

THE IMPACT AND EFFECTS OF AFGHAN MIGRATION IN THE CENTRAL ASIAN STATES

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Abstract: *Our paper intends to analyse the measures taken by Afghanistan's neighbours (central Asian states) in the context of ISAF (International Security Assistance Force) withdrawal from Afghanistan, that is preventing and counteracting the threats to their frontier security generated by movements that cannot be controlled by the Afghan population. The policies and strategies initiated and implemented by multiple international and regional intergovernmental organisations, in accordance with the public international law instruments implemented with the purpose of protecting and assisting refugees, asylum seekers, or any other person in need for international protection, require thorough analysis of the convergence of common multilateral agreements, with a view to highlighting the mutations and evolutionary tendencies of the social and security processes in Central Asia.*

Keywords: *Afghanistan, International Security Assistance Force, Central Asia, mechanisms of international public law, Afghan refugees*

1. INTRODUCTION

Throughout history, it has rarely happened for the Central-Asian region to become the center of power of any empire or influential state, this region being, in fact, divided, re-divided, conquered and periodically fragmented and representing more a battlefield for other powers. Its position among four historical centers of power, eloquent even today, has brought it both advantages and disadvantages, like access to trade routes and attack lines of all regional powers, or a permanent vulnerability, risking to be attacked from all directions, fact that would cause political fragmentation or a total vacuum of power due to the successive dominations.

Starting with the first decade of the XXI century, stability in Central-Asian region began to depend more and more on the situation that has developed in this region, with regards to the military and political conflict in Afghanistan, one of the most important international issue. This fact had as a consequence the activation of the Afghanistan's neighbors, states for which the regulation of the Afghan problem has a vital role.

2. CENTRAL ASIA – BETWEEN HISTORY AND PRESENT

Central Asia has represented for a long period of time an important geostrategic objective, for

superpowers or regional powers. Due to its geostrategic position, Central Asia has access to the most important Eurasian trade routes and to all regional powers. On the one hand, Russia continues to politically and military dominate this region, and China has an important role due to its investments in the oil and gas industries and take a stand in the region through the Shanghai Cooperation Organization - SCO (see details on Mihalache, 2012). On the other hand, “the United States, by its military presence in the region, is an important actor, but does not have such an extended relationship with Central-Asian states like its two geopolitical opponents, Russia and China” (Danilov, 2014).

Huge geographic space, approximately the size of the whole Western Europe, situated at the crossroad of more civilizations, Central Asia is one of the less known regions of the world, that has now caught the attention of the global great powers due to the significant flows of Afghan refugees that crossing the borders of this area and to the geopolitical changes arising from the crisis in Afghanistan. The five countries this region consists of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan - the “stans” of Central Asia, located in the middle of the Asian continent, “have together a total of 2 million km² and a population of about 60 million inhabitants, mostly Muslim” (Bădescu, 2014:16). After the disintegration of USSR, Central Asian states have

focused their efforts towards strengthening their statehood and assuming responsibilities that are specific to an independent state. In its more than two decades of independence, the states of this region, their societies and living conditions of the inhabitants and the 40 ethnic groups living in this space have experienced radical changes.

The biggest transformation is that these nations, for the first time in their history, have their own state and can take their own decisions about domestic and foreign policy evolutions. There are two types of states in Central Asia: powerful states in terms of territory, demography, economy and military (Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan) and weaker states (Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan), between these two types of states being, at some point, moments of tension or hostility caused by the division of natural resources in general. Governments of Central-Asian states have dealt with “growing difficulties in order to maintain internal stability, to prevent conflict escalation between secularism and Islamic influence growth - a key issue represented by Afghan migration problem” (Bădescu, 2014:17). According to M. Kaylan (2008), “the natural resources of Central Asia, from Turkmenistan's natural gas to Kazakhstan's abundant oil, cannot reach the West free of Russia and Iran except through that narrow conduit in the Caucasus. Moscow's former colonies in Central Asia are Afghanistan's most desirable trading partners”.

Despite their common experiences, each of the five Central-Asian countries has some characteristics that can help make the difference between them. Kazakhstan - the largest country by territory, with a population of about 16 million, with rich oil and gas reserves, as well as with market reforms - has become some kind of regional power. It is the main exporter of cereals in the area, receiving approximately 80% of total investments in Central Asia and has held the presidency of the OSCE in 2010. Turkmenistan distinguishes itself by its rich resources, a country with a population of 5 million that has rich hydrocarbon resources, particularly gas, and country which benefits of the geostrategic advantage of being a coastal state at the Caspian Sea. On the other side are economically weak states - Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan - which had faced many internal conflicts. Tajikistan, state with a predominantly mountainous characteristics, has a population of about 7 million people, is currently facing poverty issues, as well as problems regarding the development of democracy and economy. It can be mentioned that on the territory

of this state are three Russian military bases, with their headquarters in the cities of Dushanbe, Kurgan-Tube and Kuliab. Kyrgyzstan, with a population of about 5.3 million, is a poor country, currently dealing with the lack of electricity and a harsh climate. Uzbekistan occupies an intermediate position. The country with the largest population in Central Asia, about 24 million, has a common border with the other four Central-Asian countries, “at whose borders are a significant Uzbek minority” (Bădescu, 2014:21).

