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Migration from Ukraine to the Czech Republic with Respect to the War Conflict in Eastern Ukraine

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Abstract

The paper¹ focuses on changes in migration from Ukraine to the Czech Republic as a result of the war events in East Ukraine especially in 2014–2015. It briefly summarises Ukrainian-Czech migration history and then concentrates upon non-asylum migration with respect to the events in Ukraine since 2014, the area of international protection and the migration of Czech compatriots from Ukraine to the Czech Republic. The article concludes that up to 2016 the armed conflict in Ukraine, despite its seriousness and destabilising consequences, did not distinctly effect changes in the migration situation in the Czech Republic, although the statistical data show increasing interest among Ukrainian citizens in permanent stay permits in the Czech Republic, acquisition of Czech citizenship and refugee status. Since 2015 Czech institutions have also assisted several hundred descendants of 19th-century settlers to Ukraine in moving to the Czech Republic. Despite these developments, at present, the overall numbers of incomers from Ukraine to the Czech Republic are predominantly influenced by economic contexts. Rather than migration, the citizens of Ukraine in the Czech Republic, members of the Ukrainian minority in the Czech Republic and the Czech compatriots in Ukraine reacted to the military situation in the form of social activities. To describe the situation, statistical sources are used in particular, while the paper does not cover short-term and illegal migrations.

Key words: Ukraine, Czech Republic, migration, resettlement

Abstrakt

Autor analizuje zmiany w procesach migracyjnych z Ukrainy do Republiki Czeskiej w wyniku konfliktu zbrojnego we wschodniej Ukrainie, koncentrując się w szczególności na latach 2014-2015. Tekst zawiera krótkie podsumowanie ukraińsko-czeskiej historii migracji, a następnie przedstawia ruchy migracyjne o charakterze uchodźczym, poza uchodźczym i osób pochodzenia czeskiego na tle wydarzeń na Ukrainie od 2014 roku. Autor dowodzi, że do 2016 roku konflikt zbrojny na Ukrainie, pomimo swojego znaczenia i destabilizujących skutków, nie zmienił wyraźnie sytuacji migracyjnej w Republice Czeskiej, choć dane statystyczne wykazują coraz większe zainteresowanie obywateli ukraińskich stałymi zezwoleniami na pobyt w tym kraju, nabyciem statusu uchodźcy i czeskiego obywatelstwa. Od 2015 roku państwo czeskie wspiera również obywateli ukraińskich pochodzenia czeskiego (potomków osadników, którzy w XIX wieku osiedlili się na Ukrainie) w przemieszczeniu się do Republiki Czeskiej. Pomimo zmian politycznych, w chwili obecnej migracje Ukraińców do Czech mają głównie charakter ekonomiczny. Dodatkowo, reakcją na konflikt militarny obywateli Ukrainy mieszkających w Republice Czeskiej, członków mniejszości ukraińskiej i Ukraińców pochodzenia czeskiego na Ukrainie była aktywna działalność społeczna i pomocowa. Tekst opiera się przede wszystkim na źródłach statystycznych, nie obejmuje krótkoterminowych przepływów oraz migracji o charakterze nielegalnym.

Słowa kluczowe: Ukraina, Republika Czeska, migracja, przesiedlenie

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Table of contents

1. The Czech Republic and migration ties with Ukraine in the long-term perspective	5
2. The Czech Republic and Ukraine in the area of non-asylum migration with respect to the events in Ukraine before and after 2014	7
3. Acquisition of Czech citizenship by Ukrainians	9
4. Applications for international protection in the Czech Republic by Ukrainian citizens.....	10
5. Migration of compatriots from Ukraine to the Czech Republic.....	12
Conclusion.....	13
References	15

1. The Czech Republic and migration ties with Ukraine in the long-term perspective

The Czech Republic does not directly neighbour Ukraine, but it is a significant target destination of Ukrainian migration. Since the beginning of the 1990s, the citizens of Ukraine have been the largest group of foreigners with long-term and later permanent residence on the territory of the Czech Republic. As of 31 December 2015, a total of 105,614 citizens of Ukraine are long-term and permanent residents in the Czech Republic, and Ukrainians comprise a total of 24 percent of all the foreigners with permits for long-term and permanent residence there.² Regarding the population in the Czech Republic, the citizens of Ukraine currently comprise almost 1 percent of the people living on its territory. This makes the Czech Republic one of the states where the citizens of Ukraine form a higher concentration.

