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Veröffentlichungsversion / Published Version

Zeitschriftenartikel / journal article

#### Empfohlene Zitierung / Suggested Citation:

Kleszczyńska, I. (2020). The humanitarian crisis of Venezuela and international response to its regional migration implications. *Studia z Polityki Publicznej / Public Policy Studies*, 7(4), 31-48. <https://doi.org/10.33119/KSzPP/2020.4.2>

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# The humanitarian crisis of Venezuela and international response to its regional migration implications

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## Abstract

The aim of this paper is to analyze the dimension of the humanitarian crisis of Venezuela, with a particular emphasis on the importance of regional migration problems and the involvement of the international community. The article consists of an introduction that focuses on the background of the current migration crisis, especially in terms of substantive and methodological assumptions and the theoretical perspective. Then, the article focuses on analyzing two major research areas: a) the main social, economic, and political causes of the Venezuelan migration crisis; the effects and causes of the crisis for both the Venezuelan economy and the security of the Latin American region; and b) the involvement of the international community, with a particular emphasis on the activities of the European Union, the United Nations, Latin American governments and the United States. Hence, the hypothesis indicates that the problem concerning the migration crisis of Venezuela is both caused by and deepens further socio-economic problems of the country, causing a feedback effect. The article is prepared based on an institutional and legal method (analysis of selected initiatives and the shape of public policies supporting the problem of the refugee crisis of Venezuela); systemic (analysis of the impact of the migration crisis on regional security in Latin America); content analysis (in particular documents and statutes of international organizations and governments); descriptive statistics method (analysis of statistical data related to the scale of the economic crisis of Venezuela and the population affected by the refugee problem). The results of the article indicate that the possibilities of handling the migration crisis are still limited due to the lack of coordination of the actions of the Venezuelan government and international organizations.

**Keywords:** Venezuelan humanitarian crisis, Nicolas Maduro, Hugo Chavez, Venezuelan refugee crisis, international relations in Latin America

**JEL Classification Codes:** H70, H75, H76, H72

**DOI:** 10.33119/KSzPP/2020.4.2

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## Kryzys humanitarny Wenezueli i reakcja środowiska międzynarodowego na implikacje związane z problemem migracji regionalnej

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### Streszczenie

Celem niniejszego artykułu jest analiza kryzysu humanitarnego Wenezueli ze szczególnym uwzględnieniem znaczenia problemów migracji regionalnej i zaangażowania społeczności międzynarodowej. Wstęp do rozważań koncentruje się na preludium obecnego kryzysu uchodźczego oraz na głównych założeniach merytoryczno-metodologicznych. Następnie skupiono się na dwóch głównych obszarach badawczych: a) najważniejszych społecznych, gospodarczych oraz politycznych przyczynach kryzysu migracyjnego Wenezueli, b) zaangażowaniu społeczności międzynarodowej w problemy migracyjne Wenezueli ze szczególnym uwzględnieniem działań Unii Europejskiej, Organizacji Narodów Zjednoczonych, Organizacji Państw Amerykańskich, rządów państw Ameryki Łacińskiej oraz Stanów Zjednoczonych. Biorąc pod uwagę wskazane założenia, hipoteza artykułu wskazuje, że kryzys migracyjny Wenezueli zarówno jest spowodowany kryzysem humanitarnym państwa, jak i pogłębia go, wywołując efekt sprzężenia zwrotnego. W artykule zastosowano metody: instytucjonalno-prawną, systemową, analizę treści oraz metodę statystyki opisowej.

**Słowa kluczowe:** kryzys humanitarny Wenezueli, Nicolas Maduro, Hugo Chavez, kryzys uchodźczy Wenezueli, stosunki międzynarodowe w Ameryce Łacińskiej

**Kody klasyfikacji JEL:** H70, H75, H76, H72

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## Introduction and the theoretical framework