3. CENTRAL ASIA AND THE CRISIS IN AFGHANISTAN

The most important factors that have a considerable influence in Afghanistan are the United States, NATO, EU, Pakistan, Iran, China, Russia, Central-Asian countries (Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan), India. Since October 2001, the main methods used to influence the situation in Afghanistan are held by the Euro-Atlantic community. Before 2001 within the UN operated a contact group with concerns to the Afghan problem, which consisted of countries bordering Afghanistan (Iran, China, Pakistan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan). In order to solve the Afghan problem it is necessary the participation of both this state's neighbouring countries and key regional actors, to form a contact group “7 + 5”, which requires the participation of seven states that share a border with Afghanistan - Tajikistan, India, China, Pakistan, Iran, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan and the participation of Russia, the US, NATO, SCO, and CSTO (Collective Security Treaty Organization). Most member states of this cooperation format, that have influence over Afghanistan, are participants or observers in regional international organizations, especially in NATO, SCO, CSTO, Eurasian Economic Union. Traditional threats coming from Afghan soil - terrorism, religious extremism and drug trafficking - have a threatening character for the neighboring states (that are members of CSTO), fact that makes the current need for cooperation between NATO - CSTO regarding the stabilization of the Afghanistan problem, but here the issue of cooperation between the two organizations is complicated because of their many unresolved bilateral issues and especially because NATO's intentions not to recognize the CSTO area of responsibility. In this regard, NATO has taken over the responsibility of coordinating the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) in the summer of 2003, in order to support the

Afghan government and people. At the same time, this commitment of NATO was a clear indicator of how the Alliance adapts to the security requirements of the XXI century. ISAF has extended towards the west of the country and is seen as an indispensable partner in the effort to maintain the security and stability of Afghanistan, through so-called Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs). In addition to fulfilling this core function,

ISAF troops have given assistance in reconstruction, disarmament of former militias, weapons storage and confidence-building measures (Carp, 2006).

The repercussions of the conflict in Afghanistan, especially in relation to drug trafficking, creates serious security risks for Central-Asian states. The boundaries of this region with Afghanistan are quite accessible, an open way to Russia and Europe for drug trafficking. In addition,

traffickers have increasingly gain more influence on state institutions, especially within the most fragile countries in the region, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan (Frunzuliță, 2013:208).

All five Central-Asian republics perceive security and stability in Afghanistan as vital to their own national security. Although the interests and concerns of these states differ in relation to Afghanistan, there are some common themes, threats and opportunities. The five Central-Asian countries share concerns about the threat of al-Qaeda organization, terrorism and, to a different extent, of drug trafficking. Tajikistan is more threatened by drug trafficking than other republics, due to its weak state administration. Also,

Tajikistan is more interested in and tied to the future of Afghanistan by the large number of Tajiks, over 27% of the population, living in this country (Frunzuliță, 2013).

To a different extent, the Central-Asian republics, with the exception of the “positive neutrality” (see details on Shikhmuradov, 2012) of Turkmenistan, support the efforts of the Coalition in Afghanistan, including through their participation in the Northern Distribution Network (RND), an important alternative supply route for ISAF. In the late years, about half the supplies for US forces and the International Coalition in Afghanistan is transferred by RND. Moreover, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan have provided ISAF troops with airfields and runways.

Partnership with the US and ISAF has been gradually realized and calibrated according to the relations with Russia, which maintains a strong influence in the region, particularly through its links with political and security institutions of the Central-Asian countries (Frunzuliță, 2013).

Until now, Kazakhstan has been the only state in the area that provided Afghanistan with direct assistance. Central-Asian republics participated in many regional initiatives concerning border security and respect of law and order, such as the Caspian Sea Initiative, as well as Border Security in Central Asia. Although they perceive in a different way the threat level of terrorism, al-Qaeda and the Talibans, Central-Asian republics are more concerned about a premature withdrawal of Coalition troops from Afghanistan and about the situation that will follow.

