The Impact on Balkan Interstate Relations of the 2015-2016 Migration Crisis

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Thesis Summary

Political events within the European Union and the wider areas beyond its periphery manifest in a continuous intricate interaction. In particular, the recent trends of rising Euroscepticism have come together in an interesting interaction with the ongoing migration of peoples from Africa and the Middle East and some regions of Asia.

The first of the two elements have always been present in the EU project but has gained a lot of traction with the onset of the Euro-Crisis which started in 2008. The problems that surfaced since then have raised once again questions of European integration vs. state sovereignty in combination with putting the spotlight on the risks of market, financial and fiscal integration. The social consequences of the economic crisis in the European areas which were hit hardest, opened new discussions regarding European solidarity and moral responsibilities between the EU member states. The shadow of the Euro-Crisis can be seen in the various contemporary political movements which have sprouted up through both the old EU democracies and the more recently integrated regimes. These movements position themselves across the political spectrum making (often populist) appeals for EU disintegration in the worse of cases, or for EU reforms in the best.

In parallel, while the EU was still pacifying its internal economic turmoil which erupted in 2008, a wave of political unrest erupted in its immediate periphery, the likes of which had not been seen since the collapse of the Soviet Block regimes of Eastern Europe two decades earlier. North Africa and the Middle East were gripped by a series of popular revolts which started in Tunis and Cairo and reverberated across the region. These effectively where multiple disenfranchised political movements which formed common fronts against their respective regimes and called for changes such as more open elections and other more or less progressive social and political reforms. The Arab Spring of 2011 started a process which is still ongoing and the mixed results of which are still in development. This process, which the international community greeted with some degree of optimism and hope, morphed into violent clashes and what would later be referred to as the Arab Winter – referring to the multiple crises and outright civil wars which erupted in the region and are still undoing.

Regardless of the final outcome of these regional events, one thing that seems to be indisputable is the fact that the regional instability which is most violently visible in the cases of civil war of Libya and Syria on the Mediterranean coast (as well as beyond in states such as Yemen) has had a twofold impact on the Mediterranean area: on the one hand, the inhospitable situation on the ground in some areas around the Mediterranean has caused an exodus of population seeking safe haven and better lives, many of which looked to Europe, on the other hand, the weakening or outright collapse of the regimes of some of these Mediterranean states has nullified what buffer effect they were providing between Europe and the troubled African regions beyond the Sahara or those beyond the Middle East. The result culminated in a humanitarian issue regarding the irregular migration of peoples seeking refuge from economic hardship, political persecution or outright threat of violent conflict.

The EU currently finds itself in the midst of these two series of events and their unfolding interaction, among the many other ongoing internal and external issues. On the one hand there are the movements challenging existing treaties and to a certain extent the very ideals of the EU. On the other hand, we have the persistent pressures of a migratory flux which both impacts the transit and target states and also feeds into the discourse of Euro-scepticism, sovereignism and often outright xenophobia and isolationism. These tendencies of xenophobia and isolationism are predominantly manifested against outer-Europeans, but at times also against Europeans which do not resonate with the anti-migration agendas.

Because of the afore mentioned dynamic, the topic of migration is of significant importance for the development the EU. The divergences that can arise between states vis-à-vis the topic of migration can cause friction and distancing between European states. Alternatively, convergence – be it pro immigrant or anti – can lead to a stronger European order.

The thesis will examine the actual and potential impact of migration routes on transit region interstate relations and politics. The focus will begin on a European level and then narrow down on the Balkan route.

The theoretic lens employed will be that of the Copenhagen School, as it provides tools for analysing a humanitarian phenomenon which involves a variety of actors including states, international organisations, non-governmental organisations and supra-state actors such as the European Union.

The CS theory applies itself very well to the crisis nature of the situation. That is because CS theory can look at how a migration issue is turned through speech acts from a political into a security issue. Security issues enter a space of special importance, which opens up the possibility for actors to employ extraordinary measures, for example the suspension of liberties and rights of displaced migrating persons.

Finally, regarding CS theory, it also permits the analysis of regional security complexes which emerge around security issues. Successfully mapping the stakes and interests of the states caught up in the Balkan Migration Complex will offer insight into the potential deadlocks and possible venues of cooperation between states. Quite importantly, by observing the trending attitudes and announced intentions, this research can attempt an evaluation of short term scenarios which are of importance to the Balkan region.

The Copenhagen School framework will be augmented with more theory coming from literature on discourse analysis and migration studies as well as research on Euroscepticism and anti-immigrant theory.

What this thesis aims to produce is a comprehensive analysis of political discourse regarding immigration, and how can this discourse impact European interstate relations, with a zoomed focus on the Balkan region.

Theoretic framework for security analysis: The Copenhagen School

- The Copenhagen School approach is useful for analyzing the issue of securitization of immigration because of its focus on discourse acts.
- Its breakdown of security into sectors is useful because immigration tends to be linked to the social sector primarily, as well as the political and economic sectors, perhaps even environmental.
- Furthermore the theory's focus on discourse acts allows the consideration of a broad typology of actors, from supra national organizations to influential non-governmental organizations.
- The Copenhagen School use of security complexes for analyzing the interdependence of multiple unit actors of different types operating in different areas but all linked to the same issues.

The Copenhagen School of Security Studies has the following central features:

- Securitization is resulted through successful **Speech Acts** which require a referent object, a securitizing actor, functional actors and a legitimizing audience.
- Security is divided into five interlinked and overlapping **Sectors** of activity: Societal, Political, Environmental, Military and Economic.
- Security **Complexes** are formed around an issue. Actors from sub-state to international levels can be a part of a single such complex.

The Copenhagen School of Security Studies was developed by Barry Buzan, Ole Waever and Jaap de Wilde and formally outlined first in their joint work *Security: A New Framework for Analysis*. The Copenhagen School looks at Security as a result of discourse acts performed by social agents, for example a Head of State. These acts of discourse can securitise a topic, for example declaring that state sovereignty or the fabric of society is threatened by unrestrained migration. Such a speech act turns the regulation of migration into a security problem which may permit extraordinary measures to be taken in the interest of security, for example constructing a border wall.

