

DISCURSIVE AND INSTITUTIONAL MANAGEMENT OF REFUGEES AND THEIR CRISIS IN LITHUANIA

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ABSTRACT In this article, Lithuanian discourse and institutional management of migration is assessed, using the framework of securitization of migration offered by Jef Huysmans. In Huysmans' work, migration is securitized not only in discourse, but also in the institutional practices of both the states and, in the case of Europe, also the EU. It is not only by talking about asylum seekers as a security problem, but also by moulding it into the practice of border control and policing (treating it in the same documents and institutions as terrorism, drug trafficking and organized crime) that migration becomes a security issue. In the Lithuanian case, both discourse and institutional practice leans to treat immigration and asylum as primarily security problems. In the discursive arena, however, the topics of 'hard' security are clearly eclipsed by economic topics and, it is argued, the economic pressures are the ones which could explain best the hostility towards refugees and reluctant compliance with the EU relocation scheme.

Introduction

In the beginning of 1990s, Lithuania often appeared in the front headlines and breaking news stories of the world media. Its struggle to regain independence became an indelible part of a larger drama of the disintegration of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War. Removed from this frontline position, during the

rest of the decade, Lithuanians were happy to assume a couch-seat and focus on rebuilding the shattered economy and creating institutions that would allow it to achieve the ambition of belonging to the Western club of nations. The newsworthy events in the meantime were happening elsewhere. The new millennium brought some changes to this attitude as the attacks of September 11, 2001 altered the global international scene and introduced the 'war on terror' as a defining feature of the coming decade. Lithuania was active in supporting the US in its attempt to root out Al Qaeda and the possibility to establish the terrorist havens anywhere in the world. This strategy also led to the war in Iraq which, in 2003, brought ire of the 'old' European states, primarily France, against the newly independent Eastern Europeans for their unwavering support for the United States in its quest.

Lithuania has participated in all the major international operations that the US and its NATO allies have undertaken in this turbulent decade. It overstretched its defence resources when it agreed to take upon itself the lead of a PRT (Provincial Reconstruction Team) in Afghanistan. It joined the fighting in Iraq, participated in the missions to root out piracy in the Horn of Africa. Yet, this active engagement in the Middle East did not seem to concern much either the political establishment or the public. The former took for granted the need to repay the US for the security guarantees it extended when the country joined the NATO alliance in 2004, the latter preferred to leave security questions to the security professionals and preferred to keep a distance from the foreign policy issues, armed forces and their missions. (Urbelis, 2007)

The Ukraine crisis of 2014 changed the attitudes of both the public and the political elites about the importance of foreign and defence policies. Yet, it was the refugee crisis of the summer of 2015 and its consequent implications for the stability of the European Union and for the obligations of the country towards its partners that

brought home the importance of the world events. As one keen observer noted, ‘Lithuania wasted ten years in the EU and NATO thinking that world events do not concern it and that complicated problems are not that complicated’ (Pugaciauskas 2015) and the current crisis, at least in theory, should have brought both the complexity of the world issues and the need to look further than one’s own backyard home.

Yet, while on the one hand, the refugee crisis served as a kind of wake up call to face up to the global developments, on the other, it worked to entrench existing stereotypes, to rekindle nationalist and populist rhetoric and to increase the undercurrent of Euroscepticism. In this article, I will explore Lithuanian dealings with the issue using the framework of securitization of migration developed, primarily, in the works of Jeff Huysmans. This approach emphasizes the importance not only of discourse, but also of institutional practice in developing securitization of a phenomenon such as migration. I will therefore concentrate on both these elements in the analysis. The first part of this article will present the major tenets of this theoretical approach, the second will look at the institutional aspects of Lithuanian migration policy and its implications, the third will explore the discourse surrounding migration and the EU relocation scheme in the country.

Securitization of migration

Though migration as a phenomenon and even migration of entire peoples is as old as humanity and the states had to manage some types of ‘migration crises’ since the times they were created (it is enough to remember the Roman empire’s unsuccessful attempts to tame migration of Germanic peoples across its borders and the subsequent collapse of the Roman state), the interest in migration as a part of international relations and security studies is rather new. It became an important subject for social sciences due

primarily to two developments in theory and in practice of security towards the end of the Cold War: the widening and deepening of security studies and the introduction of the notion of 'human security' as opposed to state security.