Venezuela's constantly deteriorating internal situation and the deepening humanitarian crisis, caused by both inefficient political and economic management of the state under the authoritarian rule of Nicolas Maduro, attract the attention of the international community. Given the presented assumptions, the purpose of this article is to present both the factors and determinants that triggered the current economic and political crisis of Venezuela and the scale of the effects in the form of a refugee crisis. Hence, the article's considerations focus on the analysis of three main research questions: a) the reasons for the current humanitarian crisis of Venezuela; b) Venezuela's migration and refugee problems; and c) the international community's response to the humanitarian crisis and the possibilities for its resolution. The article consists of an introduction, which focuses on a general description of the current crisis of Venezuela and an indication of the main methodological and substantive assumptions. In the next part, the article is devoted to the background of today's humanitarian

crisis of Venezuela, with a special emphasis on the history of political and economic implications. Then, the article focuses on the scale of the economic crisis phenomenon and its impact on the intensification of the refugee problem of Venezuela. Subsequently, the next part was devoted to analyzing the dimension of the Venezuelan migration crisis, especially in terms of statistical data and the characteristics of migration directions. The last part of the article is devoted to the involvement of the international community in solving the humanitarian and migration crisis of Venezuela, with a particular emphasis on the activities of the United Nations, the Organization of American States, the European Union, the Norwegian Dialogue, the Lima Group, and the United States.

Taking into account the assumptions, the article distinguishes the following hypotheses and research questions that serve to falsify the indicated issues:

H1: *The economic and political crisis are the main reasons for the intensification of the migration wave of Venezuelan citizens, causing the phenomenon of positive feedback.*

The indicated research hypothesis allows for the analysis of the relationship between the sources of Venezuela's socio-economic crisis and its consequences in the form of the necessity to leave the country by a large number of Venezuelans. Then, the following research questions are used to test the indicated relationship: a) What are the sources of Venezuela's current socio-economic and political crisis? b) How does the crisis determine the intensification of migration to the countries of the region and the U.S.?; c) What legal and security problems are related to the refugee crisis of Venezuelans?

H2: *Managing and limiting the phenomenon of mass migration from Venezuela is closely dependent on the adopted public policies both at the governmental and international levels.*

This issue allows capturing the commitment to future possibilities of solving the migration problem of Venezuela, which determines the security problem not only in the immediate environment but also in the Latin and North American regions. Hence, the following research questions are used to falsify the hypothesis: a) What measures have been taken to limit and manage the problem of mass migration at the level of the Venezuelan government? b) What measures have been taken to limit and manage the problem of mass migration of Venezuelans at the level of the Latin American region? c) What measures have been taken to limit and manage the problem of mass migration of Venezuelans at the global (extra-regional) level?

Taking into account the interdisciplinarity of the issues discussed, this article refers to the theoretical conditions of international economics and international relations. Considering the dimension of the issues related to the analysis of the phenomenon of the economic crisis, which has its roots in the inadequate diversification of

sources of income and public debt, the article uses the theory of the state's economic policy, and, in particular, macroeconomic instruments. On the other hand, taking into account the scale of the internationalization of Venezuela's migration problem, the considerations are analyzed through the prism of the theory of institutional liberalism. Adaptation of the indicated approach allows the author, first of all, to analyze the involvement of regional and global partners in the process of creating appropriate public policies. The success of actions limiting the migration crisis is strictly dependent on multilateral solutions, which is reflected in the methodological and substantive assumptions of the article.

Based on the literature review, the author has developed an analytical model corresponding to the substantive and methodological assumptions and the possibility of falsifying the hypotheses. Due to the interdisciplinary nature of the considerations, the article uses both quantitative and qualitative data to analyze the role of the international response to the Venezuelan refugee crisis. The obtained data were evaluated (through qualitative or quantitative transformation); categorized (by political and economic determinants that both deepen and limit the crisis), and selected (via the application of statistical tools).

The considerations were developed through a *systemic method* (pointing to the importance of Venezuela's refugee crisis for both the regional and extra-regional levels and the involvement of organizations and partners at the international level); *historical* (indicating the importance of past problems of economic management and their consequences for the poor condition of life in Venezuela); *content analysis* (reports and documents from government and international organizations); *descriptive statistics* (presenting issues related to the economic crisis and the scale of the Venezuelan migration). The leading technique used in this article is the *case study*, which made it possible to distinguish the Venezuelan refugee crisis in the regional and global dimensions. The data were obtained on the basis of the content of documents and reports analysis from government organizations: the International Monetary Fund, European Union, International Energy Agency, United Nations, Human Rights Watch, Organization of American States. Congressional Research Service reports and analyses of think tanks: the Brookings Institution and Center for Strategic and International Studies remain an important source of information as well.