When thinking about these security sectors, the analyst must consider the following questions:[1]

- What the security agenda is within the sector?
- What types of actors are distinctive to the sector?
- What logic of threats and vulnerabilities operates within the sector?
- How the security dynamics within the sector divide among the local, regional, and global scales?

Sectors are useful in order to split a situation into more specific focus spaces. This is useful for analysis as it allows the thinker to limit the scope of observation by reducing the number of variables at play to a manageable degree.

However, items identified by sectors lack do not exist independently of items outside their respective sector.

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[1] Ibid. p. 19

According to Buzan, Waever and de Wilde, internal security complex dynamics can be placed on a spectrum: [2]

- **Enmity** – the complex member states act out of fear, rivalry and mutual perception of threat. States linked to the Syrian civil war can be placed in this category, Iran, US, Russia, Syria, Israel, Turkey, Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Gulf States.
- **The middle** – the complex is a security regime in which states still treat each other as potential threats but have made reassurance arrangements to reduce the security dilemma among them. The Western Balkan states can be placed here.
- **Amity** – the complex members interrelate as a pluralistic security community. An example of this is the EU (for the most part).

Beyond Amity, a region is so integrated that the security complex it formerly hosted becomes eliminated, "transforming it from an anarchic subsystem of states to a single, larger actor, within the system."[3]

There are two condition under which security complexes may not be present, according to Buzan, Waever and de Wilde:

- **Lack of capabilities** – in this case, there is no security complex formed because the states have not got the capacity to project their power externally. Such an arrangement is especially possible in isolated regions where major actors have agreed to not get involved.
- **Overlay** – in this case, the security complex is not formed because a strong external actor has managed to suppress it. This usually "involves extensive stationing of armed forces in the areas overlaying by the intervening great power(s). Intervention usually reinforces the local security dynamics; overlay subordinates them to the larger pattern of major power rivalries and may even obliterate them."[4]

When changes to a Security Complex are triggered, the structural options are:

- **Maintenance of the status quo** – when the changes have supported or have not seriously undermined the structure.
- **Internal transformation** – when the changes within the complex's outer boundary are caused by regional political integration, decisive shifts in balance of power, or major alternations in the pattern of amity and enmity.

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[2] Idem. p. 12.

[3] Ibidem.

[4] Idem. P. 12-13.

- **External transformation** – occurs when the outer boundary is redrawn to allow addition or deletion of major states from the complex.
- **Overlay** – occurs when external powers suppress indigenous security dynamic.

That being said, Buzan, Waever and de Wilde claim security complexes' regionalizing logic may be weak in the case of units not being fixed or threats not being conditioned by distance.[5] This observations is important for the topic of this thesis, as the issue of migration is one that can be difficult to define concretely in space and time. Thus, it is possible for a security complex to develop a weak regionalizing security logic. This may offer another explanation to why the issues of migration are so close to other more concretely definable ideas such as borders and sovereignty, history and nation. Perhaps these more fixed concepts allow for the strengthening of security logic on the topic of migration.

Finally, on the topic of security complexes, the Copenhagen School categorizes them in two ways: Homogenous and Heterogeneous.[6]

- **Homogenous** complexes are outlined when the analysis is restricted to a fixed sector, but examines the interaction of multiple units within it.
- **Heterogeneous** complexes are the result of analysis of different types of actors across different types of sectors.

Heterogeneous security complexes have the advantage of linking actors across sectors, thus enabling the analyst to keep the entire picture in a single frame and also to keep track of the inevitable spillovers between sectors. Homogenous security complexes allow to isolate dynamics to a sector, but may obscure other links with other sectors.[7]

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[5] Idem. p. 16.

[6] Ibidem.

[7] Idem. p. 16-17.

Immigration brings out contradictions in the liberal European order.

- The Liberal State is built on four aspects: Democratic Rule, Constitutionalism, Capitalism and Nationhood.
- Each of these define the way the liberal state interacts with the issue of immigration. Tensions between the different constituent parts flare when the rate of immigration is too great.
- The Liberal Order when faced with the question of high rates of migration also finds itself having to deal with tensions. States have to choose whether they will act unilaterally, bilaterally or multilaterally to address immigration.

The migration routes into Europe & Closer look at the 2015 migration wave

This chapter focuses on exploring the EU irregular migration landscape starting in 2009 and develops the following points:

- Migration routes are defined by a mixture of push, pull, facilitating and counter-active factors.
- Frontex has identified 8 areas or routes of migration into the EU.
- The year 2015 stands out as a major moment, when a large number of migrants began flowing in through the Eastern Mediterranean.
- The causes of this funnel effect are explained as:
  - A shift from the Central Mediterranean sea routes to the Eastern Mediterranean sea due to safety concerns
  - A shift away from the Land Routes into Greece and Bulgaria to the Aegean due to border fences.
  - A closure of borders for Syrian refugees into neighboring states, which led them either into Turkey or out of the region.
  - Low prospects for peace in Syria.
  - Alarming signals that the refugees held in Turkey might be relocated back into Syria.
  - Relaxation of efforts to retain Syrians within Turkey, combined with signs that their rights and conditions are not going to be improved.

- The above dynamics led to the funnel effect which shocked the Eastern Mediterranean in 2015.
- The Turkish-EU power relation was central to this event.