Traditional studies of security within the discipline of international relations (further – IR) focused exclusively on the state as its referent object and on military threats as the existential threats. In the context of an ongoing nuclear race and with the memory of total war still rather fresh in the minds of scholars and practitioners alike, this focus seemed quite natural. With the struggle between the super powers over, this concentration on states exclusively and on their potential military contenders suddenly felt too narrow. The scholars in IR started treating security as a much wider problem both in terms of referents and in terms of the threats they may face. Even when state remained the referent object of security, the threats to it now were much broader. Previously, the thinkers in IR agreed to include economic factors in their investigations of the power of states and hence their security levels, to this in the last decade of 20th century was added a whole plethora of spheres in which threats to security may rise. In the already classical investigation of Barry Buzan and his colleagues, five spheres were distinguished: military, political, economic, societal and environmental. (Buzan et al. 1998) The subsequent attempts to deepen the understanding of security added sectors (e.g. health, see, e.g. O'Manique and Fourie 2010) or distinguished others cross-sectoral threats (such as international organized crime, see, e.g. Terriff et al. 1999).

At the same time, while the state remained in the privileged position of the main referent of security, its monopoly was increasingly eroded. Around the state, the presence of environmental threats and especially the man-made problems, brought the Earth itself as a referent object of security. Within the states, society became a referent object of security and much

attention has been given to its wellbeing and strength of identity in assessing security (or lack thereof) of the states.

Even more importantly, the 'human security' concept was introduced. Theoretical approaches arguing for inclusion of individuals into the investigation of security can be found in the burgeoning literature on these topics towards the end of the Cold war and even more specifically once it ended. The greatest push for the serious consideration of this concept and the challenges it presented came with the 1994 UNDP Human Development Report, which clearly stressed the need to move 'from an exclusive stress on territorial security to a much greater stress on people's security' and argued for the adoption of 'human security' as a guiding principle for making the world a safer place. This report introduced a broad agenda of changes necessary to bring this new security about in seven different spheres: economic, food, health, environmental, personal, community and political.

The 'human security' concept became one of the most discussed issues over the decade since publication of the report. For those focusing on state security, primarily the realist school in IR, human security was seen as an unnecessary distraction. In their top-down approach, individual security is also important, but an individual can only be secure in a secure state. This idea stemming from the works of Thomas Hobbes is served as one of the main lines for rebuffing the notion of 'human security' and relegating it to other branches of IR, e.g. development studies.

In the camp of supporters of the notion, debate also raged. This debate focused on the two different understandings of human security: the narrow and broad notions of it. For those advocating the narrow notion, human security should focus on the prevention of direct violence against individuals, ensuring their protection from violent death, primarily because of conflicts taking place inside the country, but also from such potential sources of demise

as organized crime groups. The ideas of the narrow school have been summarized with the metaphor of 'freedom from fear'.

The critics of the narrow understanding of human security emphasize that human dignity requires more than protection from violent death and that human security focus should be on ensuring a possibility not only to survive, but also to live a meaningful life. Such a task includes sheltering individuals from 'all the ills of underdevelopment' (Kerr 2010, p.116). This 'broad' understanding of human security is usually summarized as 'freedom from want'.

One more important theoretical development needs to be mentioned in this context. The notion of security here lost its 'objective' character, scholars stopped seeing it as a given, as certain fact of life, focusing instead on the 'constructed' dimension of security. Nobody, it has been claimed, can be completely secure, but we can feel secure or insecure. In this context the idea of securitization becomes important. Securitization deals with the process of an issue becoming a security threat. Military might or migration, terrorism or healthcare can be framed as security issues, demanding serious intervention from the highest levels of the state or they can be framed as economic, law and order or medical issues, which ask for specialist attention but do not lead to the serious reconsiderations of state policies and do not cause 'existential' fears. Securitization, thus, invites us to think of security issues not as a constant given, but as a result of reinterpretations negotiated between the opinion and policy makers, general public and bureaucratic officials. It invites us to examine the public discourse surrounding the issues and the institutional practices that emphasize their security dimension. As George Lakoff once noted, whenever a scholar hears the words 'common sense', she has an object of investigation, the same way whenever security scholars hear that something is a 'security issue', they have an object of investigation. (Lakoff 2002, p.4)