Thus, at the end of 2013, NATO had 84,000 troops in Afghanistan, of which 60,000 were Americans (Simion, 2014). During 2014, all the states participating in ISAF have taken the commitment to withdraw its troops from the Afghan territory, the mission being due to officially end at the end of last year. Due to the withdrawal of ISAF troops from Afghanistan in 2014, Central Asia faces now a period of potential political instability, because

Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan could be affected by a potential resurrection of Islamic radicalism (Bădescu, 2014:21).

Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan, both two countries that had been governed a long period of time by authoritarian presidents, octogenarians, are vulnerable due to possible secession risks. Kyrgyzstan has not yet recovered after the two violent events of government crisis in the last decade.

All Central-Asian states are concerned about the potential insecurity that may result from the withdrawal of the ISAF mission from Afghanistan, which can lead to destabilization, with negative consequences, among which the most important are the expansion of radical Islamist ideas, the intensification of drug trafficking activities and refugees crisis. Despite these common concerns, there are many differences between the policies of Central-Asian states towards Afghanistan and between their visions about future international stabilization efforts in the region. On the eve of the military campaign in Afghanistan, led at first by the United States and then by NATO, the Central-Asian states had complex attitudes towards

Afghanistan. On the one hand, they were concerned about the potential spread of existing instability in Afghanistan, manifested by different actions of the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) in Tajikistan in 1999 and in Kyrgyzstan in 2000. On the other hand, Turkmenistan - and, to some extent, Uzbekistan - sought to accommodate with the Taliban regime in Afghanistan, trying, at the same time,

to gain economic benefits from the stabilization of the Afghan situation and from the construction of a gas pipeline to South Asian markets (Kassenova, 2014:3).

4. THE MAIN PROBLEM - AFGHAN REFUGEES IN THE CONTEXT OF THE ISAF WITHDRAWAL

Policymakers and experts from Central Asia believe that the complete withdrawal of ISAF troops from Afghanistan will lead to a new stage of instability in this country. The Afghan government and Afghan military forces are unable to deal independently with Taliban insurgents. This fact will have direct consequences on each state that is part of Central Asia, at different intensities, depending on the level of exposure and vulnerability perceived by each state with regards to the security challenges arising from the situation in Afghanistan. In this context, according to Kassenova (2014:9), "it can be said that the most affected state will be Tajikistan and the safest state will be Kazakhstan". Although there is a concern that an Afghan government influenced by Taliban will allow the creation of a network of training camps, support bases and points for the Central-Asian Islamic radicals, along Afghanistan's borders with Central-Asian countries (Kassenova, 2014), the current problem of states from Central Asia is the large number of Afghan refugees, who cross borders in search of political asylum and protection and security. So, we have shown in the figure below data regarding the number of Afghan refugees in Central-Asian countries in 2010.

According to the director of Afghan Refugees Association, "Ariana", Asadullo Vadzhah (2010), the official number of refugees from Tajikistan amounts to 5,000 people. Kazakhstan recorded a total of 600 official refugees, and those from Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan and Turkmenistan were not officially registered yet (Afghanistan.ru, 2012). So, based on these reports and on the data in the figure above, one can say that the number of registered refugees in countries from Central Asia

is much lower than the actual number of refugees who are on their territory.



Fig.1 Afghan refugees

Almost all Afghan refugees consider Tajikistan as the best country for transit to countries that can provide them with social welfare. Experts believe that this fact is due to two main reasons: economic and psychological.

The vast majority of Afghan refugees are ethnic Tajik and of Sunni Muslim religion... Most of them have higher education, reasons for which locals treat them controversially (Menkouski, 2013:195).

There was a special UN program until 2007, whose main objective was to forward refugees from Tajikistan to another countries, but this was later canceled. In the same year, Tajik authorities tried to evict refugees from Dushanbe (where they came in search of a job) in border areas, where they were once registered. Refugees were allowed to live only in certain cities and regions. In 1990, for example,

Uzbekistan forced Afghan refugees to leave the country, with the result that, today, in this country, live only Afghan businessmen, who have special accreditation (Verhoturov, 2012).

Afghan refugees in Kazakhstan must demonstrate annually to the special committee that the war in their country have not finished. By law, refugee status in this country is limited to one year, and the new law "On Refugees" (2010) brought no change regarding the modification of the term (Nur, Kazakh News Agency, 2010).

