

Strategies Sectors | **Culture & Society**

The Impact and Role of South-East European Countries in Recent Migration Crises

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On the southern shore of the Mediterranean, *something* that had been simmering for years, surprised everyone and erupted into the *Arab Spring* where masses, who had been deprived of their rights, stood up to authoritarian regimes. The uprising prompted further waves of destabilization and also migration towards the shores of nearby Mediterranean and Middle Eastern states to the north.

What in its beginnings was a legitimate desire for the democratization of society, has become a conflict between various fractions in several states where central governments evidently have no absolute control over their own territories. The result of these conflicts is millions of displaced persons, both within and outside of those countries.

Simultaneously, "international migration has moved to the top of the international security agenda. Increasingly, policy-makers in the United States, Europe, and around the world are making links between migration policy and national security."¹ Everyone understands what 'failed states' imply for global security, and when large sections of their populations are trying to get into Europe, we need to analyse all the challenges posed by the situation. This is especially important if the situation in Afghanistan, Syria and Libya is becoming more ex-

treme, rather than stabilising, and when individuals and small groups can represent a significant security risk.

The overland migration route to Europe (alongside the standard route over the Mediterranean) was well used in 2015, primarily across Greece and then through south-east Europe towards Germany, which is the main destination for a large number of migrants. The goal of this article is to address certain current issues and outline how countries in south-east Europe are reacting and how those countries have coped with not having a unified EU policy on the subject.

High Migration Pressure and Its Consequences

Because of the persisting instabilities in 2015 and January 2016, over 1,100,000 people have transited through the countries of south-east Europe with the end goal of entering the territory of the European Union.²

The worrying factor is the enormous increase in the number of entries in 2015 (853,650) with respect to 2014 (72,632), the percentage increase being over 1000%, and the trend is increasing in 2016. Analysing the countries of origin, the citizens of Syria, Afghanistan and Iraq represent over 80% of all migrants transiting towards the European Union. This is why the EU is currently under great migratory pressure, from various sources, which, because of the destabilized situation and ongoing conflicts, terror and insecurity in the countries of Africa and the Ara-

¹ Fiona B. ADAMSON. "Crossing Borders: International Migration and National Security," *International Security*, Vol. 31, No. 1, Summer 2006, pp. 165–199

² IOM, "Mixed Migration Flows in the Mediterranean and Beyond, Compilation of available data and information," *IOM Report*, www.iom.int/sites/default/files/situation_reports/file/mixed-flows-mediterranean-and-beyond-21-27-january-2016.pdf

bian Peninsula, will undoubtedly only increase. Unfortunately, regardless of the EU countries' efforts to assist migrants crossing by sea, in the last two years 7,049 people have lost their lives attempting to cross the Mediterranean, and in the first five weeks of 2016, a further 409 people had also lost their lives.³

Along with the aforementioned problems, one of the results of the Member States accepting the influx of people mostly fleeing from fighting and secondly from poverty and hunger is a major political crisis among European countries and a real institutional threat of the Schengen borders dissolving. Certain politicians, as well as certain countries, are becoming more of the opinion that borders should be closed and such an uncontrolled influx of migrants be stopped. Certain countries have already lined their borders with barbed wire, reintroduced border controls and are heavily increasing their measures to control the entry and settlement of foreign nationals on their territory.

The particular segment of illegal migration is the one connected with organized crime. There are two main forms of organized crime related to illegal migration: human trafficking and human smuggling.⁴ The difference between trafficking and smuggling is that smuggling does not include the elements of exploitation, coercion or violation of human rights as is the case with trafficking.⁵ Estimates of the profits of criminal organizations rise as the number of illegal migrants smuggled or trafficked rises. The Guide to the New UN Trafficking Protocol from 2000 states that the UN estimated that criminal organizations involved in human smuggling or trafficking annual were making a profit of between 5 and 7 billion US dollars.⁶ Most of that profit is generated on European soil which, without a doubt, represents a huge security challenge for all of Europe. When certain other categories are added to these figures, estimates on the profits generated grow exponentially. For example, the International Labour Office, in its report from the

"Global Against Forced Labour Conference" in 2005, estimated that more than 30 billion US dollars of annual profit was being generated by forced labour, migration and human trafficking.⁷

Security of the European Union's External Border

The security of EU countries is of special interest for every individual member country, but the question of the external border has a larger common dimension, being that the border's security should be of the same level regardless of the country which enforces its control. The terrorist attacks show that the perpetrators are preparing themselves in many countries, which highlights the issue of the role the border police play in those areas as well. In the contemporary, globalized world the question of whether there is a point in having borders at all has been raised.⁸ Is the security of borders or border areas a part of the wider security issues in which only one or more countries establish mechanisms for mitigating risks or dangers? In the EU, the quality of border controls is established in line with shared standards. Guarding borders, and especially changing the 'nature' of borders, is at the core of every attempt to understand the contemporary European transformation.