It could be subsumed from what has been said above that the issues of migration became one of the important focus points for the development of these new approaches to security as they seemed to epitomise the newly discovered trends of seeing humans as a security referent, of the vulnerabilities of societies and their identities and even of the changing nature or at least the understanding of state security itself. One of the most influential is Jef Huysmans' (2006) take on the topic in *The Politics of Insecurity. Fear, migration and asylum in the EU*. In this book, the author goes beyond the discursive approach to securitization taken in most of the previous works on the topic and emphasizes the institutional practice that helps render it a security issue. It is important to go this way, he claims, because: 'even when not directly spoken of as a threat, asylum can be rendered a security question by being institutionally and discursively integrated in policy frameworks that emphasizes policing and defence.' (p.4)

Security thus comes into being as not only discourse, but also a technocratic practice. This is relevant because, as Huysmans emphasizes, 'in technocratic or modern societies expert knowledge is inherently political' (p.10). In the case of the EU, which the author analyses at length, migration became part of security discourse already before the 9/11 attacks in New York and Washington, which in the Western world brought the most obvious securitization of movement of people. Rather, 'the search for strengthening anti-terrorism policies entered an already heavily prestructured domain of insecurity' (p.63).

The most significant of these developments was the introduction of the Schengen zone and the agreements and procedures that followed its application, specifically the strengthening of external borders that led to the need for stronger policing of these borders. The cooperation between police and customs offices required for this endeavour took place in the framework of discourses that

produced a ‘security continuum connecting border control, terrorism, international crime and migration’ (p.71).

Thus, while in the post-war years in-migration was seen as a necessity, the only way to restore the shattered continent, in the end of 1980s it was still framed as a human rights issue, during 1990s migration came to be framed more and more as a security problem. In addition to the more straightforward policing dimension of migration, the issue was increasingly presented as a threat to cultural identity and a danger to the welfare state. The danger to cultural identity can be linked with the idea of ‘societal security’ within the framework developed by Barry Buzan and his followers (Buzan et al. 1998) and, even though not directly linked to the ‘hard’ security problems, can appear for local communities as security issue, especially if emphasized accordingly in the media and by the political elites. The last point – danger to the welfare state also evokes the dangers to economic wellbeing, therefore, yet another frame of security, presenting migration as a multifaceted threat to the security of the country and its society. All these elements can be encountered in the discourses and practices of Lithuania as well, the examination of which I will now turn to.

Lithuania’s approach to migration. Institutional dimension

Lithuania is a member of a number of international institutions which stipulate the importance of the rights of asylum seekers and the right to asylum. On 12 March 1991 Lithuania joined the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Article 14 of the Declaration notes that ‘Everyone has the right to seek and to enjoy in other countries asylum from persecution.’ Such commitment was strengthened in 1997 by the ratification of the Convention on the Status of Refugees of 1951 and of its Protocol of 1967. After ratifying this document, Lithuania became a country of refuge for asylum seekers and agreed to implement the system of their integration. Later the legal framework for both conferring asylum

and the integration into society of its receivers was strongly influenced by EU legislation, which establishes more concrete rules for dealing with potential applications for asylum in its member countries.

As Huysmans notes, the procedures that are established in the EU documents tend to treat migration as a security problem and that is especially visible in the actual practices of the agencies dealing with the issue (mainly those engaged in the border control). In these procedures, a balance is sought between the state needs and its obligations to preserve human dignity that are always emphasized by the organizations monitoring the asylum process in the country.¹

In Lithuania, migration politics is outlined in the Government's Guidelines on Lithuanian Migration politics, adopted in 2014; the procedures of immigration and seeking of asylum are described in

¹ European Commission's Recommendation establishing a common "Practical Handbook for Border Guards (Schengen Handbook)" to be used by Member States' competent authorities when carrying out the border control of persons (C (2006) 5186 final), *para.* 10,1 reads: 'A third country national must be considered as an applicant for asylum/international protection if he/she expresses – in any way – fear of suffering serious harm if he/she is returned to his/her country of origin or former habitual residence. The wish to apply for protection does not need to be expressed in any particular form. The word "asylum" does not need to be used expressly; the defining element is the expression of fear of what might happen upon return. In case of doubt on whether a certain declaration can be construed as a wish to apply for asylum or for another form of international protection, the border guards must consult the national authority(-ies) responsible for the examination of applications for international protection [emphasis added].' Also: "With a view to ensuring effective access to the examination procedure, officials who first come into contact with persons seeking international protection, in particular officials carrying out the surveillance of land or maritime borders or conducting border checks, should receive relevant information and necessary training on how to recognise and deal with applications for international protection [...]. They should be able to provide third-country nationals or stateless persons who are present in the territory, including at the border, in the territorial waters or in the transit zones of the Member States, and who make an application for international protection, with relevant information as to where and how applications for international protection may be lodged [...]" *Directive 2013/32/EU*