## Background of the current humanitarian crisis in Venezuela

At the beginning of 2019, among others, European Union countries and the United States administration recognized the chairman of the Venezuelan National Assembly – Juan Guaido, as the interim president of Venezuela, which resulted in the internal state of diarchy (O’Neil, 2019). Also, the humanitarian crisis is maintained by the widespread problem of corruption, political persecution, and hyperinflation (Coronel, 2008). Still, many Latin American, European Union, U.S. government, and international organizations are trying to improve Venezuela’s socio-economic situation by trying to adapt required and integrated public policies (International Monetary Fund, 2019). Subsequently, due to the fact that the living conditions of Venezuelans are getting worse day by day, many citizens decide to emigrate. Known as the Venezuelan migration, refugee crisis, or *Bolivarian diaspora*, it is currently the largest migration crisis in the history of both American continents.

The ability to resolve or reduce the current humanitarian and migration crisis depends on condensed public policies, both at the national and international levels. Working out an appropriate position by rationalizing the system activities of states and societies gives an opportunity to solve the indicated problems. It is worth emphasizing that, given Venezuela’s significant political and economic problems, effective public policy requires action at least at three levels. The first and most important approach is multidimensionality, which would allow for the adaptation and implementation of sectoral policies that could lead to a deep analysis of the scale of the problems and their dependence on individual policies. The next level concerns strictly the focus on the humanitarian and migration problems. This will allow indicating the range and the occurrence of a given problem, which may become the subject of a more detailed analysis and attempts to solve them. Normative orientation remains to be the last important level, which is rooted in humanistic values. It is worth recalling that there are many important options within public policies. This category certainly includes sectoral (economic, health, educational) policies, but also horizontal (regional, family, social), strategic, or redistributive, regulatory, and administrative policies towards Venezuela (Wiseman, Beland, 2010: 143–144).

It is worth pointing out that the scale of the refugee problem of Venezuelans is currently being compared to the migration problems of Cubans and refugees from Syria. In the first place, Venezuelan migrants escape to neighboring countries – primarily to Colombia (Bahar and Dooley, 2019). It should be noted that by the end of 2018, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) indicated that

more than 3 million Venezuelan citizens had left the country, most of them remain in the Latin American and Caribbean region (The Economist, 2013). However, an important problem is the issue of the lack of recognition of most Venezuelan immigrants as political refugees, which prevents them, inter alia, from receiving help from international organizations (Congressional Research Service, 2020: 1–6).

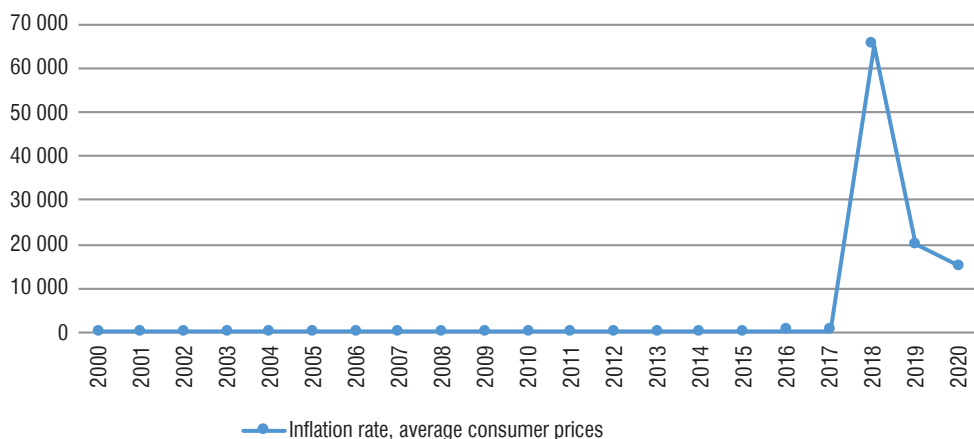
After Chavez's death in 2013, Nicolas Maduro became the President of Venezuela, who immediately began to strengthen his rule (Johnson, 2018). From spring to summer 2017, Venezuela experienced numerous civic protests that demanded the release of political prisoners, the need to respect the separation of powers, and above all, to hold early presidential elections (McCarthy, 2017: 61–67). In 2017, Maduro continued to transform the political system, trying to push further constitutional changes, which allowed him to hold presidential elections (Seelke, 2020: 1–2). Finally, Maduro began his second term in early January 2019. However, the legitimacy of his power is consistently undermined by the EU, the United States, the G-7 group, and most Western hemisphere countries (Hernandez, 2019: 1–3). The international community indicates that the only democratic institution of the political system of Venezuela remains the National Assembly, headed by Juan Guaido, who was eventually elected interim president (Oppmann, 2019).