In the Czech Republic the citizens of Ukraine together with Slovaks are the most numerous members of foreign states who acquire Czech citizenship, and every year the number of Czech citizens of Ukrainian origin also increases.³ The citizens of Ukraine also frequently enter into mixed marriages with Czech citizens (Uherek et al., 2008a). We can therefore conclude that there are long-term ties between Ukraine and the Czech Republic and a number of people in the Czech Republic have transnational contacts with this country.

The core of the migration from Ukraine to the Czech Republic comprises labour migration. Besides that, migration for the purpose of reuniting families occupies a significant position, the importance of which has increased since the beginning of the 21st century (Uherek et al. 2008a). Particularly until the period of the economic crisis at the end of the first decade of the 21st century, the Czech Republic treated Ukraine as a reservoir of an inexpensive flexible labour force. The Czech Republic especially attracted employees for unqualified positions, but also, albeit rarely, for skilled jobs (the level of over-qualification was as high as 22 percent, although this also affects other foreign communities) (Leontiyeva 2014). Migration in terms of long-term residence predominated, i.e. with visas over 90 days and with the assumption that the bearer of this status would remain on the territory of the Czech Republic for a period longer than one year, i.e. the period for which the permit for the purpose of the residence would last (Zákon 326/1999, Sb.: §42). Interest in more long-term settlement in the Czech Republic was demonstrated only by a section of the immigrants, while on the other hand a significant proportion manifested a tendency to improve their economic status in Ukraine (Uherek et al. 2008b; Janská 2015).

The strategy of the Ukrainian workforce began to change with the arrival of the economic crisis in the second half of the first decade of the 21st century, which significantly affected construction, manufacturing and other industries where Ukrainians in the Czech Republic frequently found work. The number of people with Ukrainian citizenship then began to decrease significantly in terms of long-term residences, while on the other hand the number of people with permanent residence increased.⁴ In 2011 the size of these groups was almost

² Source: Czech Statistical Office.

³ Source: Czech Statistical Office.

⁴ A permit for permanent residence on the territory of the Czech Republic usually assumes uninterrupted residence in the country for a period of four or five years, a civic clean record and means for the residence. It is also granted to the family members of the asylum seekers, for humanitarian reasons and other reasons specified in Article IV of Act 326/1999 Coll., as later amended. The granting of permanent residence makes residence possible within the Czech Republic without listing the reason for residence and expands the rights of the bearer of this status.

equal (Drbohlav & Valenta 2014: 49), with a slight decline in the number of people with Ukrainian citizenship in the Czech Republic.

The long-term migration contacts between the Czech Republic and Ukraine have historical, social and economic causes. Until 1918, the territory of the contemporary Czech Republic and a significant part of Western Ukraine were components of the same state, the Austrian monarchy, and active migration movement was already taking place at that time between the two territories (Uherek et al. 2008b). From 1919 until 1938 part of contemporary Ukraine, so-called Sub-Carpathian Ruthenia, was part of Czechoslovakia, and this fact was accompanied again by extensive bilateral migration movements particularly of experts and of the administrative apparatus from the Czech Lands to Ukraine and less qualified workforce to the Czech Lands. After 1945, when Sub-Carpathian Ruthenia, or Transcarpathian Ukraine, was attached to the Soviet Union, several thousand people were authorised to resettle from Sub-Carpathian Ukraine to the Czech Republic with ties to Czech territory (Vaculík 1997; Uherek et al. 2008b). Although contacts between Ukraine and Czechoslovakia, or the Czech Republic, substantially decreased in 1946–1990 at the level of the spontaneous movement of people, the awareness of migration ties and possible cooperation continued to exist at least in Transcarpathian Ukraine. Minor spontaneous work and business exchanges also took place in 1946–1990 (Uherek et al. 2008b).

