MIGRANT AND REFUGEE CRISIS IN EUROPE: CHALLENGES, EXPERIENCES AND LESSONS LEARNT IN THE BALKANS

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Europe’s top threats

• Since 2015 - terrorist threat, strained international relations, and stagnant economic indicators have maintained the unstable environment (Dugulin, 2017).

• Rise of populism, nationalism and xenophobia. In that sense the issues of migration and security are threatening the fundamental values on which the EU is built. - European Commissioner for Migration, Home Affairs and Citizenship (EEAS, 2017).
Overview of migrant and refugees statistics

• **65.3 million** people around the world have been forced away from home - nearly **21.3 million refugees**, over half of whom are under the age of 18.

• An estimated **11 million** Syrians have fled their homes since the outbreak of the civil war in March 2011. In 2017, **13.5 million** are in need of humanitarian assistance within the country.

• The majority have sought refuge in neighbouring countries or within Syria itself, **4.8 million** have fled to Turkey, Lebanon, Jordan, Egypt and Iraq, and **6.6 million** are internally displaced within Syria.

• About **1 million** have requested asylum in Europe. Germany, with more than **300,000** cumulated applications, and Sweden with **100,000**, are EU’s top receiving countries.
Migration phenomenon Vs. Liberal theory (theoretical fundamentals)

- Every liberal country has an obligation to give shelter to anyone who flees from persecution, war and dictatorship.
- As the right of life is not given by the state, it does not depend on any state’s will.
Migrants and refugee routes

• UNHCR - 3 primary routes: the Central Mediterranean route from North Africa to Italy, the Eastern Mediterranean route from Turkey to Greece, Bulgaria, and Cyprus, and the Western Mediterranean route from North Africa to Spain.

• Frontex
Movement out of Turkey and onward movement from Greece and Bulgaria (UNHCR)
Western Balkan route

• Continuation of the migrant flows dominantly coming from the Eastern Mediterranean route.
• Passes through small countries on the Balkan Peninsula and neighbouring Central European countries with reduced or limited financial, infrastructural and institutional resources, less advanced asylum systems and burdened with political, social and other problems at the same time.
• Main risks: 2015 (national security, public security, and public health) and 2016 (personal migrant security, health care, and humanitarian protection).
Registered and reported arrivals to Macedonia, Croatia, Serbia, Slovenia and Hungary in 2016 (IOM)
Balkan route statistics

• The total number of arrivals to Europe by the end of December 2016 was recorded as 387,739 and it is a stark contrast to the 1,046,599 arrivals recorded in 2015.

• In Greece there was a 79% decrease - 176,906 arrivals in 2016 compared to the 857,363 recorded in 2015, while Italy saw a slight (16%) rise in numbers of arrivals, from 155,842 in 2015 to 181,436 in 2016 (IOM, 2016, p.1).
Development

< August 2015

• Various flows of migrants, entering by foot, hidden in vehicles or trains, using railway tracks and cycling to the highroad
• Registered many cases of smuggling migrants.

Aug - Nov 2015

• Huge flow of migrants (most of them from vulnerable categories)
• Organized transport and services provided within states’ established reception centres.
After EU-Turkey Statement

• Central Mediterranean again became the best alternative entry point to Europe using Libya’s ports, but also minor numbers arrived in Italy from Egypt and Turkey.

• An advanced regional approach using more efficient border restrictions imposed at several points along key routes.

• The numbers crossing the sea to Greece from Turkey dropped drastically with arrivals in October 2016 almost 99% lower than in October 2015 when 211,663 crossed the Aegean – an average of 6,828 per day. In 2016, arrivals on the Greek islands dropped from an average of 2,175 per day in January to 96 per day in October and 54 per day in December (UNHCR).
Incidents and attempts for violent and massive entrance (1)

Incidents near Border Stone 59
Reasons that contributed: uninformed migrants, false information and guidance by various activists and organizations.

14.03.2016
More than 2000 migrants, accompanied by NGO activists and journalists attempted to enter illegally in the nearby v.Moin.

10.04.2016
More than 3,000 migrants attempted to break the fence on different places and attacked security forces by stones, metal bars and other objects.
- 23 officers injured, 8 vehicles and other equipment damaged.
Incidents and attempts for violent and massive entrance (2)

- More than 200 migrants passed around the police cordon on the Greek side and attacked police forces with stones and metal bars.
- 1 police officer injured, 5 vehicles damaged.

Around 30 migrants accompanied by 5-6 photographers damaged the fence and went back to the Idomeni camp.
Stranded Migrants Trends from the EU-Turkey Agreement to 29 December 2016 in the Western Balkans, Greece and Hungary (IOM)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>No. of stranded migrants and refugees on 10 March 2016</th>
<th>No. of stranded migrants and refugees on 29 December 2016</th>
<th>% change from March to December 2016</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Greece</td>
<td>42,688</td>
<td>62,784</td>
<td>47%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Macedonia</td>
<td>1,199</td>
<td>137</td>
<td>-89%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Serbia</td>
<td>1,706</td>
<td>5,633</td>
<td>230%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Croatia</td>
<td>231</td>
<td>620*</td>
<td>168%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slovenia</td>
<td>408</td>
<td>339</td>
<td>-17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hungary</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>460**</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bulgaria</td>
<td>865</td>
<td>5,560</td>
<td>543%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>47,097</td>
<td>75,533</td>
<td>60%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Number of asylum seekers
**Data available as of 16 November 2016.
LESSONS LEARNT AND MEASURES TAKEN IN DEALING WITH THE PROBLEM

• Consideration: Spontaneous > very serious.
• Crisis without political background arising in the region > impact of daily politics and populism on the regional cooperation. Result: hotspots appeared on the borders where there are real bilateral disputes (Macedonia-Greece and Serbia-Croatia) and where there is an atypical implementation of European security policies and strategies (the Hungarian border).