## The significance of the economic crisis

Until recently, Venezuela was the most prosperous economy in Latin America due to its oil reserves (The U.S. Energy Information Administration, 2019: 1–3). The oil sector accounts for 90% of revenues for Venezuelan exports, which means a considerable economic dependence on the indicated raw material (CIA Factbook, 2019). However, the critical dependence on oil exports underlines that Venezuela's economy is closely linked to global price fluctuations in commodity markets (Congressional Research Service, 1–2, 2018). Eventually, the lack of savings and inadequate management led to doubling of public debt. The process of intensified nationalization of enterprises, control of the currency, and prices remain a huge problem (International Energy Agency, 2019). Venezuela's economic problems and the lack of stability still deter foreign investors, which aggravates the crisis further (Rendon, 2018). Therefore, the price drops on international oil markets in 2014 led the country to the current humanitarian crisis (Claessens and Kose, 2013: 28). The hyperinflation and lack of currency reserves prevent the import of necessary services and goods, in particular food and medicine (Biller, Laya, 2019). Moreover, it should be noted that the economy of Venezuela is strictly dependent on foreign creditors – in particular, China

and Russia (O'Brien, 2019). Finally, American sanctions, which mainly hit the commodity sector – oil and gold – remain a challenge for Venezuela's economy (International Monetary Fund, 2019b).

**Figure 1. Venezuela: Inflation rate from 1984 to 2020 (Annual percent change)**



Source: International Monetary Fund (2019a).

## The humanitarian crisis and Venezuelan migration problem

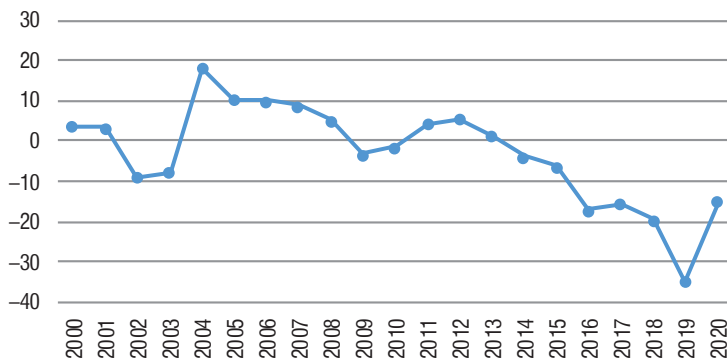
Until recently, Venezuela was one of the most common destinations for Latin American migrants due to the prosperous living standard. However, at present, Caracas is facing a severe refugee crisis. The most important reasons for the mass escape of Venezuelans include the growing violence and crime, gang wars, hyperinflation, and shortages of basic products (International Monetary Fund, 2020). However, possible solutions to this problem require a coordinated public policy, in particular, economic and social reforms and systemic changes. According to the UN reports, about 5 thousand people leave Venezuela every day. As many as 65 thousand people applied for asylum, but still most Venezuelans do not have basic documentation to legally reside in neighboring countries or other destinations. Unfortunately, the lack of refugee status limits the possibilities of receiving foreign assistance and enforcing basic human rights. Moreover, not having crucial documents determines the possibility of exposing Venezuelans to the problem of frequent arrest, deportation, and abuse by many criminal groups. In particular, migrants are exposed to the risk of human trafficking, sexual abuse, and forced labor. However, the situation of



people who decide to leave Venezuela is not improving. Still, these people must face the problem of exploitation, human trafficking, violence as well as discrimination, and xenophobia (Margesson, Seelke, 2019: 24–30). Although Colombia and other neighboring countries offer assistance, their ability to provide basic services is very limited, and the internal situation is becoming increasingly tense. Interestingly, the current exodus of Venezuelan citizens is an unprecedented phenomenon of mass emigration in the West Hemisphere, so in a region where one of the most stringent standards of protection for displaced persons or refugees applies.