A specific role in the formation of migration ties between the territory of the Czech Republic and Ukraine is played by compatriots, the populace of Czech origin within Ukraine, whose predecessors on the territory of then Tsarist Russia immigrated in the second half of the 19th century. Also, after 1945 and subsequently in the first half of the 1990s there was a substantial weakening of this minority with return resettlement to the territory of the contemporary Czechoslovakia and Czech Republic. In the course of the 20th century, approximately 35,000 people emigrated in this way from Ukraine (Valášková et al. 1997). However, even now, roughly 6–10,000 people claiming Czech origin live in Ukraine (MZV ČR 2014) and react to the changing living conditions in both states.

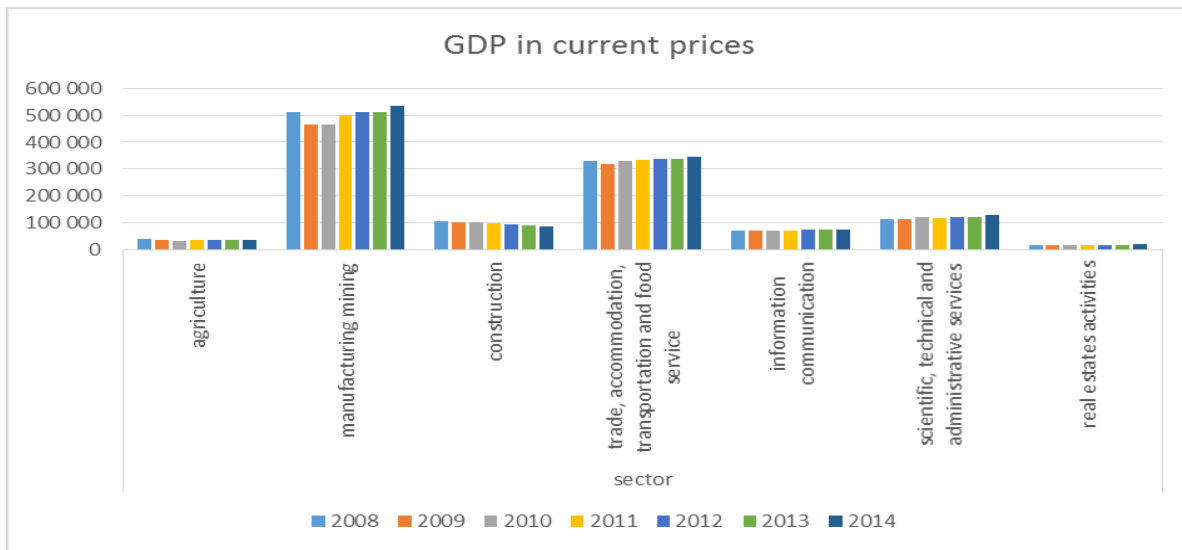
Another specific theme which is a component of the migration system between the Czech Republic and Ukraine is international protection. In 1990 the Czech Republic adopted an act on refugees (Zákon č. 498/1990 Sb.) – “The aim of which was to amend the approach of the state bodies in the procedure on the status of a refugee and the rights and obligations of foreigners who have requested the recognition or have been recognised with the status of a refugee” (Zákon č. 498/1990 Sb.: §1). In 1992 the Czech Republic then ratified the Geneva Convention of 1951 and New York Protocol of 1967 (Haišman & Trombík 1998). By 1990 a total of 1,602 people had requested international protection (MVČR 2015: 2). Since the creation of the legal norms for asylum claimants, citizens of Ukraine have been among applicants for international protection and also among the most frequently rejected applicants for the reason of non-fulfilment of the legal conditions for its provision. However, a small proportion of the applicants from Ukraine were provided with international protection even before 2014, and recognised refugees from Ukraine also subsequently acquired citizenship of the Czech Republic.

2.The Czech Republic and Ukraine in the area of non-asylum migration with respect to the events in Ukraine before and after 2014

To date only a few academic texts have been published contextualising the dynamics of recent processes in Ukraine. As the initial experience reflecting migration issues was publicised already in 2014 in *Central and Eastern European Migration Review*, the guest editor Yana Leontiyeva correctly noted that “preparation of this monothematic issue started before Ukraine’s Maidan protests of late 2013. Therefore, the articles presented here pay only limited attention to the changing current economic, political and social situation, factors that are likely to influence Ukrainian migration patterns both domestically and internationally” (Leontiyeva 2014a: 6). A year after, despite the substantial migration movements caused by the Ukrainian conflict, an increase in immigrants from Ukraine had been observed only in several states. In 2015 Marta Jaroszewicz correctly noted that in the Czech Republic the number of Ukrainian migrants remained stable (Jaroszewicz 2015).