According to Frontex (the European Border and Coast Guard Agency) data, migration flows currently through 8 distinct entry routes into the EU:
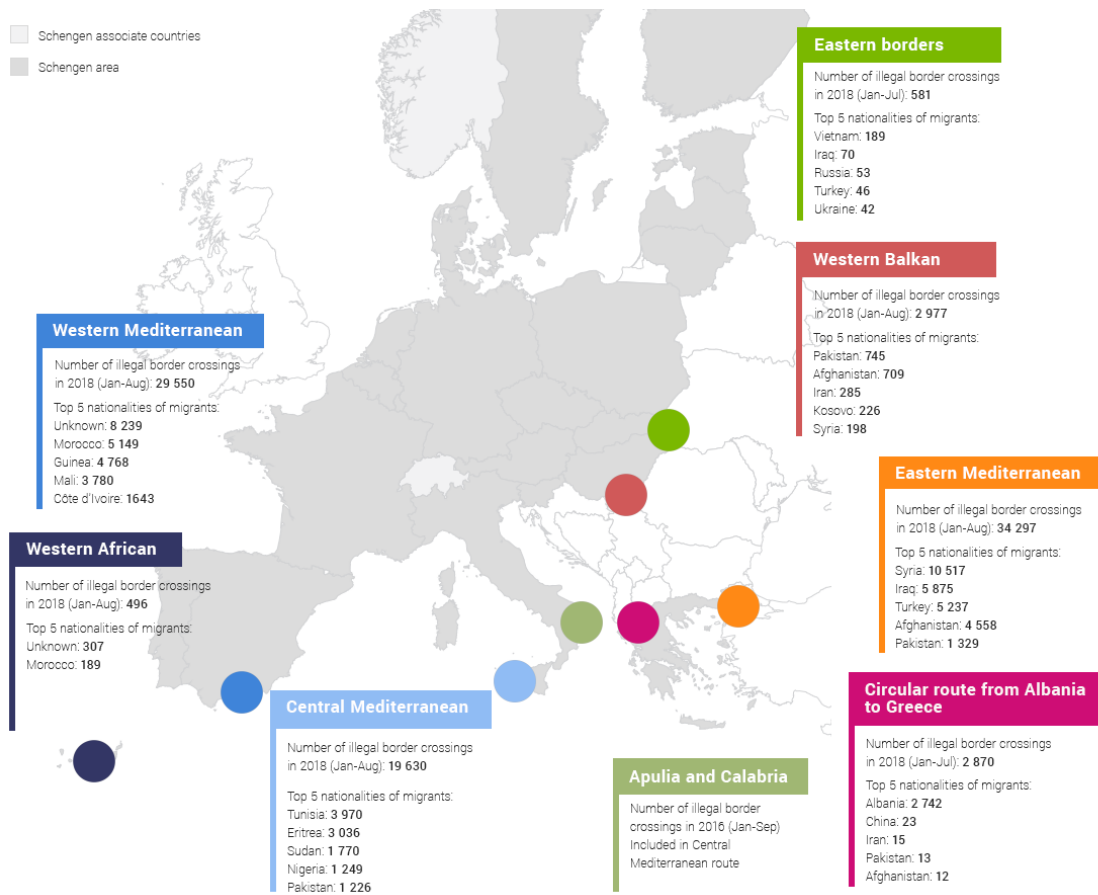
1. **Western African** - Canary Islands
2. **Western Mediterranean** - Spain land and sea borders without the Canary Islands
3. **Central Mediterranean** - Italy and Malta sea borders
4. **Western Balkans** - Greece, Bulgaria, Romania, Hungary and Croatia at the land borders with countries from the Western Balkan region
5. **Circular Route from Albania to Greece** - Greece land border with Albania and North Macedonia
6. **Eastern Mediterranean** - Cyprus, Greece sea border, Greece and Bulgaria land borders with Turkey
7. **Black Sea** - Bulgaria and Romania sea borders
8. **Eastern Land Borders** - Romania, Hungary, Slovakia, Poland, Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, Finland and Norway land borders with Moldova, Ukraine, Belarus and Russian Federation

The peak of the flux takes place between the second half of 2015 and the first half of 2016. During this time a large number of border crossings begin to occur through the Eastern Mediterranean and Western Balkan route. These are correlated with push factors in Syria as well as actions taken by the Turkish state.

This peak placed a great deal of pressure on the Western Balkan and Eastern Mediterranean routes, prompting actions on both a regional and European level.

This wave of migrants and refugees was caused by a mixture of push and pull as well as catalyzing factors which tie together events in Syria, ISIS, Turkey, Greece, the Western Balkans and the EU.

The following centralized data from Frontex regarding illegal border crossings shows us that the population flows have greatly fluctuated over the last decade.

Schengen associate countries
Schengen area

Eastern borders

Number of illegal border crossings
in 2018 (Jan-Jul): 581
Top 5 nationalities of migrants:
Vietnam: 189
Iraq: 70
Russia: 53
Turkey: 46
Ukraine: 42

Western Mediterranean

Number of illegal border crossings
in 2018 (Jan-Aug): 29 550
Top 5 nationalities of migrants:
Unknown: 8 239
Morocco: 5 149
Guinea: 4 768
Mali: 3 780
Côte d'Ivoire: 1643

Western Balkan

Number of illegal border crossings
in 2018 (Jan-Aug): 2 977
Top 5 nationalities of migrants:
Pakistan: 745
Afghanistan: 709
Iran: 285
Kosovo: 226
Syria: 198

Western African

Number of illegal border crossings
in 2018 (Jan-Aug): 496
Top 5 nationalities of migrants:
Unknown: 307
Morocco: 189

Eastern Mediterranean

Number of illegal border crossings
in 2018 (Jan-Aug): 34 297
Top 5 nationalities of migrants:
Syria: 10 517
Iraq: 5 875
Turkey: 5 237
Afghanistan: 4 558
Pakistan: 1 329

Central Mediterranean

Number of illegal border crossings
in 2018 (Jan-Aug): 19 630
Top 5 nationalities of migrants:
Tunisia: 3 970
Eritrea: 3 036
Sudan: 1 770
Nigeria: 1 249
Pakistan: 1 226

Apulia and Calabria

Number of illegal border
crossings in 2016 (Jan-Sep)
Included in Central
Mediterranean route

Circular route from Albania to Greece

Number of illegal border crossings
in 2018 (Jan-Jul): 2 870
Top 5 nationalities of migrants:
Albania: 2 742
China: 23
Iran: 15
Pakistan: 13
Afghanistan: 12

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The impact of migration on the West Balkans

This chapter focuses on taking a closer look at the West Balkan regional dynamics and history with regard to migration by discussing the following areas:

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[8] Map taken from: https://frontex.europa.eu/along-eu-borders/migratory-map/ as of 10/14/2018. Data source: FRAN and JORA data as of 5 September 2018. The data presented refer to detections of illegal border-crossing rather than the number of persons, as the same person may cross the external border several times. However, there is currently no EU system in place capable of tracing each person's movements following an illegal border-crossing. Therefore, it is not possible to establish the precise number of persons who have illegally crossed the external border.

