

Memorial Shoah Prague

In collaboration with The Vaclav Havel European Dialogues

THE JOURNEY

CESTA

(Europe and refugees - from escape to finding one's feet)

A European civil society discussion

As we find ourselves in the midst of the present refugee crisis let us not forget Europe's own bitter experience of exile, emigration and worse, waves of people fleeing from poverty, war and persecution. When the Soviet tanks came to Budapest in 1956 and 1968 to Prague, hundreds of thousands Hungarians and Czechs fled to the West, following those who fled Central and Eastern Europe after the war. Attempts to escape from behind the Iron Curtain continued: hundreds of thousands fled in secret and often all alone. Fences, bullets and dogs didn't frighten anybody away.

Half a century earlier, in 1939, twelve thousand Jewish children were saved from Germany, nearly seven hundred Czechoslovak children were saved through "Kindertransports" to England. There, families, church and civic organisations took care of them. As for the Czech parents, they were assembled in Prague, put on trains from the Bubny railway station and sent to the East, never to return.

Today, Europe itself has become a safe haven. People are arriving daily from other parts of the world, who want freedom from religious fundamentalists, freedom from war, and freedom from hardship.

A refugee's journey from home has many stages: the dream of leaving, the plan, the actual departure, the transit, the smuggling, the entry into Schengen, finding one's feet - a place to live, a community to integrate, interactions with officialdom to seek formal refugee status, work and survival in the formal or informal economy, integrating with a community and beyond, and, maybe, one day, returning home. That long journey - which can take years to get even half way through it - is hugely affected by the policy environment. From the failure of the state that runs your home all the way to the way our EU states run their economies to every detail in between: a refugee's journey, experiences and life-chances are inextricably affected by the policies that we all contribute to making a reality.

And every stage - or almost - of that journey has active civil society organisations doing what they believe will help. There are countless inspiring stories of personal and collective efforts and successes.

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The Sunday session before the official start of the Havel Dialogues wants to begin by taking a small step back: what is our social goal?

If you're a civil society actor in this space, you're quite likely to believe something like this: Each individual is valuable. We look forward to a world in which the states we live in respect each of us and our rights. In the meantime, we work to do what is possible to bring that future closer and to repair the most egregious departures from it. As Europeans, we think that Europe has a particular role to play because of its history, its present and the values by which we want to live together as a political unit.

We can argue about the details, the emphasis and the words. But we want to address the causes of the flow of refugees and we want to maximise Europe's capacity to welcome. We may have different opinions about what is an important constraint on that capacity. But to

the extent that we do put effort into the problem, we want it to be as effective as possible. How does all this relate to what the EU is doing? Why not try to find money from the EU budget to pay those who are willing and able to give humanitarian or other support to refugees and asylum-seekers in an over-burdened Member State, or even a third State? As well as family and friends, corporations and NGOs should also be allowed to sponsor, and universities could ask if students, staff and alumni wanted to support refugees who qualify for courses.

Sunday session is divided into three parts:

- The first session will be an exposition of EU policy from the commissioner. In a response the question will be raised about the need to integrate the problem into the design of every policy, European or national.
- The second will be a brainstorm: it will showcase selected projects to give an overview of initiatives throughout the refugee's journey. It will also discuss the difference between humanitarian aid and charity at the beginning and a long-term engagement in a problem with no visible end.
- The final session will be a synthesis and conclusion. Given the current environment, is there any "low hanging fruit" to increase the effectiveness of civil society action on the one hand and the European Union on the other? How can the two sides reinforce each other? We will aim to have the afternoon conclude with a statement that we will publish and disseminate at the Havel Dialogues and beyond.

Program

Sunday 29.5.2016

Holesovice-Bubny Railway Station

12.30- 12.45

Opening

Pavel Stingl, Memorial of Silence, Bubny

Michael Zantovsky, VHL, Vaclav Havel European Dialogues Conference 2016

12.45-13.30

Introduction:

Refugees 1939/ 2016

Speakers tbc

13.30-15.00

I. The European perspective: A view from Brussels

Speaker: *EU commissioner for migration, home affairs and citizenship, Brussels*

Panel tbc

15.00-15.30

Break

15.30-17.00

II. A citizen's perspective: Volunteers and civil society

*Volunteers: supplementing EU's existing programmes. Private sponsorship of refugees.
Universities: education, integration. Churches: a tradition of care. Spreading the word: new media*

Speakers: tbc

Chair: Tony Curzon Price

17.00-17.30

Break

17.30-18.30

III. Brussels and European civil society (Searching for synergies)

Speakers tbc

Short discussion

Conclusion: *Tony Curzon Price*

18.45-19.45

Reception