Although the situation in the south of Ukraine is critical and unstable to this day (UNHCR 2016), this is reflected in the dynamics of the migration system between the Czech Republic and Ukraine only in some areas. The total number of citizens of Ukraine in the Czech Republic did not dramatically increase as a result of the war events. In the area of long-term and permanent residences, we can rather observe a stagnation in the total number of Ukrainian citizens. This points not to development influenced by war events but to the situation in the labour market in the Czech Republic, where the revival of the economy in areas where Ukrainian employees found employment took place rather slowly. The work and financial conditions of employment in the Czech Republic have also not changed significantly, and so not all of the population of Ukraine see them as advantageous. In the pre-crisis period, we recorded opinions of our respondents in Ukraine stating that work stays in the Czech Republic are becoming ever less lucrative, and that it is necessary to look for rather longer-term work to be able to cover the costs associated with such a stay (Uherek et al. 2008b). Whereas in 2009 the number of Ukrainians undertaking permanent and long-term residences culminated at a figure of 131,932 people, by 2010 their number had gradually dropped to 104,156 and the percentage in the total number of foreigners in the residence formats in question progressively began to decrease. The numbers of foreigners from the individual countries reflect not only economic development in the Czech Republic as a whole, but also changes in the demand for a certain type of employees and professions (Uherek 2009). In areas like construction, manufacturing or agriculture, where a less qualified labour force is employed, the reduction in production was most significant.

Figure 1. GDP in current prices

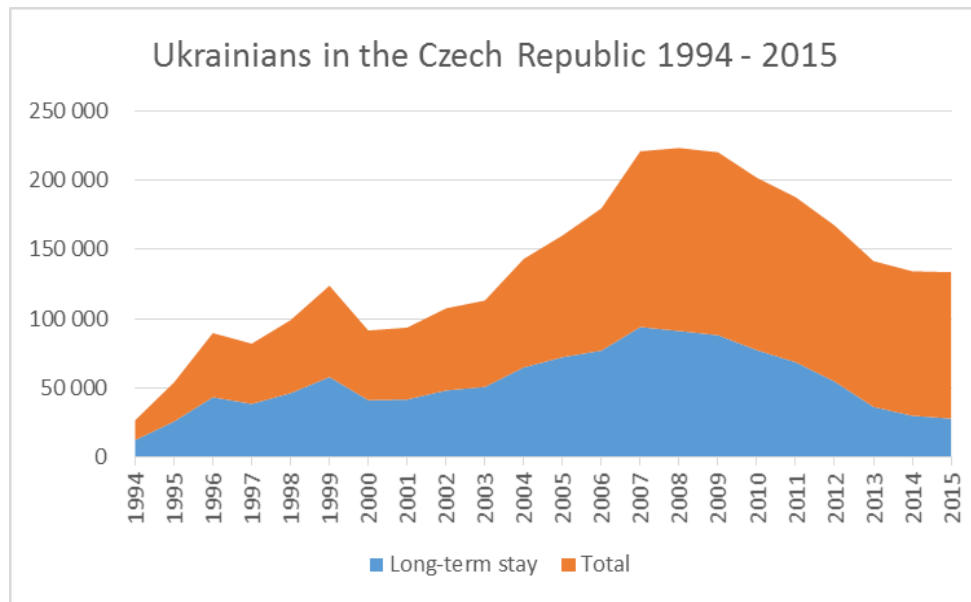


Source: Czech Statistical Office

The drop in the number of Ukrainians in the Czech Republic stopped only in 2015, increasing to 105,614 persons with long-term and permanent residence.