According to the data from February 2020, since the outbreak of the humanitarian crisis of Venezuela, about 4.8 million Venezuelans have decided to flee the country. The need to emigrate has already affected over 17% of the population. For example, due to the ongoing civil war in Syria, 4.8 Syrians left their country in the aftermath of the Arab Spring, in 2015. Thus, the scale of the problem means that the Bolivarian diaspora is currently the largest wave of refugee emigration in history. UNHCR experts estimate that by the end of 2020, about 6.5 million inhabitants may leave Venezuela (UNHCR, 2019a: 3).

**Figure 2. Venezuela's Real GDP growth (Annual percent change)**



Source: International Monetary Fund (2020).

## The main directions of the Bolivarian diaspora

A vast majority of migrants, oscillating about 85% of the general population, decide to stay in the Latin America and Caribbean region. 1.6 million Venezuelans have traveled to Colombia so far, followed by Peru (862,000), Chile (372,000), Ecuador (385,000), Argentina (145,000), Brazil (254,000) (The UN Refugee Agency, 2019). Although even the UNHCR does not recognize the majority of Venezuelan migrants as refugees, it also indicates that a significant proportion of these people

require humanitarian assistance and the involvement of the international community in regulating their status and basic rights. Usually, potential victims are smuggled from villages or small towns to large cities. There, they are forced to do physical work, prostitution, or domestic assistance. Particularly, women and girls are vulnerable to sexual exploitation (UNHCR, 2019b). On the other hand, men and boys are forced labor. Moreover, males are often recruited for Venezuelan criminal groups. Furthermore, people who do not have identity documents are particularly exposed. Although the Maduro government has consistently assured that it guarantees educational programs for citizens at the risk of human trafficking, it has not decided to publish statistical data on the scale of this phenomenon (Rendond and Schneider, 2018: 1–6).

Since the beginning of the 21st century, the population of Venezuela currently residing in the U.S. has more than tripled (U.S. Department of State, 2017). However, the largest intensification of the migration wave has enocurred in recent years. Since 2015, the number of immigrants from Venezuela has increased by up to 54%. In 2018, the total number of Venezuelans in the U.S. amounted to over 234,000, which means that they constitute the fifth-largest immigrant population from South America in the United States. When comparing the analyzed migration group, Venezuelans residing in the U.S. more often have higher education, it is easier to get a green card due to numerous relatives or professional connections. Taking into account the population distribution, Venezuelans in the U.S. live mainly in Florida (up to 54%) and Texas (12%) (Gallardo, Batalova, 2020).

However, the lack of integrated action at the international level remains to be a problem. The lack of consolidated public policies concerning humanitarian, immigration, and financial activities limits the liquidation of the effects of the crisis. According to the data, problems related to migration connected with Syria consumed about 7.4 billion dollars during the first four years of the civil war. For comparison, a total of \$5.8 million was donated to the Venezuelan migration crisis (Congressional Research Service, 2020: 5–11). The refugee crisis that is currently observed in the entire region affects people who are often malnourished and in poor health. Diseases that are usually treatable in the 21st century, such as measles, are the cause of death of many Venezuelans. The refugee health situation has been dramatically aggravated by the outbreak of the global coronavirus pandemic. At present, Covid-19 is also one of the most important causes of mass migration of the inhabitants of Venezuela. That is why regional organizations, in particular the Pan American Health Organization, are looking for a way to obtain additional funds that would help to cope with epidemiological problems (Congressional Research Service, 2020: 6–11).