- **The ways in which unilateral border closures can lead to domino reactions** as was illustrated on a European level during 2015/2016 at the peak of the migration crisis panic. Places like Scandinavia and Central Europe together with the West Balkans illustrate how urgent and drastic actions like closing borders or building walls can become legitimate courses of actions in the short term.
- **A year by year breakdown of west Balkan migration highlights** which clearly shows how the 2015-2016 was a period of overwhelming crisis.
- Made note of how deciding to close borders or facilitate transit through **unilateral actions had limited if not negative results** (leaving migrants stranded in the Balkans).
- Made note of how **local coordination supported by the EU** began bringing migration in the West Balkan area back under control by late 2016.

Following the refugee crisis, there has been a noticeable shift toward a security-driven approach to migration. In the case of a fresh refugee crisis or increased migratory pressure, the governments of the Balkans tend to accept the deployment of more harsh measures to deal with a potential influx of migrants. The amount of cooperation in locating and apprehending people traffickers, as well as combatting irregular migration in general, has grown. The EU has decided to either ignore or implicitly condone actions taken by Balkan nations (such as border tightening and pushbacks) to decrease the number of asylum seekers in the EU in the absence of a unified refugee policy.[9]

Despite widespread condemnation of Hungary's strong anti-immigrant rhetoric and actions, the spirit of Orbanism has pervaded the Balkans.[10]

Croatia, having moved away from its mainly sympathetic and humanitarian handling of migrants in transit, amended the Law on Defense in the spring of 2016, allowing the army to help the police in border control in exceptional circumstances. Croatian authorities have attempted to amend the Aliens Act in order to "criminalize solidarity" as part of a larger effort to harmonize the Act with EU laws. The approval of the amended Aliens Act was postponed in early 2017 due to opposition from humanitarian and human rights organizations. Slovenia was more successful in this regard.

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[9] Weber, B., *The EU-Turkey Refugee Deal and the Not Quite Closed Balkan Route*. Retrieved June 14th, 2021, Democratization Policy Council, 02.10.2017, http://www.democratizationpolicy.org/summary/eu-turkey-refugee-deal-and-the-not-quite-closed-balkan-route/, accessed 14.06.2021.

[10] Slapšak, S., *Orbanizacija Slovenije, i šire. [Orbanization of Slovenia, and beyond]*, 08.10.2016, Peščanik: http://pescanik.net/orbanizacija-slovenije-sire/, accessed 14.06.2021.

First, at the outset of the refugee crisis, the Slovenian parliament passed interim legislation allowing the army to be stationed at the country's borders.

In January 2017, the Parliament passed modifications to the Aliens Act that allow the government the ability to refuse entrance to foreigners who do not fulfill the entrance standards and to automatically deport irregular migrants in the event of an emergency.[11]

The State Border Control Act was also amended in the same session, providing police greater legal tools to use in the case of rising migratory pressure. Slovenia has also built a portion of a border barrier with Croatia to deter illicit entrance. Croatia began deliberately pushing migrants across the green border to Serbia in late 2016. Human rights groups claim that migrants' phones have been confiscated, that they have been stripped of their clothes, that they have been harassed, and that they have been forcibly pushed back to Serbia.[12]

The policy of pushbacks, on the other hand, appears to have been most common in North Macedonia and Serbia, occurring on a daily basis in both countries as a result of the ongoing flow of illegal migrants. North Macedonia is either relocating migrants to Greece or relocating them to Serbia. Serbia, on its part, is attempting to reintegrate them into North Macedonia. As a consequence, a ping pong practice with refugees has taken place. Serbia approved combined army and police patrols at its borders with North Macedonia and Bulgaria in the summer of 2016, in response to Hungary's increased actions against illicit border crossings. "Serbia does not wish to become a collection point for migrants," said the press secretary.[13] North Macedonian police continued to get assistance from Visegrad nations and Austria in policing the country's borders.

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[11] Sesar, J., *Slovenia: Amendments to Aliens Act denies protection to refugees*, Amnesty International, 26.01.2017, https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2017/01/slovenia-amendments-to-aliens-act-denies-protection-to-refugees/#:~:text=The%20amendments%20to%20the%20Aliens,would%20be%20exposed%20upon%20return. , accessed 14.06.2021.

[12] Weber, B., *The EU-Turkey Refugee Deal and the Not Quite Closed Balkan Route*, Democratization Policy Council, 02.08.2017, http://www.democratizationpolicy.org/summary/eu-turkey-refugee-deal-and-the-not-quite-closed-balkan-route/, accessed 14.06.2021.

[13] Reuters, *Serbian police, army to form joint border patrols to stem illegal crossings*, 16.06.2016, https://www.reuters.com/article/us-europe-migrants-serbia-border-idUSKCN0ZW0IR, accessed 14.06.2021.