the Law on the Legal Status of Aliens, some procedural stipulations can also be found in the Law on State Border and Protection Thereof. The main institutions participating in creating the migration policy and its implementation are the Ministry of Internal Affairs; Migration Department; State Border Control Agency under the Ministry of Interior and, as its branches, the Foreigner Registration Centre and the Refugee Reception Centre.

Migration politics in Lithuania during the last decade reflected growing concerns with emigration and it is to this type of migration that most attention is given in the current migration policy guidelines. A further look at this document also reveals that the greatest concern of the government lies in economics (both in emigration and the loss of labour resources due to it and in immigration) and in the potential illegal activities of the immigrants. It is emphasized, for example, that the procedure for issuing permits of residence in the country ‘is increasingly abused by foreigners’ (Lithuanian Migration Policy Guidelines, point 9.12); that potential students create a ‘risk of illegal migration’ (9.16), there are not ‘enough effective measures for fighting marriages of convenience’ (9.18) and that employers are ‘interested in importing labour force from third countries with a view to cutting labour costs. This type of immigrated labour poses competition for Lithuanian citizens in the internal labour market.’ (9.19) This interest in labour and especially the potential for illegal labour permeates the rest of the document as well. While it is admitted that Lithuania may have a need to import labour, it is stressed that ‘regulations should not stimulate employers to use cheap labour from third countries without making all possible efforts to use the internal workforce, and should not create conditions for employees from third countries to travel to other EU Member States through Lithuania, stimulating the economic emigration of Lithuanian citizens and raising additional social tensions.’ (19.5) At the same time, ‘Provisions stipulating that foreigners who do not

engage and will not engage in actual economic operations will not be granted or allowed to keep the right to residence in Lithuania shall be complied with.’ (19.7)

Lithuanian Law on the Legal Status of Aliens stipulates that an application ‘for refugee status or subsidiary protection in the Republic of Lithuania’² could be lodged either at the border crossing point, at the territorial police agency or at the Foreigner’s Registration Centre (Article 67). The other procedures and institutional responsibilities that are outlined in this law include the role of the Migration Department, which is responsible for the examination of applications. The initial application and decision whether or not further deliberation on the asylum will take place are supposed to occur within 48 hours. Later, the Migration Department has a maximum of 6 months to provide a final decision on whether or not to grant asylum in Lithuania. During that process the asylum seekers are accommodated at the Foreigner Registration Centre and if the decision is to grant asylum in Lithuania, the refugee is transferred to the Rukla Refugee Reception Centre.

This procedure is in compliance with the international agreements of Lithuania and is following the letter of both the EU regulations and human rights conventions that the country is party to. Yet, as the saying goes, the devil is in the details. As following the securitization framework of Huysmans we should look into

² The laws stipulate that there are three categories afforded those who ask for asylum in the country. First is refugee status that grants the right to permanently reside in Lithuania with all the privileges that are tied to it. Second status is that of subsidiary protection afforded those who do not qualify for refugee status, but who cannot return to their country due to potential persecution there and is granted for one year with the possibility of extending it for longer. Finally, temporary protection status is to be granted to incoming people in case of a great influx of people when the state cannot handle their applications with due process (so far this status has never been afforded to anyone). See description of these categories at ‘Migration in numbers’, at <http://123.emn.lt/en/asylum/asylum-10-years-retrospective>

institutional practice, it is exactly the institutions mentioned above whose work should be examined in order to assess the balance between concerns for human security and the views of migrants as a threat in the Lithuanian context.