## International engagement in the Venezuelan refugee crisis

The humanitarian crisis of Venezuela attracts the attention of the international community. The options for overcoming both the political and economic crisis are closely dependent on the involvement of foreign institutions: international and regional organizations, and individual governments. The proper implementation of public policies and international initiatives remains a key element that can positively determine the reduction of Venezuela's crisis (Human Rights Watch, 2019a).

### United Nations' activities

One of the most engaged international institutions that are trying to coordinate public policies related to the humanitarian crisis of Venezuela and the accompanying migration crisis is the United Nations. Although in 2018 the Maduro government refused humanitarian aid, it allowed UN delegations to increase humanitarian and protective actions in 2019. The UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA), which coordinates protection activities, remains the main body supporting the fight against the Venezuelan crisis. As a result of UNOCHA's operations, a humanitarian response plan for Venezuela was established and consistently implemented, which finally allocated funds of \$ 223 million (UNOCHA, 2020). The funds allow covering measures focused on improving health, water purity, sanitation, hygiene, food security, safe accommodation, medicines, and education. According to the data presented by the UN, in 2019, there were 78 entities in 24 states and 231 municipalities of Venezuela delegated to help in the humanitarian and migration crisis (Human Rights Watch, 2019b). Anyway, what limits the UN's activities are still fuel shortages, long interruptions in electricity and water supply, extensive telecommunications problems, and in particular, the activities of organized crime groups. However, the UNOCHA 2020 report, which was published in December 2019, underlines that humanitarian operations still require a significant increase in funding to \$ 750 million. It is worth emphasizing that the activities of the UNHCR and UNOCHA are consistently supported by the operations of the Venezuelan Red Cross and the International Red Cross (ICRC, 2020). Therefore, these activities focus primarily on healthcare, which aims to guarantee access to basic medical services and help for the most vulnerable (seriously ill or injured) people (United Nations, 2020a).

The increasing problems with the Venezuelan migration crisis have determined the UN Secretary General to appoint special delegates from the UNHCR and the International Organization for Migration (IOM) to coordinate the actions of the

communities that deal with the reception of Venezuelan immigrants: governments, regional organizations, both international and national NGOs, and the Red Cross movement. What is more, a huge role in coordinating activities requires the involvement of the United States administration in humanitarian response. Thus, the U.S. is, in particular responsible for promoting regional consensus and dialog on humanitarian and migration issues. Eventually, by the coordinated activities of the UNHCR and IOM in 2018, the Regional Refugee and Migrant Response Plan (RMRP) was launched. It should be noted that this plan is the first such migration initiative in America. The plan focuses mainly on the development and implementation of coordination and operational strategies, as well as the acquisition of special funds for humanitarian activities. Under the RMRP, \$ 738 million was donated, which supported over 2 million Venezuelans both in the region and in the territories of the Venezuelan host countries. Moreover, the UNHCR and IOM initiative also provides for formal support, focusing on legal assistance in asylum applications. The RMPP offers educational programs and supports activities in the area of protection against violence and abuse in both sexual and forced labor dimensions. Successfully, the next migration plan was launched in December 2019 (Refugee and Migrant Response Plan, 2020: 5–15). According to the data, another \$ 1.35 billion is to be transferred in 2020. This fund is expected to reach the neediest Venezuelans, oscillating around 4 million citizens and immigrants residing in the Latin American and Caribbean region. So far, the countries involved in controlling the migration crisis of Venezuela have developed the so-called *Quito* regional coordination platform. The program focuses primarily on improving internal border management, creating a uniform cross-border identification system, and voluntary regional relocation programs. Quito envisages extensive, joint infrastructure investments towards the region (Quito Process, 2019).

