



Story of Martin: Who deserves a Blue Card?

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Abstract:

Martin comes from Egypt as highly skilled professional in the financial sector. Reasons that brought him to Slovakia are of private and family nature. Martin felt free to express a critical insight of his own immigration experience in the interview for the project “Migration to the Centre” with the Human Rights League Slovakia.

Martin, why did you decide to come to Slovakia, what brought you here?

I met a girl and we fell in love. I had a very good job in Egypt, good education and very good salary. But we wanted to live together and it is much easier for her to be in Slovakia.

What was your profession back in Egypt?

I am specialized in finance with more than 10 years of experience. I have a master degree, three diplomas in finance and some other professional certificates as well. I have the highest certificate in finance in the world, the CFA.

How was it for you in this situation to obtain a residence permit in Slovakia?

It was not that easy. I tried to obtain the blue card as a highly qualified candidate, but there were many obstacles. It takes long time and no company would wait for me longer than one or two months. The other issue was the salary. It should be 1.5 of the average salary in Slovakia. This is a requirement I can understand, but in my case there was only 20 or 50 Euro difference. That's why I could only apply for the normal work permission.

So you have a temporary residence permit?

Yes.

What was the biggest hindrance when you were applying for the residence?

Foreign police. The people working there are only doing their job. But the condition of the place where we had to wait... it's not nice. I had to be there at 4 a.m. just to get a place in the queue and I still wasn't the first one there. There were more than 20 people in front of me already and some of them took more than one ticket. You have to wait until the afternoon, till you can enter and once you get inside, you can't speak to anyone, because they don't understand any other language but Slovak. I speak English and German, but I couldn't communicate with the employees there. How about people, who do not speak any other languages then?

How does it look like in the Foreign police station Bratislava?

What I was missing as well was a reasonable place to sit. The inside area with chairs is very small. Imagine I was there in winter, it was snowing and I was waiting outside the office for three or four hours. I could not move from my place, because somebody else would take my position in the queue. It is nonsense and this is only the waiting. I am not saying we need to build a new building, but at least a tent to protect us from the snow would help. And some benches, so that people can sit. We could do reservations in the internet to eliminate the queuing; people would come directly to their appointment. The working times could be increased, now they are open only three days a week. If we added just one more day, or if there were longer working hours during these three days, I think it would solve a very big part of the problems.

Can you remember any good practice there?

I have to mention the positives as well. Once I met an officer there who tried to speak English. It was not very good, but at least we could communicate somehow. She was very nice and tried to help me as much as she could.

Martin, based on your personal experience, would you recommend any changes to be taken?

I think the procedure has to be enhanced somehow. There is a lot of potential. For example I have to go there in person to inform them if I change my employer, only to hand them a piece of paper. This has to happen automatically. As soon as my employer sends my resignation or dismissal to the labor office, they can simply forward it to the foreign police.

How long have you been here, in Bratislava?

I have been here several times, but the longest time since last September. During my former visits I had to deal with the foreign police as well, because of my visa, I had to register myself. Once I went there a funny thing happened. The officer asked me "Why are you here?" So I answered: "To register". I asked people in the line to translate for us. The lady kept

asking: “Why are you here already?” I think she didn’t know about this law, the obligation to register with the foreign police when I come on an invitation. If you are asking people to obey the law, you should at least know what the law says.

Thanks for sharing the story. Martin, did you already start learning Slovak?

Yes.

Will that be useful for you?

Definitely. I’d like to deal with my girlfriend and her family. They speak English and German, but still, some parts of the family don’t and I need to speak to them in their native language, to be closer. To show I am respecting the country where I live, the language, the traditions, the culture. And I am also learning for myself, because here in the country you don’t use any other language besides Slovak so I have to know the law. I respect the law, whatever it is, so I need to understand it. To know the rules, so that I know what I should do and what I shouldn’t, what my obligations are. Now, when I go to some place in Slovakia, for example to get my driving license, I need someone to translate for me. Or at the doctors. All the time, even if I go to a coffee shop, I need somebody to help me. To live in such a country, such a wonderful country I have to say, I need to speak the language.

Will you try to obtain the blue card again in the future?

Yes. After I studied the law more, I discovered that it is all tailored for me. They ask for more than five years of experience, I have ten. They ask for very high education of more than eight years, I have even more plus professional non-academic certificates from international organizations like International Management Institute. This is the worldwide most recognized organization issuing certificates in the field of finance. Concerning the job, I think I have good opportunities, because people in Slovakia don’t have such qualifications. I think I would be adding value to the country, because if I work with juniors or even with seniors, I will add value to their qualification and enhance it. After maybe five years of dealing with them, they will be well trained and they can fill this gap on the working market in Slovakia.

So you think that your profession is appreciated and you are not “stealing a job” from anyone else?

I contacted many companies and some of them even called me, for example one week ago I got a call from a renowned international company. The lady told me she has been looking for exactly my profile for more than six months. But my obstacle is that the people don’t speak English and so they ask me how my Slovak was. That’s why I am studying the language now. But there are international companies that gave me offers. The problem is again, that they are afraid of the blue card and the work permission process. They think that it is going to take long time. In the beginning they believe I am married and there is no legal problem with my

employment. They contact me, ensure me that I am the one they need and invite me for an interview. I went to one employment fair as well. I spread my CV, everyone appreciated it, they were asking for details and if they could call me. Often they have been searching for such qualification for several months. The thing is that my specialization is not only finance in general; it is rather some function of finance one could say. It is needed in the multinational companies for strategic planning, for budgeting, controlling.

How many positions in your profession are available on the labor market?

If you check the internet, you will find more than twenty or thirty positions they have been announcing for months now. Either nobody is applying, or people who do are not professional enough for the standards of international companies. Again, my problem is that the HR people don't know the procedures how to employ me.

Do you see a bright future for yourself in Slovakia?

I would wish to see it this way. But after all of this hurdles, I am seriously considering to find another country. Either to go back home, or as I told you, I speak German. It is much easier for me to find something in Vienna. We decided to come to Slovakia, because it is a new market with potential. I know it since I am an economist. The future might be very nice in such a country. But with this kind of barriers, I don't think it will be easy. In all the countries in the world, when they need to encourage the international experience, to enrich young people, the human resources and to make them more qualified, they get professionals from all over the world, give them residence permit, make everything much easier for them, so they can stay in the country and enrich the work force, which is one of the most important economical resources. If we speak in a macro scale, in a bigger scale, this is very advantageous.

Martin, do you have information about the situation in other EU countries?

I have a cousin in Germany who is a dentist. As he moved there from Egypt, they gave him, for sure not for free, but they gave him a dentist clinic and free language courses. They organized a test for him to acknowledge his dentist certificate and to allow him to work there, because they needed him. There is very big gap on the market in Germany. If Slovakia would like to compete with such a country like Germany, I think you should see what they do there to apply it. With all the respect for the traditions, for the country of course. You need to enrich your experience, to increase the talented and qualified work force.

Why do big companies like IBM or Dell move to Slovakia? They come here because the work force is cheaper for them than in any other place in Europe while highly qualified at the same time. Qualified young people cost more, but once they find them here and they are still cheaper compared to other places, of course they will be coming here. It will increase the state income in taxes; it should increase a lot of facilities in your country, which will boost your

economy consistently. We start from a very small issue, but trust me this creates a domino effect in the economy.

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