**SEVERAL IMMIGRANTS TO THE CZECH REPUBLIC TALKING ABOUT VARIOUS ASPECTS OF THEIR INTERNATIONAL MIGRATION**

**A Very Brief Introduction of the Respondents**

For the purpose of our interviews concerning international migration – we have chosen four respondents coming from different countries. **Ana Maria Salaba** (born in 1960) comes from Romania and she has moved to be with her children who live and work in the Czech Republic. **Mrs. Dinh** (1971), a Vietnamese woman, has found (together with her husband) a job in the northern Bohemian town Litvínov. **Mohamad Ej Hajj** (1981) from Lebanon came to the capital city Prague to study medicine at Charles University. A Chinese young man **Yi Pei Zhu** (1994) moved to Teplice, a spa town in the north of the country, together with his parents when he was nine years old because of bad economic situation in China.

**Job Opportunities and Economic Situation**

A job opportunity represented the main motivation for moving in most cases. Yi Pei’s father worked as a soldier and then as a button salesman. Since he longed for a better salary, the family decided to change the residence of their stay and found temporary home in Slovakia. The next journey led them to the Czech Republic, where the father started to run his own restaurant in Teplice. Yi Pei’s mother used to produce statuettes in China but she stopped doing this activity after her arrival to Europe, because she helped her husband with establishing the new project to open a restaurant. Mohamad El Hajj started his medical career also in Teplice and nowadays he works as a specialised doctor in Masaryk Hospital Ústí nad Labem.

The economic situation of countries influence unemployment rate. Unemployment is surprisingly relatively low in Romania, however there is higher poverty compared to the Czech state. The reason is that people do not earn so much money but the prices in shops are the same. Romanian currency reform after the revolution caused that people became poor.

**Education and Language**

Young foreigners coming to our country have to cope with Czech educational system. Some of them consider it quite easy. Yi Pei points out to the difficulty of schooling in China. He also mentions differences: e.g. more entertaining lessons and the lower age of teachers at Chinese schools. Ana Maria studied pedagogical faculty in Romania and it was quite demanding period of time for her, nevertheless he could not practice the profession of teacher in the Czech Republic. She earns a living as an operator of telephone lines. Ana regards humiliating that some of her immediate superiors ended their education only at elementary level.

Mohamad passed his school-leaving exam when he was seventeen years old. Afterwards he was preparing for the study of medicine in Lebanon. He had succeed in entrance tests, but unfortunately – since many applicants were successful too - he was not accepted as a medical student. Despite this he did not give up; and also his parents wanted him to try again. Mohamad’s uncle, living in the Czech Republic, recommended him to go here. Mohamad began next preparations after his arrival to Mariánské Lázně, a famous Czech spa town, where he studied Czech language for one year. Then he passed the entrance exam in Prague and studied at First Faculty of Medicine of Charles University. Mohamad compared the level and difficulty of education system in Lebanon and our country and he claims that it is more difficult to be accepted in his native land, but following studies are rather easier there. In the Czech Republic, the situation is, in his opinion, the other way round.

Mrs. Dinh felt that it was a very demanding task for them to learn Czech language at the very beginnings. Ana Maria could remember her problems with Czech grammar and spelling. People in Lebanon can decide whether they prefer to be involved in French or English educational system. Mohamad’s parents chose the French one for their son. Eventually he studied both - French and as well English language since high school. He did not have any problem to acquire Czech language, because he could profit from his previous experience with learning languages. On the whole, he is able to speak four languages – native Arabian, French, English and Czech.

**Political Situation, the Quality of Life, Healthcare**

Political situation represents a very important factor in the issue of immigration. The topic of a totalitarian regime is mentioned in the interview with Ana Maria from Romania. She told us about communism in her native country; e. g. about communist hatred towards religious people. On the other hand, God believers demonstrated their faith as a gesture of defiance against civil oppression.

The quality of life is not high in Romania; however the accessibility of essential facilities is comparable to Czech ones. There are not so many department stores and shopping malls, but a large number of small shops. Vietnamese markets occur rather seldom because Romanian economy is not convenient for Asian chapmen. The government does not pay any benefits to Romanies.

Mohamad thinks that the majority of Czech people is financially almost at the same or very similar level – there are not so many really poor people. By contrast, you can meet a lot of wealthy men and the poor in Lebanon. The profession of a medical doctor is therefore quite attractive in this country as it enables intelligent and talented people to reach the society of upper class. Nevertheless, our respondent does not plan to come back due to the fact that the most of hospitals belong to private owners. It implies a kind political involvement and Mohamad does not like politics at all.