The refugee crisis served as a catalyst for populist rhetoric across Europe. The Balkans were no different. "Is it human that refugees, that is migrants, do not respect Croatian flag, Croatian police officers, that they break into police cordons, stone journalists, dictate how a sovereign country should behave?" asked one politician.[14]

Another warned: "There are millions of people in Asia and Africa who want to come to Europe. We fail to consider that these people will flood Europe, that these people are significantly more biologically superior to Europeans, in other words, they have more children. It is very good to have many children, but in addition to demographic, there is also a cultural policy. We like the mentality we have in Croatia."[15]

In theory, the Catholic Churches in Slovenia and Croatia were calling for solidarity and help to refugees in the spirit of Christianity, but clergy in these countries were not as enthusiastic about supporting Pope Francis in his persistent and generous pleas. In an editorial, a priest and the editor-in-chief of a Catholic weekly, Glas Koncila, cautioned that refugees constitute a threat. "…people suitable to realize goals of ideology of globalization whose intention is not only to destroy families, nations, nation states, cultural identity, but may also, even more so, have the intention to destroy monotheistic religions, in particular Christianity in all its forms."[16]

Islamic Communities, on the other hand, showed greater sympathy, owing to the fact that the majority of refugees were Muslims, although they kept a low public presence. With a few noteworthy exceptions, neither Serbian nor North Macedonian Orthodox Churches were very outspoken in their pleas for assistance to refugees.

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[14] Interview with Damir Kajin, president of a newly formed party Istrian Democrats and a former MP, Nacional, 22 September 2015 http://www.nacional.hr/intervju-damir-kajin-udomio-bihizbjeglice-ali-granicu-je-trebalo-zatvoriti-milanovic-ugrozava-nacionalnu-sigurnost-zemlje/., accessed 14.06.2021.

[15] Ladislav Ilčić, president of a small conservative party HRAST who was in the governing coalition at the time of the interview, N1 television, 4 December 2015 http://www.telegram.hr/ politika-kriminal/ovo-je-7-skandaloznih-izjava-iz-domoljubne-koalicije-o-izbjeglicama-imuslimanima-zbog-kojih-je-reagirao-i-karamarko/., accessed 14.06.2021.

[16] Ivan Miklenić quoted in Telegram, 28 September 2017 http://www.telegram.hr/politika-kriminal/glas-koncila-je-objasnio-svoj-stav-o-izbjeglickoj-krizi-i-nema-puno-veze-s-humanimstavom-pape-franje/., accessed 14.06.2021.

The European incentives to maintain Western Balkan stability and collaboration prevailed in bringing the Balkan states together during the most crucial moment of the Migrant Crisis. If one looks at the unilateral knee-jerk short-term reactions to sharp influx increase in 2015, one sees uncoordinated unilateral initiatives of states with limited or detrimental results. This might suggest that in the absence of incentives to collaborate, regional stability would have suffered more and interstate relations might have become more tense as finger pointing and passing the blame would have been a tempting tactic. However, given the sustained efforts of coordinating a response to the Migrant Crisis and more importantly, forming collective regional goals through frameworks such as the Berlin Process, it appears the collective challenge might have actually strengthened the local interstate relations.

Balkan route's aftermath

Despite the reduction in numbers compared to the steady flow of migrants that occurred until the route was closed, many asylum seekers and migrants continue to attempt to enter Europe via the Western Balkans in 2017. Frontex reports that the number of irregular border crossings along the Balkan Route increased to 9.964 during January to October 2017.[17]

This has an influence on a condition of forced migrant permanence in camps, which is already serious, considering that there are 5.000-8.000 refugees in Serbia, around 60.000 in Greece, and 5.000-7.000 in Bulgaria, according to the most recent available statistics from September 2017.[18]

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[17] Frontex, *Migratory Routes Map: Western Balkan Route*, http://frontex.europa.eu/trends-androutes/migratory-routes-map/, accessed 14.06.2021.

[18] UNHCR, *Europe – September 2017*. Monthly report, https://data2.unhcr.org/en/documents/download/60384, accessed 14.06.2021.

The phrases "stuck," "trapped," and "dumped" are frequently used in papers and diaries to describe the situation of migrants in camps.[19]

Despite the closing of the borders, a trickle of approximately fifty individuals from the Turkish city of Bodrum continues to arrive on the Greek isles of the Dodecanese every day.[20]

Thousands of migrants have already flocked to Lesbo, Chios, Samos, Keros, and Kastellorizo, becoming a hotspot. These islands are on the route to Europe and are barely 10 kilometers from the Turkish coastlines, making them accessible. Greece's condition is described as critical. According to witnesses, migrants have been living in deplorable conditions for several months, having been housed in substandard lodgings like as hangars and camps while waiting to be moved to other European nations.[21]

The European Union stated in September 2015 that it will use a quota system to move 160.000 asylum seekers from Italy and Greece to other EU countries. Only 13.000 individuals out of 66.500 who willingly agreed to join the program have been moved twenty-five months later, in September 2017.[22]

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[19] Imanuel Marcus, *A year after Balkan Route closure: Thousands of refugees are stuck*, Sofia Globe, 10.03.2017, http://sofiaglobe.com/2017/03/10/a-year-afterbalkan-route-closure-thousands-of-refugees-are-stuck/, accessed 14.06.2021.

[20] Are you Syrious?, *AYS News Digest May 22nd, 2017: Growing uncertainty among those being (re)moved*, 22.05.2017, https://medium.com/@AreYouSyrious/ays-news-digest-22-5-17-growing-uncertainty-among-thosebeing-re-moved-f453b9c86052, accessed 14.06.2021.

[21] Marta Welander, *Life in Limbo: filling data gaps relating to refugees and displaced people in Greece*, 2017, http://refugeerights.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/RRDP_LifeInLimbo.pdf, accessed 14.06.2021.

[22] Amnesty International, *EU: Countries have fulfilled less than a third of their asylum relocation promises*, 2017, https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2017/09/eu-countries-have-fulfilled-less-thana-third-of-their-asylum-relocation-promises/, accessed 14.06.2021.