The negative in this process is that certain security disturbances have been used as an alibi for a political settling of accounts with European institutions or other countries, meaning that illegal migrants that certain political structures consider a great security threat are treated differently, ignoring the fact that without migration there can be no development, especially in Europe where the birth rate is decreasing. Migrants are not criminals, and in the interest of migration control and the reduction of illegal migration actions should be more spread; particularly ac-

³ IOM. *Mediterranean Update: Migration Flows to Europe: Arrivals and Fatalities*, http://missingmigrants.iom.int/sites/default/files/Mediterranean_Update_09_February_2016_0.pdf

⁴ IOM. *Irregular Migration*, 2004: www.rcmvs.org/documentos/IOM_EMM/v3/V3S12_CM.pdf

⁵ IOM. "Glossary on Migration," *International Migration Law*, 2004: <https://publications.iom.int/books/international-migration-law-ndeg25-glossary-migration>

⁶ UN. *Guide to the New UN Trafficking Protocol*, 2000: http://action.web.ca/home/catw/attach/un_protocol.pdf

⁷ International Labour Office. "A global alliance against forced labour," 2005: www.ilo.org/public/english/standards/relm/ilc/ilc93/pdf/rep-i-b.pdf

⁸ At the "Fine-Tuning EU Border Security" round table, held on 29 September 2010 in Brussels, Jean-Louis De Brouwer, Director for Immigration and Borders at the Directorate General for Home Affairs of the European Commission, posed the key question: "Is there any point in talking about borders in the globalised world?"

TABLE 18

Arrivals to European Countries through Balkan Route

Arrivals to	2015	2016	Total
Greece	858,608	52,055	910,663
Macedonia	388,233	48,374	436,607
Serbia	571,178	48,669	619,847
Hungary	391,384	378	391,762
Croatia	555,791	56,181	611,972
Slovenia	378,604	52,845	431,449

Source: IOM⁹

tions taken against smugglers should have a multi-agency approach, beyond the national one.

Border security is multidisciplinary, which raises the question of whether the existing agencies can respond to all the challenges. Are border police officers capable of recognising and efficiently acting on all forms of criminal activities and misdemeanours they are facing? There are many agencies which have jurisdiction over border control but have no unified command responsibility and the equipment and cadre is used inefficiently because they only perform duties under their jurisdiction. If all the agencies had a unified command system, the resources and the equipment would be spent more rationally and efficiently.

Reactions of South-East European Countries to the Migration Crisis

Due to the evident lack of a common European Union policy towards the challenge of the great migrant influx every member country, and not just those on migrant routes, has decided on independent measures with, at least at the outset, no cooperation and coordination with neighbouring countries.

The countries of south-east Europe (including Greece which is a Schengen Member State) have found themselves completely unprepared to face the enormous influx of migrants of many categories; from refugees, asylum seekers and economic migrants, to those wishing to avoid registration while entering EU territory because they used to be members of various military units in the war-affected areas.

The Director of Europol Rob Wainwright stated, in January 2015, the assumption that between three to five thousand European citizens are fighting in ISIL's

ranks and that they are a definite threat.¹⁰ During the investigation of the terrorist attack in Paris the misuse of refugee and migrant routes through south-east European countries, for the purpose of hiding identity and undetected entry, has been confirmed. In his 2016 statement, Wainwright pointed out that up to 5,000 jihadis trained in the Middle East could be at large in Europe. "Europe is currently facing the highest terror threat in more than 10 years. We can expect ISIL or other religious terror groups to stage an attack somewhere in Europe with the aim of achieving mass casualties among the civilian population." But he played down fears terrorists are using the migrant crisis to enter Europe posing as asylum seekers. "There is no concrete evidence terrorists are systematically using the flow of refugees to infiltrate Europe."¹¹

Additionally it is important to point out that illegal migration, regardless of whether it is individual, overseen by organized crime groups or of potential terrorists, implies a sequence of criminal actions connected to the act of illegal border crossing like: forgery and document theft; various frauds; coercion and abuse; various customs infringements; people, children and organ trafficking; corruption of civil servants.