In the practice of dealing with migration in Lithuania, it is first to be noted that the actual implementation of procedures varies significantly and depends to a great extent on the attitudes of the people involved in carrying them out. The Lithuanian Red Cross Society, which is responsible for monitoring the implementation of asylum procedures on behalf of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, notes that the standards of reception of potential asylum seekers are very uneven. Some border guards follow all the procedures by the book, conduct interviews according to the established standards, explaining very clearly to the potential asylum seekers both the purpose of the procedure and the manner in which the application will be assessed, are polite and helpful. Others show with their demeanour that the procedure itself is a burden for them and they just wish it to be over. This is a very problematic attitude as the law on Aliens stipulates that the person requesting asylum to provide reasons for their asylum claim within 24 hours of making an asylum application. (Order of Minister of Interior 2004) It is also assumed that adding new information at a later stage negatively affects the image of the entire application and can lead to a negative decision. In Article 83 (2) of the Aliens Law, the exemption from the duty to support the asylum application by written proof does not apply where ‘contradictions are established between the facts specified by the asylum applicant that have a decisive effect on the granting of the asylum.’

After the first encounter with the officials when trying to enter the country, potential asylum seekers are accommodated either in the Foreigner Registration Centre or (in case of unaccompanied minors) in the Refugee Reception Centre. The Foreigner Registration Centre is under the supervision of the State Border

Control Agency and such arrangement has often been criticised by the asylum experts and NGOs working in the area, emphasizing that the people who are vulnerable and have potentially suffered from persecution in their own countries should not be accommodated in the institution of law enforcement, but rather one that provides social services. (EMN Focused Study 2013, p.26; see also Lithuanian Red Cross 2011)

Yet, many of the potential asylum seekers end up not only in the Foreigner Registration Centre, but outright in prison. It is emphasized in this case that crossing the border without the proper documentation is a crime and therefore those who do not know how to ask for asylum or just appear suspicious in the eyes of the authorities, are sent to such establishments. A case of two Afghani minors who were afforded just such treatment has resonated widely around the country (see, e.g. Sinkevičius 2014), as did the case of a Syrian family with three small children, who came to Lithuania without proper documents and were separated, the adult parents sent to different prisons, the children to a care home. (Lietuvos Raudonojo Kryžiaus Draugija 2014)

All these examples show that migration is viewed through the prism of law enforcement, and the procedures for managing the asylum procedure and the institutions involved are all linked to the policing structures of the state. The only partially independent unit in the structure is the Migration Department that is responsible for the examination of applications. The presence of such a separate institution is considered to be one of the examples of best practice standards in the system of migration management. Yet, in recent years, there were some attempts to reform the system in such a way that the Department would be removed and its functions given over to the Ministry of Interior itself. This potential reform created great concerns in the NGOs observing the situation of migration in Lithuania, who argue that getting rid of such a (at least nominally) independent institution and giving over its

functions to others would disturb significantly the balance of concerns over human rights vis-à-vis those of security.³

This securitization is even more fortified by the involvement of the State Security Department (SSD) in all the stages of the procedure. Since the inception of the asylum legislation, the procedure has been established whereby the decision on granting asylum is dependent on the note from the SSD about the potential threat caused by the migrant. These notes are classified and their disclosure can be refused to the lawyers of the asylum seeker in court and would only be shown to the presiding judge if they are deemed to contain intelligence information. In such cases, the claim of SSD that a person represents a threat is most often taken into account even if no documents that confirm such judgement could be located.⁴

The system of double and triple checking the people applying for asylum has reached its peak after Lithuania agreed to the resettlement of the 1105 people in need of international protection, and may be quite indicative of the chances of the EU scheme to succeed. The criteria being discussed: that it should be Syrians with high or professional education, that priority will be given to families, should speak at least one language of the EU, preferably English and express a wish to be resettled to Lithuania. Priority would also be given to Christians rather than Muslims. These criteria (though criticized by some observers) were, as usual supplemented by the requirement to have a note from the SSD saying that the person does not present a threat to Lithuanian security. This led to some curious discussions between the Greek

³ These concerns were expressed in a letter of five organizations working in the sphere of human rights to the government of Lithuania. Shown to the author by Gintarė Guzevičiūtė, the Director of Lithuanian Red Cross during the interview, 13 November 2015.

⁴ Interview with Laurynas Biekša, Associate Professor at Mykolas Romeris University, practicing lawyer in the field of migration. 27 December 2015.

officials and Lithuanian ones, with the Lithuanians ‘accusing’ the Greeks of trying to ‘give’ them some thugs and the Greeks replying that they certainly have no capacity of checking each individual who usually comes to their country without documents. A number of Lithuanian officials flew to Greece. The result of this flurry of activity so far – one relocated family which did not receive the coveted status of refugee, but only that of additional protection. The officials dealing with the issue emphasize that their concern is ‘security first’ therefore when the agreed-upon thousand will be relocated is not entirely clear.