Activists and media representatives have made complaints to the Greek government about the status of the camps that house migrants and refugees.[23]

In July 2017, the EU announced a new round of funding for Greece, totaling 209 million euros.[24]

Several dozens of refugees, mostly Syrian women and children, set up tents in front of the Parliament building in Athens' Synthagma Square on November 1st, 2017, to protest delays in reconnecting with family in Germany.[25]

Some of the migrants, who have been in Greece for more than a year, have started a hunger strike. "Our family ties are stronger than your illegal agreements" read a banner held up by a woman in Athens, referring to the deals on the refugees made among European Union member States.[26]

According to media reports, Germany and Greece agreed to limit family reunification; nevertheless, Greek Migration Minister Yannis Mouzalas stated that family reunifications increased by 27% in 2017 over the previous year. He went on to say that the German administration had assured him that refugees in Greece with family members in Germany will ultimately be reunited. [27]

[23] Patrick Kingsley*, Thousands of refugees left in cold, as UN and EU accused of mismanagement*, The Guardian 22.12.2016, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/dec/22/thousands-ofrefugees-left-in-cold-as-un-and-eu-accused-of-mismanagement, accessed 14.06.2021.

[24] European Commission, *EU launches new humanitarian program for the integration and accommodation of refugees in Greece*, Press Release, 27.07.2017, http://europa.eu/rapid/pressrelease_IP-17-2121_en.htm, accessed 14.06.2021.

[25] Beata Stur, *Refugees in Athens protest for family reunification in Germany*, New Europe, 01.11.2017, https://www.neweurope.eu/article/refugees-athens-protest-family-reunificationgermany/, accessed 14.06.2021.

[26] Karolina Tagaris - Deborah Kyvrikosaios, *Refugees in Greece demand transfer to Germany, start hunger strike*, Reuters, November 01.11.2017, https://www.reuters.com/article/us-europe-migrants-greece/refugees-in-greece-demand-transfer-to-germanystart-hunger-strike-idUSKBN1D14UQ?il=0, accessed 14.06.2021.

[27] Deutsche Welle, *Germany limits refugee family unification for those arriving from Greece*, Deutsche Welle, May 19.05.2017, http://www.dw.com/en/germany-limits-refugee-family-unification-for-thosearriving-from-greece/a-38898465, accessed 14.06.2021; Theo Ioannou, *Syrian Refugees Start Hunger Strike in Athens Demanding Transfer*

In 2017, the number of refugees and migrants stranded in Serbia is to be between 5.000 and 8,000.[28]

To deal with the increasing number of immigrants, the government has built additional facilities, although they are insufficient.[29]

Human traffickers might profit from the scenario since people are forced to live in deplorable conditions for extended periods of time. The cost of crossing the Serbia-Croatia border ranges from 200 to 350 euros for an all-inclusive package that includes a bus ride to the Croatian border as well as tools to cut the wire at the border. This approach, according to Rujevic, also feeds corruption among the police forces.[30]

During the International Global Security Forum in Bratislava in May 2017, Croatian President Kolinda Grabar Kitarovic stated that the Balkan Route "must be permanently shut": a new potential wave of migrants could destabilize South-East Europe, which is why it is critical to continue fighting human smuggling.[31]

The political inconvenient of the presence of asylum seekers and migrants is seen as a hindrance to Serbia's progress and a burden. The evacuation and destruction of the 'barracks' in which the refugees were housed on May 10th, 2017 and the signing of a deal with Emirates' businesspeople

to Germany, Greek Reporter, 01.11.2017, http://greece.greekreporter.com/2017/11/01/syrian-refugeesstart-hunger-strike-in-athens-demanding-transfer-to-germany/, accessed 14.06.2021.

[28] UNHCR, *UNHCR Serbia Update – October 2017*, https://data2.unhcr.org/en/documents/download/60156, accessed 14.06.2021.

[29] The Sphere Project, *Shelter and settlement standard 1: Strategic planning*, http://www.spherehandbook. org/en/shelter-and-settlement-standard-1-strategic-planning/)/, accessed 14.06.2021.

[30] Nemanja Rujevic, *Closed Balkan Route means lucrative times for human traffickers*, Deutsche Welle, 27.01.2017, http://www.dw.com/en/closed-balkan-route-means-lucrative-times-forhuman-traffickers/a-37308858, accessed 14.06.2021.

[31] Agenzia Nova, *Sicurezza: presidente croata Kitarovic, necessario mantenere chiusa rotta balcanica*, Agenzia Nova, 28.05.2017, https://www.agenzianova.com/a/0/1574755/2017-05-28/sicurezzapresidente-croata-kitarovic-necessario-mantenere-chiusa-rotta-balcanica, accessed 14.06.2021.

for the development of the 'Belgrade Waterfront,' a 300 million Euro investment, are linked, according to Wright.[32]

According to a report titled A Dangerous Game, written and distributed by the Belgrade Centre for Human Rights (BCHR), Macedonian Young Lawyers Association (MYLA), and Oxfam, countries along the Balkan Route have denied new entrants protection measures and, rather than ensuring their safety, have pushed them back to their countries of origin without even offering them the opportunity to leave.[33]

Once in North Macedonia or Serbia, refugees confront several problems with the asylum system procedures owing to inadequacies in the execution of legislation relating to the right to asylum. The major obstacles that migrants experience are delays in providing identity papers and issues with the phrasing of judgments during the evaluation of asylum petitions.[34]

The Hungarian Parliament enacted a detention legislation for asylum seekers on March 7th, 2017, which was heavily condemned by the European Union.[35]

The Hungarian Helsinki Committee (HCC) objected to this policy before the European Council, which accused Victor Orban's government of illegally detaining migrants, citing the instance of two Bangladeshi immigrants who were imprisoned in Röszke's border camp and subsequently

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[32] Herbert Wright, *Belgrade Waterfront: an unlikely place for Gulf petrodollars to settle*, The Guardian, 10.12.2015, https://www.theguardian.com/cities/2015/dec/10/belgrade-waterfrontgulf-petrodollars-exclusive-waterside-development, accessed 14.06.2021.