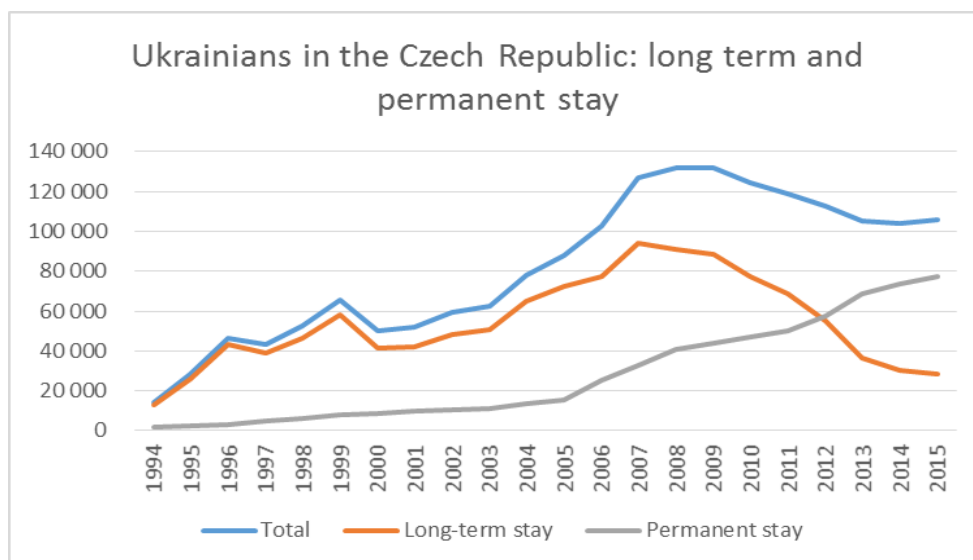
Whereas the total numbers of Ukrainians on the territory of the Czech Republic has not shown a distinct movement, the structure of the residence statuses has changed. As we observed in the course of the oil crisis in the Western states in the 1970s (Castles & Miller 1993), also in the case of Ukrainian migration to the Czech Republic the crisis situation led to efforts of foreign employees to stabilise their position in the target country and create such conditions that the possible loss of employment did not threaten their stay there (Castles 1986). Hence in the case of a crisis, a flexible labour force always leaves the target country only partially. Whereas in Germany in the 1970s thanks to the unification of families the crisis meant a growth in the number of foreigners on the territory of the state, in the Czech Republic of the 2010s it rather meant a change in the structure of the stays. While long-terms stays still dominated over permanent residences in 2011, Ukrainian migrants still more clearly prefer permanent residences. This indicates their becoming stabilised in the country and that the majority of Ukrainian migrants have decided to live in the Czech Republic. The flexible workforce, which came to the Czech Republic mainly for earnings to be used in Ukraine, is becoming a category of foreigners who set down roots in the Czech Republic.

Figure 2. Ukrainians in the Czech Republic 1994-2015



Source: Czech Statistical Office

Figure 3. Ukrainians in the Czech Republic: long-term and permanent stay



Source: Czech Statistical Office

3. Acquisition of Czech citizenship by Ukrainians

The increasing tempo of stabilisation of citizens of Ukraine within the Czech Republic is also apparent in the growing interest in citizenship of the Czech Republic. The number of citizenships of the Czech Republic granted to foreigners from Ukraine rises permanently, regardless of whether the number of Ukrainians in the Czech Republic increases or declines.

A rapid growth in the number of citizenships granted was recorded especially in 2014. Whereas the number of citizenships of the Czech Republic granted to former citizens of Ukraine fluctuated below the threshold of 500 people annually up to 2008, it rose to an average of 576 persons annually in 2009–2013. In 2014, the number of citizenships granted jumped to 2,075.

The reasons for the increasing interest in the granting of citizenship could be political, economic and pragmatic. Naturally, the numbers of citizenships granted are not connected only with the interest of the citizens of a given state, but particularly also with the policy of the Czech state in the given area. The new Act No. 186/2013 Coll. on state citizenship of the Czech Republic and on the amendment of some acts, which came into effect on 1 January 2014, is mainly connected with this. The new wording of the act allows dual citizenship, which was granted only in exceptional cases in the previous version (Zákon č. 186/2013, Sb.). The numbers of citizenships granted to the citizens of Ukraine in 2002–2014 are summarised in the following graph.