With so much activity to make sure few people manage to reach Lithuania, little time, energy and money is left for the work of integrating those who do. In the migrant integration policy index Lithuania is in 34th place out of 38 countries.⁵ The state still relies on the rigid mechanisms it applied until the current crisis. The numbers of migrants were then much smaller and at the same time, the integration procedure had little else but flaws. Already the initial stage, described as ‘integration at the foreigner registration centre’ is a perfect euphemism for the actual lack of integration. The Lithuanian President emphasized the need of ‘not allowing the ghettos’ to be formed, when the actual practice shows people shoved into exactly such type of conditions since their very arrival. In addition, the outrage in the population caused by the relocation support money for the incoming refugees resulted in this sum being cut to such an amount that would hardly allow living in bigger towns where there is actual work and instead of creating incentive, dooms people to remain in areas with high unemployment and little chances of getting off welfare payments, consequently leading to tensions and potential societal security problems which were meant to be avoided.

⁵ See the data and elaboration on it at <http://www.mipex.eu/lithuania>

Though it would be difficult to get out of such vicious circle in the best of circumstances, there seems to be little political will to make it happen in the first place. The politicians gain more points bashing immigrants than trying to find solutions to their integration.

Lithuania's approach to migration. Discursive dimension

Since its entry into the European Union in 2004, Lithuania's issue was with emigration rather than immigration. Since then, 515,707 Lithuanian citizens emigrated, dwindling the country's population to below 3 million.⁶ The first wave of emigration started already in 2004-2005, but its peak was reached in the years following the global economic crisis that started in 2008. At that time, most discussions in the public sphere on migration focused on the question of emigration and the ways of limiting it or its impact.⁷

The question of immigration, refugee flows and asylum-seekers was touched upon infrequently in the media and was virtually absent from the political discourse. Reporting on the issues was often tinged with negative tones, such as the frequent use of 'illegals' as a noun to describe the irregular migrants. News on the Foreigner Registration Centre tended to focus on violent incidents, reinforcing the view of asylum seekers as troublemakers.

The decision of the EU that all its members should show solidarity in the unprecedented influx of asylum seekers by participating in the relocation scheme brought these questions out of obscurity into the limelight. In Lithuania, like in most other countries, this question created great tensions in society and brought to the word-

⁶ For migration statistics to and from Lithuania, see <http://123.emn.lt/>. This project created by 6 Lithuanian institutions is aimed at providing accurate statistical information on the issue. It is initiated by the European migration network and presents a useful tool for statistics and background analysis of migration.

⁷ A large part of Guidelines on Migration Policy are dedicated to this issue.

warzone two militant camps: those who believe that Lithuania cannot and should not accept any asylum seekers and those who believe that the country should accept even more than the agreed upon 1105 people. The understanding of complexity of current crisis of migration in current public discourse is often sacrificed for the sake of better chances in the war of attrition. Trenches are dug on both the sides of those who would not see a single foreigner (refugee or otherwise) in the country and those who would extend their welcome to everyone without considering the consequences. The obstacles for holding the middle ground in such a battle are quite daunting.

The (more numerous) camp of those who are against accepting larger numbers of asylum seekers into the country usually bring up three types of arguments: economic, cultural and security-based. It must be noted, however, that security-type of arguments are the least invoked in discussions. These were brought out after the Paris attacks on 13 November 2015 and after the Cologne sexual harassment cases on the New Year's Eve of 2015, but they are often used as an afterthought, as an additional argument for those still unconvinced. Terrorist attacks are rare and their impact wears off with time, the same applies to other outbursts of violence, thus those arguing tend to concentrate on the issues that are on people's minds daily, such as their economic welfare, job security and access to health care. All these are seen as being threatened by the influx of migrants.⁸ After the relocation scheme has been

