Analyses OSW

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Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary and Romania, 'no' to allocating refugee quotas

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At a meeting of the EU Justice and Home Affairs Council on 22 September, the delegations from the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary and Romania voted against the decision to allocate refugees among the EU countries. In contrast to the Baltic states and Poland, which had also been among the main critics of setting mandatory refugee quotas, they demanded until the end that the decision on assigning quotas be taken based on voluntary declarations by each country.

Commentary

- During the negotiations, the Visegrad Group countries jointly formulated a number of demands shared by other countries in the region (particularly Romania), which were taken into account by the EU Council. These concerned: a lack of automaticity (permanent mechanisms) for relocating the refugees; the right of individual countries to identify and verify the refugees (also in terms of separating off the economic migrants); and the EU's consideration for the specificities of the region, particularly possible waves of migration from the East. The countries opposing the Council's decision emphasised that the first step should be to strengthen the EU's borders and reduce the influx of migrants, and only then to start discussions about quotas. To achieve this goal, however, will help the mechanisms used to relocate the refugees from Italy and Greece, which are aimed at encouraging these countries to comply with the EU procedures to the migrants.
- The countries which opposed the decision of the Council, which had no chance of building a vetoing minority, were guided by their calculations regarding future EU decisions on migration policy, among other factors. It is in their interest to avoid the mandatory assignment of refugee quotas in the future, in particular the use of top-down conversion rates based on the Council's current decision. These countries fear that if the decision was taken unanimously, political pressure on assigning subsequent migrant quotas will be even greater in the future.
- In those countries that opposed the mandatory quotas, the migration crisis is the main topic of public debate, and almost the entire political class supports the governments' position. Resisting 'diktats' and stressing the risks associated with the influx of migrants have become an effective way to consolidate and expand their electorates. This process is particularly pronounced in Slovakia, where the governing leftist party (*Smer-SD*) is

seeking the voters of the nationalist party, and hopes to continue its single-party rule after the elections planned for the March 2016. In Hungary on 23 September, Prime Minister Viktor Orbán criticised “Germany’s moral imperialism regarding the migration crisis" and declared that the EU should develop a special partnership with Russia and Turkey, without which it will be impossible to resolve the crisis. Orbán’s hard line against migration has already begun to halt the rise in popularity of the extreme right-wing Jobbik party.

- The Czech Republic and Romania have announced that they would abide by the Council’s decision. However, the Slovak Prime Minister Robert Fico declared that his country would not accept the decision on relocation, and plans to appeal to the EU’s Court of Justice. As for Hungary – despite its harsh criticism of the EU and Germany – it may be expected that they will accept the Council’s decision.

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