Figure 4. Czech citizenship granted to (former) Ukrainian citizens

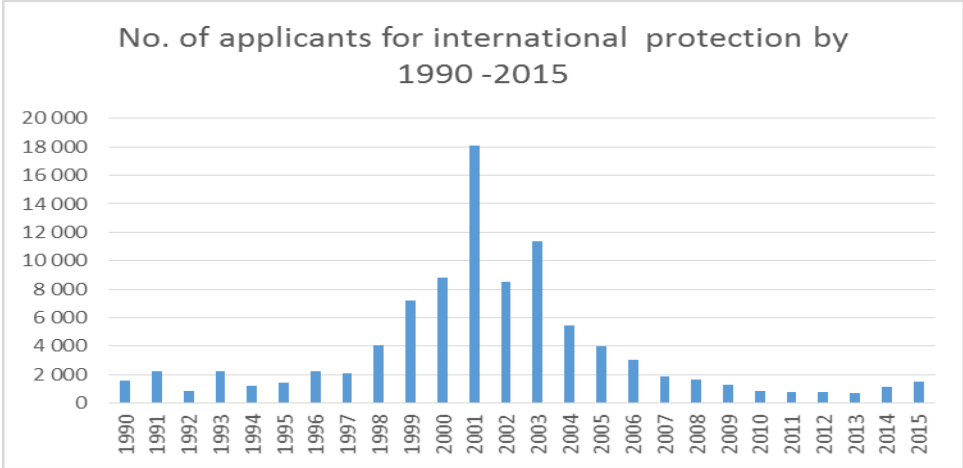


Source: Czech Statistical Office

4. Applications for international protection in the Czech Republic by Ukrainian citizens

A tense political situation usually projects itself most clearly in the migration of refugees. The Czech Republic does not currently neighbour any country which could be the source of refugees. It only borders other states of the European Union, and so is reachable by applicants for international protection mainly by air. This is also one of the reasons for which the number of asylum seekers in the Czech Republic has not been high in recent years. Compared to the number of applicants for international protection at the beginning of the 21st century, the number at the end of its first decade has significantly declined. The number of applicants for international protection in the Czech Republic is illustrated in the following graph.

Figure 5. Number of applicants for international protection 1990-2015



Source: Ministry of Interior of the Czech Republic

It is clear from the graph that the highest number of applicants for asylum came between 1998 and 2004. This large number of applicants came from Ukraine, but also from Slovakia, Romania, Russia, Georgia, Vietnam, and other countries. The vast majority of these requests were seen to be unjustified. Particularly the requests just after the beginning of the 21st century were to a certain degree motivated by the introduction of visa requirements for the countries of the former Soviet Union on the part of the Czech Republic, and thus complicated the access from those countries to the Czech labour market. In 2014 there was again an increase in Ukrainian applicants, but the success rate of the requests also increased and some of them were judged to be justified.

Figure 6. International protection of Ukrainian citizens in Czech Republic 1998-2015



Source: Ministry of Interior of the Czech Republic

Tab. 1. International protection claims of Ukrainian citizens and number of asylum cases granted in 1998–2015

Year	International protection claims	Asylums granted	%
1998	43	0	0.0
1999	94	1	0.8
2000	1,145	7	0.6
2001	4,419	3	0.0
2002	1,676	2	0.1
2003	2,043	6	0.2
2004	1,600	5	0.3
2005	987	9	0.9
2006	571	31	5.4
2007	293	19	6.5
2008	321	17	5.3
2009	203	9	4.4
2010	115	11	9.6
2011	152	9	5.9
2012	174	7	4.0
2013	146	9	6.2
2014	515	25	4.9
2015	694	7	1.0

Source: Ministry of Interior of the Czech Republic

The repeated increase in applications for international protection on the part of Ukrainian citizens is clear from the table. We can also observe continual growth of a number of successful asylum claimants. In 2015 a relatively low number of asylums were granted, but this was because the administrative authorities of the Czech Republic after judging the individual requests evaluated some of the cases as adequate for the provision of subsidiary protection. In 2014 it was 119 cases, and in 2015 it was 174 cases. In the period of January–June 2016 citizens of Ukraine in the Czech Republic submitted another 41 requests for international protection.