⁸ See, for example, Gudavičius 2015 on the general costs of integrating 1105 people that Lithuania pledged to take in; Delfi.lt 2015a on the health care costs for the potential newcomers; also ELTA 2015b (the costs are linked to the potential costs of health care and, again potential, outbreaks of epidemics); calculations of all kinds of benefits that migrants get or might get are also popular, see ELTA 2015a or BNS 2015a. The offer of Universities to allow refugees study without charge has 'shocked' the Lithuanian students (Pukėnė 2015) Even in some analytical articles 'money for refugees' is discussed in such a way that can incidentally lead to a negative reaction, e.g. the analysis of the state budget of 2016 shows that there is an increase of spending on defence, integration of refugees and the increase of salaries for the public sector employees that reaches 206.5 million

brought up in discussions, these arguments together with the wildest calculations have been floating around the media outlets and enflaming the spirits of local inhabitants. The speculations about the system reached even the level of the President, who intervened to argue for a cut in welfare benefits for the migrants, emphasizing that the support given should not be such that ‘does not encourage looking for a job’ (LRT.lt 2015) This type of argumentation resonates well with the Lithuanian public that is used to the frame of ‘Lithuania is a poor country’ and ‘Lithuania is a country of emigration’ due to economic reasons. Given such frames, Lithuanians are eager to enter the numbers taken out of context that are floating around the media sphere and reach the conclusion that the incoming refugees will be afforded better economic conditions than themselves and consequently that they are not real war refugees, but rather economic migrants who have ‘come to take away our money.’⁹

The cultural dimension is brought in here as well, with the image of an immigrant as a person who comes from a Muslim background and thus brings in all the alien traditions with him. In addition, these traditions threaten to overtake the local culture, especially given that the birth rate in the Muslim communities is seen as larger and their attachment to religion greater than that of their Christian neighbours in Europe. (Sapetkaitė 2013) As Lithuania itself does not have much recent experience of Muslim immigration,¹⁰ most of the descriptions in the public sphere are of

euros and is responsible for 56% of the total increase of spending and for 32% of budget deficit (see *Laisvos rinkos institutas* 2015) Having in mind that in reality out of this number refugee integration gets 6 million euros (see *ELTA* 2015b) such a way of describing the situation is simply odd.

⁹ One of the curious blends of economic and cultural arguments is a respondent to the question of why immigrants are dangerous who answered that it is because, being Muslims, they can work for less as they do not drink alcohol and thus do not have so many expenses.

¹⁰ Islam is one of the recognized ‘historical’ religions in Lithuania, as it had, since

the danger of a Muslim takeover of Europe are linked to the frames proposed in the conservative press of other Western countries. Thus, the information about the ‘no-go areas’ created in the British or Swedish towns and the introduction of Sharia law in Britain are dutifully reported by the media. Visions similar to the future of Europe predicted by Michel Houellebecq are also very popular, as is the general view of Muslim as a permanent Other of the European.¹¹ The image of the migrant thus created and recreated through the media is that of a lazy person, looking for welfare benefits in a European country, prone to have a large family and with little loyalty to the accepting state¹² who, with the help of ‘the fifth column’ inside the West itself works to bring about the ‘sunset of Europe.’

There are those who try to bring in some more rationality to the ‘against’ argument as there are myriad flaws in the current European migration management.¹³ They are, however, in a minority. Those who are ‘for’ accepting migrants in principle also tend to work on existing tropes rather than presenting a balanced analysis of the European policies. Thus, on the pro-immigration side there are mainly economic arguments and analogies with the Lithuanian past.

As already mentioned, emigration from Lithuania reduced its population by half a million over the last 12 years. For the more

Medieval time a small minority of Crimean Tatars. This community, very small and very well integrated is not so visible in the country. An average Lithuanian, thus, has little chance of being exposed to different cultural traditions.

¹¹ See, e.g. Kasčiūnas 2015 for one of the most vocal advocates of ‘multiculturalism is dead in Europe’ frame.

¹² See, Laučius 2015a or Laučius 2015b for one of the most vocal advocates of the ‘welfare migrants’ that are aided by the fifth column of Leftists and Liberals to bring about the death of Europe.

¹³ For one of the few proposals, see, Mazuronis 2015. And for an attempt to find balance in argument, though probably not in tone, Tapinas 2015.

economically minded, thus, the potential influx of migrants is seen as a way to compensate for that loss. President Grybauskaitė has insisted on the reduction of welfare benefits for the migrants so that ‘they find work sooner’ and later argued that migrants might be ‘good for the Lithuanian economy.’ (BNS 2015c)

Another set of arguments is based both on humanitarian grounds and bringing in Lithuanian history, particularly the wave of emigration towards the end of WWII. In this type of argumentation, Lithuanians as a nation have suffered enough from wars and its members have tried to look for safety in other countries, therefore, being safe now, they have a responsibility for others in a similar situation. (see, e.g. Baškienė 2015)