[33] BCHR, MYLA and OXFAM, *Un gioco pericoloso*, 2017, http://www.cestim.it/argomenti/28 rifugiati/2017-04-Report-Oxfam-Un-gioco-pericoloso.pdf, accessed 14.06.2021.

[34] UNHCR, *The Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia as a country of asylum: Observations on the situation of asylum-seekers and refugees in the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia*, 2017, http://www.refworld.org/docid/55c9c70e4.html, accessed 14.06.2021.

[35] Askanews, Ungheria, *Orban sempre più duro e l'ultradestra corteggia il centro*, 2017, http://www.askanews.it/esteri/2017/03/07/ungheria-orban-sempre-pi%C3%B9-duro-e-lultradestracorteggia-il-centro-pn_20170307_00160/, accessed 14.06.2021.

deported back to Serbia. After crossing the Balkan Route to arrive in Hungary in September 2015, the Bangladeshi migrants filed an asylum claim.[36]

The asylum application was promptly denied by Hungary. Hungary has been found guilty of wrongful detention of two Bangladeshi refugees by the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR).[37]

The ruling was deemed "absurd" by Viktor Orban's administration, which accused the Court of penalizing Budapest for defending its and Europe's external borders.[38]

According to the UNHCR, Orban's government's new regulations regard refugees as "illegal aliens," denying them access to obligatory international protection.[39]

In 2016, Hungary approved just 9 out of 100 asylum petitions, compared to an average European proportion of 63 percent. Furthermore, Hungary has turned down 91 percent of Syrian asylum seekers, 87 percent of Iraqi asylum seekers, and 94 percent of Afghan asylum seekers, the nationalities having the greatest percentages of refugee acceptance in Europe. This scenario is allowing new kinds of control to emerge on a social and political level, which is a phenomena that should not be overlooked. The new phenomenon of the "migrants' hunters" in Hungary and elsewhere, who publicly describe themselves as an organized paramilitary "protection" organization affiliated with a far-right ultranationalist movement, is extremely concerning.[40]

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[36] Eszter Zalan, *Hungary illegally detained migrants, Court says*, EU Observer, 15.03.2017, https://euobserver.com/migration/137243, accessed 14.06.2021.

[37] Intellinews, *ECHR ruling against Hungary strikes blow for refugee rights*, http://www.intellinews. com/echr-ruling-against-hungary-strikes-blow-for-refugee-rights-117807/, accessed 14.06.2021.

[38] Ibidem.

[39] Hungarian Helsinki Committee, *The Black Box of Nationality*, 2016, http://www.helsinki.hu/wpcontent/uploads/The-Black-Box-of-Nationality-HHC-2016.pdf, accessed 14.06.2021.

[40] Are You Syrious?, *AYS Daily Digest June 25th, 2017: Busy weekend for crossings all over the Mediterranean*, 2017 https://medium.com/@AreYouSyrious/ays-daily-digest-25-6-2017-busy-weekendof-crossings-all-over-the-mediterranean-cf83054995c3, accessed 14.06.2021.

The main instigator of these groups is Lazslo Torockai, mayor of the Hungarian village Ásotthalom, a village of about 4.000 inhabitants on the Serbian-Hungarian border, who became famous in 2015 because he demanded and obtained the erection of a fence along the border, and instituted an armed border-control service. Hungarian cities and villages may decide to constitute these armed groups if they have enough money to coordinate them, but since they are set in border areas of national significance, they are also supported by funds from the Ministry.[41]

The Balkan Route case forces all parties concerned to develop a fresh understanding of a never-ending tale. It presents a significant chance to re-define policies and priorities, in particular. Migrations will continue to occur as a result of a variety of causes including environmental crises, globalization, boundary shifts, and other considerations. The Balkan Route is a historic route that has always been vital in the larger picture of Europe, serving as one of the continent's major circulatory arteries. Corridor X, which runs from Athens to Vienna via North Macedonia, Serbia, Croatia, and Slovenia, is not by coincidence the EU's preferred and priority Pan-European corridor in the region.[42]

Migrants and asylum seekers have long used this path. Its suspension would only serve to exacerbate criminality, corruption, and possibly wars. Furthermore, while a strong impulse had been given to the creation of a sense of regional integration following the war in Serbia in the early 2000s, which was probably the most significant political achievement of the Stability Pact effort, the recent so-called migration crisis has created new clogs in a system that was becoming more fluid, especially after the recognition of Kosovo.

Until now, the EU has failed to effectively address such a complicated and deadly problem, which has sparked popular outrage across Europe, not only in communities already weakened by economic conditions. Within the present global social-economic-political landscape, it is critical

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[41] Kristzina Than, *Hungary to arm new 'border hunters' after six-month crash course*, Reuters, 09.03.2017, https://www.reuters.com/article/us-europe-migrants-hungary-borderhunters/hungary-to-armnew-border-hunters-after-six-month-crash-course-idUSKBN16G2ED, accessed 14.06.2021.

[42] Emanuela C. Del Re, *Corridor VIII. Realization, works, impact, funds*, Rome, ANAS: Ministry of Infrastructure and Transport, 2004.

to update the notion of people mobility and discover a formula to re-contextualize the concept of boundaries. The Balkans can no longer be considered merely transit countries.[43]

They have effectively become the European Union's primary border, and they must be provided with the necessary political tools to negotiate with the countries of origin and destination of migrants and asylum seekers.