5. Migration of compatriots from Ukraine to the Czech Republic

The cooperation of the state in the resettlement of persons of demonstrably Czech origin to the Czech Republic was applied to the greatest extent just after the Second World War, when large groups of the population of Czech origin resettled in the former Czechoslovakia from the neighbouring states and further large groups of ethnic Czechs from Romania, former Yugoslavia and other countries. One of the most numerous groups migrating to the Czech Republic from abroad after 1945 were the so-called Volhynian Czechs from Western Ukraine, whose ancestors went to Ukraine to manage farms in the second half of the 19th century (Valášková et al. 1997). Other compatriots from Ukraine and also other areas of the former Soviet Union resettled in the Czech Republic in the course of the 1990s and in the first decade

of the 21st century. The Ministry of Interior of the Czech Republic offers a brief overview on its website of the course of the individual migration waves.⁵

As of mid-August 2006, the assistance of the compatriots on the part of the Czech state in connection with the military conflict in Ukraine in 2014–2015 had not yet been summarised on the pages of the Ministry of Interior of the Czech Republic. It is clear from the press and from interviews which I conducted with resettled compatriots and assisted persons from the Czech institutions (August 2015) that the first 140 compatriots came to the Czech Republic in March 2015, followed by more that same year. The preparations for the arrival of the compatriots aroused discussions in the press and the attention of the public. Commentators speculated as to why these people search for refuge in the Czech Republic, from what regions they come, how many people are interested in resettling etc. (Bernkopf 2014; Štráfěldová, 2014).

However, as it later turned out, it was not an extensive exodus, and the public and media soon lost interest in the removal of individual compatriot families. At present we can say that approximately 500 compatriots have resettled from Ukraine with their family members in the Czech Republic since the beginning of the conflict. The group travelled by bus or their own cars, and residence was arranged for them in Czech hotel facilities until they found their own housing and work with the aid of the state officials and NGOs. Immediately upon arrival in the Czech Republic, the compatriots also received permits for permanent residence.

Especially those people who did not move from areas where military clashes occur regularly visit their original places of residence or consider which place of residence they prefer considering their work and personal options. The current migration and communication possibilities provide space for living in more places, and it is likely that many of the compatriots from Ukraine take advantage of this opportunity.

Conclusions

The armed conflict in Ukraine, despite its seriousness and destabilising consequences, did not distinctly effect changes in the migration situation in the Czech Republic. The number of people with Ukrainian state citizenship interested in acquiring international protection in the Czech Republic increased, but not significantly. Their applications were not frequently evaluated as justified for the granting of asylum, but some of the applicants were provided with subsidiary protection. The military clashes influenced non-asylum migration only in an indirect way. This type of migration reacts rather to the labour market. However, in 2014–2015 increased interest was recorded in the granting of citizenship of the Czech Republic or at least in acquiring permanent residence, which provides more stability to people with Ukrainian citizenship on the territory of the Czech Republic, gives them social assurance and brings them closer to the position of the citizens of the Czech Republic more distinctly than the granting of long-term residence.

The government of the Czech Republic at the end of 2014 reacted to the increased interest of the compatriots in resettlement from Ukraine to the Czech Republic, and in 2015 and 2016 there was an assisted resettlement of several hundred compatriots by the state. However, not

⁵ The Ministry of Interior of the Czech Republic on its website has divided the resettles into four waves. See <http://www.mvcr.cz/clanek/integrace.aspx?q=Y2hudW09NA%3d%3d> (accessed 8 August 2016).

even in this case was it a mass exodus, but rather an acceleration of the process of the resettlement of the offspring of Czech immigrants from Eastern Europe back to the places of the origin of their ancestors, which takes place long-term not only to the Czech Republic, but also to Germany, Poland and other countries.

The citizens of Ukraine in the Czech Republic, members of the Ukrainian minority in the Czech Republic and the Czech compatriots in Ukraine, also reacted to the military situation with the form of the social activities, increased mutual solidarity and the need to articulate their common ties transparently. Two new Czech compatriot societies emerged in 2015 in Ukraine, and altogether in recent decades we have observed five new Czech associations, which expands the number of the existing 19 social compatriot groupings.⁶ In the Czech Republic, the Ukrainian initiative lists 26 associations, which have mainly developed cultural, educational and publication activities, but also express solidarity with the affected areas and also organise material aid for them.⁷

⁶ See http://www.mzv.cz/jnp/cz/zahranicni_vztahy/krajane/krajane_ve_svete/adresare/adresare-ukrajina_adresar_krajanskych_spolku.html (accessed 9 August 2016).

⁷ <http://www.ukrajinci.cz/cs/diaspora-cr/> (accessed 9 August 2016).

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