While in the public sphere one can find different types of arguments for the relocation mechanism and in support of asylum seekers in general, these arguments do not hold much sway over the majority of the population. According to one major survey, only 15% of the respondents viewed refugees favourably.¹⁴ The Lithuanian decision to agree in principle to the relocation scheme is viewed unfavourably by 61.3% of the inhabitants and even from those who did agree with this decision, 10.9% based it on the idea that the relocated people will not stay in Lithuania anyway. As elsewhere in Europe, the most positive view of migration and the Lithuanian commitments is from people of better education and socio-economic status, inhabitants of the cities who do not feel threatened by the potential new arrivals in their jobs and are not dependent on welfare institutions. In this respect, too, the Lithuanian situation is not much different from that of other European countries.

¹⁴ The survey phrased the question as refugees, as this is the most commonly used term in the public sphere.

The differences in reception could thus be explained not by some kind of extreme xenophobia of the local population, but more by the precarious economic conditions. Twenty years of exorbitant economic growth and 10 years of EU support did close the gap significantly between the country and the rest of Europe, but are still far from closing it completely. While the macroeconomic situation kept improving, official statistics show that 19.1% of population live below the poverty line, (BNS 2015b) according to other research 32.5% were in the at risk of poverty group. (Zabaraukaitė, Gruževskis 2015) Lithuanian median salaries are some of the lowest in Europe. (Malinauskas 2015) The perception that the state cannot fulfil its obligations to its own citizens by providing them with the conditions of an adequate life is widespread and European rules are seen as an additional burden on this inadequate system.

As elsewhere in Europe, with the issue of migration in front of the public eye, there is an opportunity for the radical right. A radical nationalist party (Tautininkai) which apparently attempts to ride the wave of contention created by the refugee crisis in society tries to establish its political presence. Elections to Seimas due to take place in the autumn of 2016 will show how actual this issue truly is for the citizens of the country.

Conclusions

In its approach to migration Lithuania followed the established EU standards, adding to them its own tinge. The current migrant crisis in the country can be viewed through the prism of securitization and in so doing it is important to look into the institutional practices as Huysmans suggests. Lithuania being a rather new country and certainly new to the issue of immigration, followed rather closely the practices established in the EU and as these practices themselves were highly securitized (Huysmans 2006) so was the Lithuanian system. Unusually for the region, however, the

system did make some overtures towards treating migration as not only an issue of security but also of human rights. The semi-independence of the Migration Department and the strong institutional presence in the field of organizations monitoring adherence to the standards of Human Rights, such as Lithuanian Red Cross, are indicative of this.

In the public discourse, securitization of migration takes a different angle. The country's population is overwhelmingly against receiving any refugees in the country, yet, when concrete questions are posed, those who come from relatively similar cultural backgrounds (e.g. the Ukrainians) are looked on favourably. Migration is presented also as security issue, especially in connection with terrorism, but even such securitization reflects more the cultural/identity fears than the 'hard' security aspects of the issue. Migrants are not wanted because they are different, but especially because they are seen as competitors for the scarce (welfare) resources.

Yet, these fears are not somehow unique for the country, but are reflections of the general European anti-immigration discourse. Thus the difference in the lack of welcome for the refugees in Lithuania and other Eastern European countries compared to those in the West might not be due to some extreme xenophobia of the inhabitants of those countries, but the economically difficult situation of many of their inhabitants.

Fears and even hopes that the problem would disappear by itself cloud judgement and precludes understanding that in the current world where the movement of people has reached unprecedented heights and with Lithuania being positioned on the crossroads between the East and the West, the issue of immigration will remain constant. Even if they are not resettled through the quotas envisioned by the EU, they will keep trying to reach safer shores or greener pastures and will sometimes end their travels in the

country. The border control issues, thus, important as they may be, should not overshadow the need to create working integration and support mechanisms for these potential new citizens. The best practice standards show that these mechanisms work best when they are not segregated from those devised to help the marginalized social groups in the country, but are made part of the social security enhancement system for all the inhabitants.¹⁵ It would be possible to look at the EU migration quotas as a chance, an opportunity to create such working mechanisms for the future. This transformation, however, requires more societal and political will than the current discourse on migration seems to allow, hence, this optimistic outcome is hardly likely.

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