Within the EU's migration management system, their function must be acknowledged and institutionalized. The social, political, economic, and humanitarian costs of not doing so are extremely high, and it is critical for the EU's future. After the Balkan Route experience, the expansion process should be re-examined, and the membership procedures should be expedited. In the current situation, the concept of "Fortress Europe" has devolved into a meaningless phrase, a descriptive and derogatory paradigm that encapsulates the political and cultural elements of the closure strategy in respect to both migration and expansion.[44]

The Balkan Route has once again highlighted the interconnectedness and interdependence of global social, political, and economic events, as well as the necessity for shared responsibility.[45]

The EU bears a significant role in determining the tone of the political debate on migration and its consequences for EU and Balkan societies. The risk of the EU failing to fulfill its duties is that external borders will become more stranded, insecure, disputed, marginalized, and incapable of responding, with very high human costs and split communities.

Conclusion

Migration, both regular and irregular, has been and will be a constant phenomenon with which the EU and the southeast of Europe will have to come to deal with. The instability in the MENA region

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[43] Jelena Tošić, *From a 'Transit Route' to the 'Backyard of Europe'? Tracing the Past, Present, and Future of the Balkan Route*, in Susanne Binder (ed.) *Facetten von Fluchtausdem Nahen und Mittleren Osten*, Facultas Universität Verlag, 2017, pp. 150-166.

[44] Emanuela C. Del Re, *Pursuing Stability and a Shared Development*, in Del Re – Larémont, pp. 29-71.

[45] Emanuela C. Del Re, *Mediterranean Migrations: from Current Stalemate to Structural Responses*, in *Current Politics and Economics of Europe*, vol. 28, issue 2, 2017, pp. 45-61.

of the recent years is a catalysing factor for greater numbers coming through. This is because what previously was an area which could absorb or control migration, has now become a (often dangerous) transit space in which local individuals, authorities or para-state organisations profit from facilitating or otherwise exploiting the migrant flow.

The East Mediterranean and Balkan route are intrinsically tied to the Syria's present and future and to the EU-Turkey dynamic. This is because the largest portion of migrants along this path is made of Syrians displaced by the conflict. Most of these are essentially refugees of war. Their path takes them through Turkey and then towards Greece and up through the West Balkan states in the former Yugoslav area. Turkey now has over 4 million Syrians in its borders. Not all of these are refugees, but this is still a considerable number. The Turkish government has managed to weaponize these Syrians, through their internal policies regarding Syrians. Turkey can make life difficult for Syrians (by for example removing their right to work) while simultaneously relaxing border controls, in order to push the Syrians out and towards Europe. The Turkish government has already used this power as a strategic security threat against Europe in the two sides' bilateral negotiations. It is no secret that this power is still on the negotiating table.

The 2015-2016 migration crisis resulted in multiple unilateral actions throughout Europe in general and in the Balkans as well. The border closures, push back and push forward policies applied by individual states created tensions between neighbours with already complicated histories of conflict (former Yugoslav states). These actions were against the principle of EU solidarity. By examining the internal politics of each state, these actions begin to make more sense. Governments are easily attacked by their oppositions: the mildest criticisms is being accused of forfeiting the welfare of their native constituents to outsiders, while the wildest attacks are accusations of undermining the cultural integrity and social security by accepting dangerous foreigners into their borders.

The relatively young and small Balkan states found themselves faced with a simply overwhelming flow of humanity. They found themselves challenged to navigate a complicated crisscrossing of ideas and perceptions. These governments had to appear in control of the situation, not overly inhumane nor overly accommodating. Internally this is to convince the constituents that the situation is in capable hands and to avoid being lambasted by the opposition. Externally the Balkan states had to likewise walk the same tight line, as they were expected to uphold EU values (both

existing and aspiring EU members) which translated to a humanitarian approach, while at the same time, the Balkan states were under pressure to stop the migratory flow, which, under limited resources , would amount to inhumane push back.

What was observed was an ad-hoc reaction of individual transit states which were only able to facilitate the orderly transit of migrants. This occurred alongside lamentations and critiques from the Balkans regarding the EU's inability to agree on a course of coordinated action to address the crisis in a sustainable manner.

Occasional outcries were launched between Balkan states when the actions of one resulted in complications on another. However, these tensions never escalated too far due to the tempering effect of the EU aspirations. Arguably the region's historical sensitivities regarding war refugees (Yugoslav wars of the 1990s) also played a role in encouraging governments to avoid escalations and adopt humanitarian approaches. Lastly, the EU itself did not completely shut itself off and succeeded in negotiating an agreement with Turkey eventually, which dramatically decreased the transit flow to fewer destabilizing numbers.

The EU should follow through its plans to strengthen Schengen border control, while simultaneously increasing its migrant processing capacities and their accommodating and integrating capacities. All these aspects are crucial, as the first ensures that migrants can be identified and documented at the border, while the second ensures that migrants can be quickly processed and accommodated or denied entry. Capacities for accommodations are lastly crucial, to be able to offer reasonably humane and dignified living conditions for those human beings that do qualify for refugee status. Integration capacities are essential for reduction of tensions arising between European natives and incoming migrants.

All these measures are essential for the EU to mitigate its risk exposure to migrant flow increases like the one of 2015-2016. Beyond the moral responsibility to be able to humanely manage migration, the EU's interests are at risk when exposed to this sort of crisis. Specifically, the EU's values can under question, when member states were seen unable to agree on quotas and refused to share the burdens of the crisis in the spirit of European solidarity. Geostrategically, the inability to manage migration leaves the EU exposed to Turkey's ability to control the flow of refugees. This is a strategic weakness which the EU cannot afford to have vis-à-vis an increasingly authoritarian, illiberal, aggressive, and arguably expansive Turkish state.

Regarding the Balkan interstate relations, another migration crisis can severely destabilize the region. If the EU fails to take risk mitigating actions and remains passive while the situation in Turkey or Syria lead to flow increases again, then the region will find itself isolated. Local organized crime and political corruption will likely lead to democratic and liberal regression at best. The moderate outcome might be the severe slowdown of conflict resolution within the region. At worst, the ineffective burden sharing will result in breakdown of neighbouring relations, erosion of state authority, the appearance of radicalized native paramilitary responses and a possible flare up of interstate conflicts.