## Regional activities

The ability to respond and coordinate activities related to Venezuela's humanitarian crisis is hampered by the different attitudes towards Nicolas Maduro's presidency. Some Latin American countries still support the current president of Venezuela. Some criticize his government, while others remain neutral. Such deep divisions make it impossible to solve such extensive problems comprehensively and effectively in the Organization of American States (OAS) by adapting effective public policies and management. In January 2020, the OAS re-issued a resolution expressing opposition to Maduro's continued rule (OAS, 2020). At the same time, the OAS expresses its support for the interim president Juan Guido, who heads the General Assembly of Venezuela. Although the OAS's attitude towards internal affairs and

Maduro's presidency is clear, it is hard to reach a consensus on coordinated humanitarian action and the restoration of the rule of law in Venezuela. It is worth pointing out that the countries belonging to the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) are reluctant to intervene in the internal affairs of Venezuela. The reason for this procedure is, obviously, Venezuelan subsidized oil. At the beginning of December 2019, 11 countries that signed and implemented the so-called The Rio Treaty identified and approved a list of 29 people who supported corrupt practices and human rights violations in Venezuela (Johnson, 2019: 1–10).

## European activities

European Union countries are solidly opposed to the further presidency of Nicolas Maduro and his attempts at subsequent parliamentary attacks. Although the European Union supports interim president Juan Guido, there is no agreement in Europe on any armed intervention in Venezuela. This shows how difficult it is to work out a consolidated position on the Venezuelan crisis, even in such an integrated entity. That is, apart from the EU competences, why EU activities focus primarily on diplomatic and economic involvement (in particular through the imposition of further sanctions) (European Council, 2019). Therefore, Canada, the European Union, Panama, and Switzerland have imposed sectoral sanctions to hit, in particular, politicians supporting Nicolas Maduro's government or consistently blocking financial transactions involving the president. European Union countries have developed cooperation with Latin American countries by creating the International Contact Group (ICG). The ICG includes Uruguay, the United Kingdom, Spain, Sweden, Italy, Costa Rica, Ecuador, France, Germany, Portugal, Panama, and the Netherlands. The main goal of the Contact Group is to control the electoral processes in Venezuela, and coordinate humanitarian activities, including actions aiming to release political prisoners and Maduro's potential opponents and establish a new electoral council. In addition, in 2019, the ICG sent a special diplomatic mission to Caracas and supports the process of dialog between Maduro and Guido led by Norway (European Union External Action, 2020).

Moreover, European activities include the organization of the International Solidarity Conference, concerning refugees from Venezuela and the migration crisis in the South America region, which took place in Brussels in October 2019. The conference was held under the special patronage of the European Commission, UNHCR, and IOM. Its main purpose was to increase global awareness of Venezuela's refugee and migration problem related to the tragic economic and political crisis. Furthermore, the conference's goal was to set up lasting coordination and cooperation

between public and private sectors to maintain actions supporting the Venezuelan migration crisis and funding opportunities. The December commitments of the delegations that took part in the conference oscillate around \$ 167 million. Probably, the next solidarity conference will take place in 2020. In addition, European activities are focused on supporting the already mentioned Quito process (Congressional Research Service, 2020: 6–11).

## Norway Dialog

Norway remains one of the countries most involved in the political crisis that persists in Venezuela. Since May 2019, the Norwegian government has been supporting negotiations between President Nicolas Maduro's camp and interim president Juan Guido. The goal of coordination of talks is to be able to develop a common political consensus by defining clear conditions that enabled free and, above all, fair presidential elections in Venezuela. However, the most problematic and controversial issue is the very candidacy of Nicolas Maduro. It is still difficult to agree whether Maduro will be able to remain president during the elections. However, the Norwegian government points out that Maduro's tactics are primarily about dragging negotiations. For example, in August 2019, Nicolas Maduro suspended his further participation in negotiations under the patronage of Norway. Sanctions imposed on the president, his family, and colleagues remain the main reason for his actions. Due to a lack of consensus, in mid-September 2019, Guido completely resigned from participation in the Norwegian dialog (Seelke, 2019: 1–2).

## Lima Group

The Lima Group is a multilateral initiative that was established in accordance with the findings of the Lima Declaration, which was signed in August 2017. The charter was signed by 12 countries of the Latin American and Caribbean region: Argentina, Brazil, Canada, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, Paraguay, Peru, and Panama. In 2018, Guyana and St. Lucia joined the Lima Group, which were objected to Nicolas Maduro's re-election as President of Venezuela. The main goal of the 14 signatories is to find a peaceful solution to the political and economic crisis of Venezuela. To sum up, the group's activities include actions to free political prisoners, stop further violations of human rights, provide humanitarian aid, restore the democratic rule of law, and hold free presidential and parliamentary elections in Venezuela. In addition, the signatory countries introduced travel bans and sanctions against officials and associates of Nicolas Maduro and called on other

countries to take the same action. Mexico, however, did not introduce the proposed solutions. Like the EU countries, the Lima Group is opposed to the possibility of a military intervention in Venezuela. In February 2020, the need for free and fair presidential elections was announced. Cuba was also involved in the diplomatic process (Lima Group Declaration, 2019: 1–3).