5. THE EFFECTS OF THE REFUGEE WAVE FROM AFGHANISTAN INTO CENTRAL ASIA

As we have said above, the withdrawal of troops from Afghanistan can generate different consequences on the security of Central-Asian states. Thus, various scenarios were developed on the development of the security environment of

those countries situated near the Afghan conflict zone. One of these possible scenarios of evolution states that the withdrawal of coalition troops will lead to a strengthened position of Taliban and to Taliban attacks on people who have links with coalition structures. A consequence of this fact will be the flow of refugees to neighboring countries from Central Asia - Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, thing that will cause pressure on their economies. The presence of refugees will increase the trade with illegal weapons, will intensify the drug trafficking activities and may increase the risk of religious and ethnic conflict in the Fergana Valley (risk to activate radical Islamists to consolidate their positions and the position of other Taliban groups, funded by Islamists in Afghanistan). The increased flow of refugees in countries from this region can be a threat on the one hand to the economic security of these countries of destination, and on the other hand, the refugees flow may hide people who will try to impose the Afghan scenario upon nations in Central Asia, which will represent to some extent the interests of terrorist groups from Afghanistan and the Middle East.

If the United States will actively cooperate with Uzbekistan, then they will be able to weaken the OSCE positions. While reducing the role of CSTO, will increase the role of SCO as an instrument of politico-military and economic interaction of China on Central Asia. The direct consequence of the withdrawal of coalition troops from Afghanistan will be the danger of the outbreak of local armed conflicts between states in the region. The situation in Central-Asian countries may thus follow the "Libyan scenario". Negative factors that may contribute to the outbreak of armed conflicts and social tensions can be represented by the collapse of infrastructure, corruption and drug trafficking.

The most sensitive countries in terms of security are Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan and partly Uzbekistan (due to its intermediate terrorist organization of the Taliban Movement in Central Asia, operating on its territory). All these three countries have internal factors of instability, conditioned by ethnic, tribe and regional contradictions, but the conflict between Tajikistan and Uzbekistan on the distribution of water sources has an interstate character, and may led to a war. As a negative phenomenon it is possible the re-starting of a civil war in Tajikistan, that will attract fighters from neighbouring Afghanistan and mercenaries from the Middle East and Central Asia. In Turkmenistan will take place the integration of drug trafficking groups with

smuggling groups, which will create a favorable ground for destabilization.

Tajikistan, Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan form a "triangle of conflict", because all three countries have the greatest demographic problems, but also in terms of economic and social situation. Local economies are not able to provide employment for the growing population and about half of Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan GDPs and a fifth of the GDP of Uzbekistan is made on behalf of migrants (who due to loss of jobs can be a source of instability). Another important aspect is that in the context of the US military pressures on Iran, the latter can use the Shiite groups from Central-Asian countries to oppose to the American presence, all of which could have the result of weakening the role of Russia in the region.

The wave of refugees from Afghanistan may, directly or indirectly, represent a threat also to the prospects of enlargement of the Customs Union, where the weak links are Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan, if they are included in the integration project. Moreover, according to an analysis performed by border guard chiefs from Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan and Afghanistan, made in August, 2014, the main problems caused by massive waves of Afghan refugees, following the withdrawal of ISAF troops in Afghanistan, are the intensification of drug trafficking and the threat of maintaining the infiltration of religious extremist and terrorist ideas. As a consequence, within the CSTO collective security council's meeting, on September 23, 2014, held in Sochi, was approved an agreement for establishing an interstate program on strengthening the Tadjiko-Afghan border. In this context, the head of the Russian General Staff, Army General Valery Gerasimov, said that not only Tajikistan will receive technical and military aid worth 200 million dollars (US), but also Kyrgyzstan - 1.1 billion dollars (US). Moreover, statements were made on the accession of Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan to Russian-Kazakh system of anti-aircraft protection (see Сапарев, 2013).

6. CONCLUSIONS

Massive internal and external migration in the Central-Asian states will be an inevitable consequence of the withdrawal of coalition troops from Afghanistan. In this regard, there will be an increase in the flow of refugees and forced displacement from Afghanistan and from bordering areas of Central Asia. Taking into consideration the wave of economic crisis,

migrants from the Russian Federation will return to Central-Asian countries, which will result in an increase of pressure in the main social sphere.

The increased migration will be accompanied by the overall situation of instability and by survival conditions below the poverty line. Negative factors, generated by larger flows of Afghan refugees on the territory of Central-Asian states, which can help, in this context, to the emergence of conflicts, are represented by collapse of infrastructure, corruption and a virtual absence of social services. The most sensitive countries in terms of security are Tajikistan, Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan. Furthermore, states will limit the level of finances for social insurance, which will have a negative impact on education. Increasing social tensions in countries of the region will be accompanied by a worse quality of life (access to education, healthcare, drinking water, population mortality, etc.).

In this context, it can be said that the withdrawal of the ISAF mission from Afghanistan can produce a more intensified state of instability not only on Afghan territory, but also on the territory of those countries situated in its vicinity, namely the Central-Asian states. Waves of Afghan refugees who will migrate on their territory will inevitably lead to a destabilization of security, through intensification of drug trafficking, human trafficking and illegal arms trade.

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