Macedonia, Serbia and partly Croatia (an EU Member but not part of the Schengen area) have found themselves in the situation that, due to the lack of a European response to the migrant crisis, they have had to resolve a problem for which they lacked the capacity. Migrant registration has been done only partially, which is evident from the available statistical data. A lot fewer people have entered Macedonia than Serbia, and many more have entered Croatia and Hungary than have entered Serbia, which points to the inaccuracy of data. The same situation has been noted at the beginning of the migrant transit through Slo-

⁹ IOM Report: www.iom.int/sites/default/files/situation_reports/file/mixed-flows-mediterranean-and-beyond-21-27-january-2016.pdf

¹⁰ UK Parliament, Home Affairs Committee, Oral evidence: Counter-terrorism in Europe, HC 933, Tuesday 13 January 2015 <http://data.parliament.uk/writtenevidence/committeeevidence.svc/evidencedocument/home-affairs-committee/counterterrorism-in-europe/oral/17575.html>

¹¹ Justin HUGGLER. "EU police chief warns that 5,000 jihadists returned from Middle East – and new attack is likely," *The Telegraph*, 2016, <http://news.nationalpost.com/news/world/eu-police-chief-warns-that-5000-jihadists-returned-from-training-in-middle-east-and-new-attack-is-likely>

venia where the In/Out migrant records, which were kept by Slovenian official representatives, were significantly different. The worrying part is that the difference in numbers is hundreds of thousands.

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Certain countries have securitized the problem and decided on the introduction of radical measures, explaining that their response is aimed at the protection of national interests and European values. Greece, faced with its own long-term financial problems, negotiations with creditors and institutions in Brussels, gives the impression that it doesn't institutionally protect the Union's external border, but instead allows transit to all migrant groups through its territory. Macedonia, faced with the great influx of migrants, has partially engaged armed forces in border control, and Slovenia has done the same. The biggest example of securitization of migrants is Hungary, which has posted armed forces at the borders with the goal of preventing migrant entries and has lined its borders with Serbia and Croatia with barbed wire. Slovenia has subsequently done the same.

Every country on a transit route has reacted differently and has different views on the issue of large numbers of migrants in transit. Greece has not reacted in the way that other countries expected them to, Macedonia and Serbia have partially securitized the issue, Hungary and Slovenia have done so completely. At the same time, Croatia has approached the problem from a humanitarian perspective, refusing to securitize. As time passes, the countries on transit routes, after starting with non-cooperation and distrust, are coordinating and accelerating the process of migrant transit through their territories towards desired destinations in Western Europe.

The latest decisions, made at the end of February 2016, speak of reducing the number of migrants

who will be allowed to enter Western Europe, and accordingly transit through south-east European countries, putting all of these countries, as well as the migrants themselves, in a new and challenging position. Migrants from war-threatened countries who are already on their way do not understand the new restrictive decisions and will almost certainly, under any circumstances, try to get to their desired destination, a large number of them most probably trying to cross illegally; through smuggling, illegal border crossing or similar methods. Consequently, the migrants and transit countries in south-east Europe will surely face new security challenges, while the existing ones are yet to be resolved. This will constitute a great security risk for all.

Conclusion

The great migration pressure from people fleeing from war, conflicts or poverty, who are hoping to find protection and better lives in the developed countries of Western Europe has shown that the migration policy and the instruments that the European Union uses cannot respond to the current challenges. Accordingly, certain Member States and countries on transit routes in south-east Europe do not have a common cooperation platform but rather approach the problem pragmatically and opportunistically according to their own beliefs, capabilities and policies, their governments seeking to strengthen their own position. When the migration pressure began in 2015, the countries on transit routes neither cooperated nor exchanged data, but over time they have begun to cooperate and are functioning better and more efficiently. As a result migrants' waiting and suffering has lessened, overall costs are lower and data is being exchanged, which in turn raises the level of security. There is space for further improvement in cooperation but, without a unified policy of the key institutions in Brussels, all of the above will be nothing more than a group of individual attempts, and not a global solution to a challenge the magnitude of which no individual country can respond to. The security situation in the Middle East and in other countries in conflict indicates that the migration crisis will not end soon, and that countries of transit and destination must develop a long-term plan to address all issues, whether related to security or humanitarian problems.