## United States' activities

For a long time, Venezuela was the main foreign oil supplier to the United States. However, the many differences that arose during the presidency of Hugo Chavez led to a significant deterioration in bilateral relations. Since 2010, the U.S. administration has been closely monitoring both human rights violations and non-compliance with the principles of a democratic state of law. Counteracting global terrorism has been one of the main priorities of American foreign policy since the beginning of the 21st century. Bilateral relations between the United States and Venezuela in this regard have weakened significantly in recent years. Due to the intensification of authoritarian tendencies, both the Barack Obama and Donald Trump administration are still maintaining host sanctions aimed directly at Maduro and his associates. Donald Trump's policy focuses on providing consistent support to the interim president Juan Guido and, at the same time, strives to maintain Nicolas Maduro's isolation. On the other hand, the U.S. administration also guarantees numerous humanitarian and development initiatives. The Trump administration is pushing Venezuela to hold fair and free presidential elections as soon as possible. In February 2020, Juan Guido's official visit to Washington D.C. was held to accelerate the further democratic transformation of Venezuela (U.S. Department of State, 2019).

According to data presented by the U.S. administration, by February 12, 2020, the United States had decided to donate \$472.4 million to counter the humanitarian and refugee crisis of Venezuela since 2017. The U.S. Army has directed twice a medical ship towards the coast of Venezuela to provide emergency medical assistance to victims. It is worth recalling that at the request of the interim president, in February 2020, the United States tried to provide food and medical and hygiene supplies to the citizens of Venezuela on the Colombia- and Brazil-Venezuela borders. However, their help was rejected by the government of Nicolas Maduro. External humanitarian aid is, obviously, an important instrument of the political and image struggle (Congressional Research Service, 2020: 15–27).

## Conclusion

Probably the scale of the phenomenon of the refugee crisis of Venezuela will not be limited in the near future. The situation depends on the potential change of power in Caracas. If Maduro persists, the humanitarian crisis will be deepened. Venezuela's refugee crisis is determined by internal and external factors. These include, in particular, the internal economic and political crisis and the lack of coordination between government actions and the international response. Unfortunately, initially, both the international community, human rights institutions, and organizations downplayed the scale of the problems. This means that most countries in the region (especially Ecuador, Peru, and Chile) are forced to implement retaliation measures – in particular, imposing limits on Venezuelan entries. Such decisions mean that the crisis is spreading rapidly outside the region. Unfortunately, Venezuela's migration problem does not have quick and easy solutions. The humanitarian crisis is a profound political phenomenon. Then, it requires coordination at both the internal level as well as cooperation with the remaining seventeen South American countries. Given the scale of the crisis, which is numerically higher than the refugee problem in Syria, actions should include aid from the United States and the European Union. Moreover, due to the political stalemate and the state of dual power in Venezuela, the involvement of third countries in the negotiation and implementation of the recommendations seem necessary. The limitations on the possibility of working out common positions and implementing appropriate public policies that would determine the further spread of the humanitarian catastrophe remain a huge challenge. The indicated policies require, first of all, reforms concerning the internal management of the political and economic system and the restoration of democratic institutions. Secondly, at the regional and international level, appropriate cooperation is required regarding the problem of migration, in particular the status of refugees. Taking into account the indicated relationships, it can be noticed that the relationship between the deteriorating economic situation of Venezuela causes positive feedback because the economic problem determines the emigration wave. On the other hand, the outflow of potential labor is exacerbating the recession and fueling the problem on a regional scale. Due to the presented arguments, the considerations confirm the adopted hypotheses that the development of the refugee crisis depends on the economic and political problem, and their solution is connected with the coordination of governmental and international activities.



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