half of the respondents described the experience as negative. Even if from the point of view of positive and completely negative experience, the state was identical in particular years, negative perception of personal experience with members of minorities increased by 10 per cent.

Most of the respondents had the experience with the Roma minority in both years, it was 65 percent of respondents. Other most described minorities were the Vietnamese, Slovak and Ukraine minorities.

In the original data from 2006 experience with the Russian minority (7 percent) and the German minority (6 percent) became still significantly evident, but in 2016 only 1 per cent of respondents indicated experience with the Russian minority and 2 percent of respondents with the German minority. A completely insignificant number of respondents had experience with members of the Greek, Polish, French and Arabic minority. Although, considering current events, we may expect the Czech majority to be more interested in the issue of minorities, regarding migration crisis and how much it is presented in media, on the basis of the research data we can say that the interest has decreased slightly. However, from the point of view of collecting data about minorities a shift has occurred, when in 2006 mass media, mainly the television, played the main role, while information adopted from interpersonal communication was in the background and wasn't so reflected, in 2016 interpersonal communication as a source of information about the minority issue increased significantly. The communication took place among friends, family, at school but also during hobby activities most frequently.

Even if the Czech majority considers assimilation of minorities as required, only the third of the majority considers members of minorities capable of assimilating. Even if in 2006, 44 percent of respondents considered members of minorities unable to assimilate, in 2016, 59 percent of respondents considers them so. Even if the third of the respondents is ready to accept minorities as their fellow citizens, nearly half of the respondents is ready to accept only selected minorities, mainly members of the Slovak (94 percent), German (58 percent), Vietnamese (57 percent), Polish (41 percent) and Ukraine (40 percent) minorities.

Compared to 2006, there is a positive shift mainly for the Vietnamese minority, which has been shifted to the third place of the imaginary ranking of minorities, which the Czech majority is able to accept. On the contrary the Greek minority declined, which originally was on the third place, but in 2016 dropped down behind the Russian minority, which originally was on the eighth place. The Polish minority experienced a similar drop, which originally shared the third place with the Greek minority, but in 2016 it was replaced by the Vietnamese minority. However willingness to cooperate with the Poles and Germans still prevails, surprisingly the majority still has a tendency not to accept the Hungarians, in spite of the membership in the Visegrád Group.

From the point of view of considering the possibility that ethnic minorities have a beneficial effect on the

major population, in 2006 the answer to this question was ambivalent, in 2016 there was a significant shift towards a negative attitude expressing a disagreement with this statement.

A similar shift towards a negative attitude turned out in the case of a statement that it is not desirable to adopt anything from national and ethnic groups, because our cultural heritage would be in danger. In 2006, 57 per cent of respondents didn't agree with this statement, while in 2016 "only" 37 per cent of respondents didn't agree.

In 2006, 32 per cent of respondents agreed with a statement "We can learn a lot from minorities", 22 per cent of respondents didn't know and 46 per cent of respondents disagreed. In 2016, 23 percent agreed with the statement, 25 percent didn't know and 51 per cent disagreed. In general the attitude towards national and ethnic minorities changed into the negative one too, when in 2006, 43 percent of respondents had a negative attitude towards minorities, while in 2016, already 62 percent of respondents had a negative attitude.

In the issue of socio-economic position of members of minorities compared to the majority, in 2006, more than 2/3 of respondents believed that members of minorities are in a worse position, while in 2016, only 1/3 of respondents believed so. Evaluation regarding less chance for economic success of the members of minorities turned out the same way.

It is interesting, that even though the number of respondents who believe that minorities are in a worse economic position decreased compared to 2006, viewing of the Roma minority is completely different. They are in a better economic position than the majority according the opinions, that is mainly because of a positive discrimination and because of the opportunity to gain social benefits and state support. On the contrary, the majority sees a worse economic position of the Ukraine minority. Completely negative attitudes of the majority towards the Roma minority appeared in the data collection from 2006 and this tendency appeared in the data from 2016 too. As it wasn't possible to exclude the influence of negative attitudes towards all minorities on the basis of experience and decided opinions about the Roma minority in the original data, similarly it wasn't possible to exclude the influence in the data from 2016 either.

Nevertheless, regarding some detailed questions, some minorities, significantly for example the Vietnamese minority, succeeded in gaining favor with the majority, in case of the Roma minority still negative attitudes prevail, whose intensity doesn't decrease, but rather increases.

Whole 86 per cent of the Czech majority believes, that members of the Roma minority don't need help regarding their possible integration among the majority, because a lot of concessions have already been made. In connection with current migration crisis a lot of people reflect that they don't mind accepting anybody, not regarding nationality or the ethnic group, if they are ready to integrate into the majority and take part in functioning.

Regarding the Roma minority, respondents' opinions are more negative, they perceive members of the Roma minority as parasites of the current social system of the Czech Republic, without willing to participate in the development process of the major society, in which they have been living for generations.

Considering the process of solving the minority problems, the South Bohemia Region should express and implement the conception of the policy in relation to minorities proceeding not only from historical experience, but also with respect for current tendencies of European integration.

To create such a conception, it would be suitable to communicate and cooperate with representatives of these minorities. The final suggestion of the conception should be discussed with the Education Committee of the South Bohemia Region, the public, minority representatives and finally representatives of the South Bohemia Region.

Direct participation of the minorities in common life with the majority is one of the characteristics of a democratic society and a precondition for making the integration of the minorities easier. Such kind of involvement in public life can help significantly to prevent conflicts and national intolerance.

4. Discussion

From the point of view of the data collecting through the questionnaire, in 2016 there were fewer respondents than in 2006, but representativeness of this sample wasn't weaker in any way. Regarding current situation of migration crisis, it was considered to add some more questions to the questionnaire, but for the purpose to be able to compare the data, we decided not to extend the questionnaire and keep it in the original form. Conscious of the fact, that the most of the respondents have experience with the Roma minority, it is clear, that just this minority influences attitudes of the majority towards other members of minorities to a certain extent and it is nearly impossible to filter the influence out.

5. Conclusion

In spite of current migration crisis the interest in migration issues slightly decreases, even if they get into the area of interpersonal communication among friends, acquaintances and family because of the crisis.

Even if most of the respondents consider assimilation of members of minorities into the majority desired, there are doubts about abilities of minorities to assimilate. From the point of view of a development of attitudes of the Czech society towards minorities, a shift towards a negative attitude is perceived, except attitudes towards the Vietnamese minority, which the majority is willing to accept as their fellow citizens and respect them fully. On the contrary the Czech majority has a very negative attitude towards the Roma minority, within there is a shift towards the negative pole and frequent decided opinions in comparison with 2006.

For the purpose to prevent national conflicts and make integration of minorities easier, it is necessary to involve the members of minorities into public life, of which the first step could be creating a political conception towards minorities, which will be discussed with members of minorities and which they will be able to take part in.

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