Since health is definitely one of the most important things in our lives, the level of health care represents undoubtedly fundamental aspect of immigration. Mrs. Dinh appreciates being a member of Czech medical framework with insurance. She reckons it as a noticeable advantage compared to the Vietnamese system of instant cash payments whenever you are ill or injured and visit a doctor. Yi Pei says that Czech health care is cheaper than in China and moreover – it offers a greater variety of medication. Ana Maria pays health insurance in both places – Czech Republic and Romania. The reason is that she returns twice a year to her native country to visit her general practitioner for a check-up. She trusts doctors in Romania.

**Religion, Traditions, National Character, Culture**

International migration sometimes causes changes in confession. It is not a typical feature of moving, though it might potentially happen. Yi Pei used to be a Buddhist, but now he belongs to atheists who represent the majority of society in the Czech Republic. Ana Maria still visits a church every Sunday. In comparison to our country, much more Romanian people still believe in God – religion is widespread and it contains many branches: Orthodox Christianity, Evangelicalism, Baptism and Jehovah’s Witnesses (this group appeared mainly after the revolution). Mohamad characterizes Lebanon as a country with lot of different religious beliefs. Churches are often built near mosques. People used to be quite tolerant in the past, but nowadays it is much worse – unstable relationships between Muslims and Christians very often turn to sheer hatred. Mohamad, on contrary, appreciates religious tolerance of Czech people.

National identity plays at least as important role as religion. Holidays and festivals contribute also to the feeling of being member within a particular national society. Chinese communities in Europe keep their own traditions; nevertheless immigrants celebrate international holidays like Christmas or Easter according to the country they stay in. Yi Pei’s family does not celebrate traditional Chinese New Year, which is probably the biggest difference for them, regarding the aspect of cycle time. Mohamad says that families in Lebanon are much bigger than Czech ones and they meet more often. He sees a significant contrast in behaviour between them and Czech people who are frequently in bad mood and not very sympathetic with problems and suffering of the others.

Ana Maria had more time for cultural life in Romania. In the role of a teacher, she took part with her school kids in many culture events. As life is more hectic in our country, she has not visited a Czech theatre so far. Mohamad draws a comparison between Czech and Lebanese culture; and he comes to the conclusion that Lebanon has older history, but the level of cultural life is definitely higher in the Czech Republic. However he does not like close links between European culture and commercial world. We are, in his opinion, too dependent on the value of money and we underestimate spiritual spheres of life and art.

**Home, Family, Relatives, Community**

Before Ana Maria came to the Czech Republic, she expected better acceptance by her prospective neighbours. Eventually she was rather disappointed as they showed no try to be helpful. Luckily enough, she could spend some time by her children. Afterwards she moved out to prevent potential generation problems.

Mohamad enjoys happy family life. His wife is Czech and they met in the last academic year at university. He decided to marry her very soon. Nevertheless it was not easy at the beginning, because initially he wanted to go to Lyon in France. Since Mohamad’s partner comes from Teplice, the family lives there. They have two children – a five year old little girl Dia and a boy David who is only eighteen months. From time to time, Mohamad meets Arabian communities in our county as well as his relatives staying in Černošice near Prague, Beroun and Brno. In his leisure time, he used to play volleyball, basketball and table tennis. Now, with a family, it is a problem to manage all these activities in time, so he just plays football once a week and reads religious books. Mohamad even once lectured on religion at the grammar school in Teplice.

**Nature and climate**

Some immigrants can have troubles getting used to different climate and weather conditions; especially when they come from extremely hot or cold countries. Our respondents do not feel these aspects as difficulties. Ana Maria used to live in the south-eastern part of Romania with warm climate, fig trees and small scorpions. The other parts of Romanian country have similar climate, somewhere even colder. Ana Maria was not surprised by the character of climate after her arrival to our country, because she already had previous experience with the trips to Czech Republic for the purpose of visiting friends.

Mohamad speaks favourably about Lebanese nature with beautiful countryside, delicious fruit and vegetables and picturesque places by the sea. The dark side of this beauty is represented by bad political situation in the country as well as civil unrest in Syria – a state very close to Lebanon.

**Expectations and Future Plans**

Some of our respondents told us something about their expectations. Since they consider Czech Republic more or less good place to live, they are not afraid of the future. But not everybody wants to stay here forever. Yi Pei’s parents would like to return to China and enjoy the period of their retirement thanks to the money they had earned in Bohemia. Yi Pei’s sister Bey Bey would like to open a restaurant with her husband in the centre of Prague. Yi Pei’s dream is to study at some university abroad.

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