



Lessons on migration from my experience as a holocaust survivor

Although migration is one of the most critical social problems, it cannot be solved within the existing paradigm. Based on my experience of enduring and surviving holocaust, I will put forward a proposal for a “Marshall plan X”, that is based on entirely different premises than our current dogma. My proposed model is the path that has a historical basis, which after the devastating WW2 allowed hundreds of thousands “displaced persons” to create a new dignified life.

(a) There are some 3 million people determined to move to the countries of the Western world.

(b) There is a certain constituency of people that already arrived to Europe, or is knocking on our doors.

These are two interrelated problems. Two conflicts with two discrete solutions.

My proposal aims at (a) preventing such migration to happen, and (b) acting with dignity and benevolence towards those who stand on our soil. The two issues are incommensurable: the pressure and danger of millions of people on move requires grand scale actions on the territory where these people are now, while the issue of those who arrived to Europe is solvable as will be shown.

Slogans like “migration is a human right” are not only wrong but are highly counterproductive. We drop expressions “political asylum”, “misuse of the system”, “true and false refugees” from our vocabulary.

To make my arguments understood, I shall refer to one decisive event of my life. As a seven years old boy, back in 1944, I travelled under a false identity from Presov to Budapest. Both places were under the Nazi rule, but it seemed then that Budapest was a safer place to survive. My passport was false – it was on a girl name and I travelled with a scarf over my head. Thus, I know something about the issue of false identity and false documents. Although the journey was successful, everything what followed went wrong. My hiding in a “deaf and dumb” institution, in orphanages, in catholic cloisters turned out to be for nothing, we were betrayed, arrested and deported to Ravensbrück and Bergen-Belsen. My mother and I were liberated by the British army; we returned to Presov, just to find out that nobody else from our family survived holocaust.

Several thousand survivors of BB had nowhere to go, and a “Displaced Persons Camp” was established. This particular DP camp existed for full five years after the end of the WW2, till 1950. People who escaped death just by chance succeeded to organize their life in a meaningful way, they have built schools, nurseries, a synagogue, they had their daily newspaper, they organized theatre performances, concerts, cabarets. The reason for staying in the DP camp was that these people had no place to go, their homes were burned down, they were unwelcomed at places they came from. They mostly went to Israel thereafter. People have built something out of nothing.

Based on the above I shall show some slides related to the concept that I developed.

Professor Ivan Lefkovits is a founding member of the Basel Institute for Immunology (1969). He is Professor emerit. of the Philipps University, Marburg Germany, and Doctor honoris causa (Dr h.c.) from the University of Presov, Slovakia. He has written the History of the Basel Institute for Immunology (S. Karger AG) and prepared a collection of 15 memoirs of holocaust survivors, published by Suhrkamp Verlag with memoir covers designed by Gerhard Richter.