• Affectation:
1. on internal security of the areas near border crossing points, near refugees’ camps and along the route.
2. increased xenophobia and minor conflicts due to the cultural differences between domicile population and migrants.
• The huge migrant flows were not identified a serious threat in the national security policies.
• Consequently, the security forces and other state and local institutions did not have any strategy how to deal with the situation.
• Lack of knowledge and expertise on how to deal with "imported" and large-scale humanitarian catastrophes, including infrastructural and logistic issues
• Lack of interagency (cross-sectoral) and international cooperation.
• Uncoordinated involvement of EU capacities (Frontex, Europol, EEAS and crisis management instruments), international organizations (UNHCR, UNICEF, Red Cross and IOM) and security oriented regional initiatives (MARRI).
Key actors role – EU

The action period 2014-2016 showed that the EU, besides acting dominantly on ad hoc basis for issues of strategic importance, uses many bureaucratic and consensus based mechanisms for dealing with such kind of crisis.

Action taken:

• Organization of political meetings and pushed the Balkan state officials to increase control over the Balkan route with their own resources on the ground, offering EU guidelines and symbolic support.

• Financial aid in the later stages of development

• Very symbolic deployment of Frontex.
EU 17 operational measures plan (Oct 2015)

The plan provided implementation of the following activities:

• unique registration documents;
• daily information about new measures and activities;
• profiling and strict criteria for entry in the first country;
• first entry to be authorized only for persons with a travel document, visa or residence permit;
• daily quota for transit and acceptance – 3000 persons for transit through the route (85 persons for Austria);
• and better control of the green border.
Austria initiative (Feb 2016)

Police chiefs from Macedonia, Serbia, Croatia, Slovenia and Austria argued:

• To introduce joint registration of refugees crossing from Greece into Macedonia and
• To organise their transport from the border straight to Austria.

The process was aimed to identify and take biometric data from the migrants and determine whether they come from countries deemed dangerous, such as Syria, Iraq or Afghanistan. It was not intended to grant them status as asylum seekers, a step that will take place in Austria or whatever other country they might travel to.
Regional and national views - General perspective

• The problem cannot be transferred to neighbours or to other national or local stakeholders within system of crisis management and humanitarian assistance.

• Referring to the institutional response, the political level, national and local stakeholders involved in the crisis would never admit that their institutions were not capable and did not clearly understand the threats of the migrant crisis and their role and competences in the phases of dealing with it.
2.2 Regional and national views - Security forces sub-perspective

• This perspective is quite specific regarding other views on the problem, mainly due to police powers and their position in the society as a visible governmental institution that creates a public image of how the state deals with migrants and refugees.

• The security and intelligence services > to provide evidence against public opinion that “all refugees are terrorists”, especially after an increased level of xenophobia (islamophobia) in Europe following the terrorist attacks in Paris on November 13th 2015, and in Brussels on March 22nd, 2016, and in other European cities in the following period, and connections of the some of the executers or collaborators with the Balkan route.
Regional and national views - Security forces sub-perspective (military findings)

• Telephone guidance (leading) during border crossing;
• multiple appearances of the same persons in charge of the migrants in the trains transporting the migrants from the southern to the northern point along E75 and vice versa;
• marking of crossing paths (plastic bottles and textile);
• the existence of locations in Greece where the migrants pay for false IDs and locations for sale of fake travel documents;
• offering bribery to the members of Macedonian security forces for faster and easier transit through the country;
• and there is an unconfirmed information that the transport is funded and the funds are obtained at several locations in Turkey and Serbia.
2.2 Regional and national views - Security forces sub-perspective (police findings)

- migrants are coordinated from people from Afghanistan and Pakistan, which stay in Greece on purpose;
- the service costs 300–1500 euro per person; transportation happens with cars or vans usually;
- they use “lookout” on the road;
- organizers provide accommodation in the north of the country, near the border;
- and when they are detected by the police, the drivers are always ready to run and to leave the vehicle and migrants (Pavlovski and Popovska-Aleksandrovska, 2017).
Conclusion (1)

European response.

- Instinctive/survival (Darwin) reaction established on an ad hoc basis, rather than as well thought out and comprehensive security strategy.

- Initiatives for dealing with the crisis and fostering regional cooperation in the Balkans usually came from the countries most affected by the Balkan route.

- Serious absence of solidarity and lack of consensus for issues threatening European security and stability.

- New endeavors between the EU and some EU countries and Turkey do not accomplish the goals and sustainability of the EU-Turkey Statement.
Conclusion (2)

Interstate cooperation
- Depends on the political will and extent of institutional autonomy of all concerned parties at all levels.
- Bilateral disputes > border hotspots (Macedonia-Greece and Serbia-Croatia)
- No guarantee that lessons learnt will be implemented accordingly if new refugee and migrant flows affect the region.

National level
– Lack of interagency cooperation > serious failures in the national systems of crisis management.
– Security policy makers will have to redefine the content of security policies and strategies > overcome nationally limited perspectives.
Thank you for your attention

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