SECURITY CHALLENGES IN 2019 - PRESENT AND FUTURE APPROACHES IN THE WESTERN BALKAN ROUT OF MIGRATION

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Abstract: *The last years have been seen as a turmoil in the Balkans in regard to immigration routes. Smugglers guide immigrants across the border of the Balkan states such as Greece, Albania, Montenegro, Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, into the European Union. The migration patterns are new or old; what "works" is unchanged what "don't work" is to be changed before the law enforcement institutions adapt as illegal is every day faster than legal. 2019 is to be seen as a difficult year for the European Union but also for the non-EU member states in the Balkans in both terms of unity and common trust facing security challenges that could undermine the fragile stability and prosperity context. The environment and the geopolitical context seems to be a constant challenge for the states that require adaptability in order to maintain peace and calm in the region. The security challenges require diplomacy, fast action, financial and human resources, strong regional and international partnerships, confidence and mutual trust to deal with. Organised crime, illegal migration, are just the tip of the "security iceberg" EU and non - EU states have to manage now and in the near future. The aim of the paper is to provide a diagnosis in terms of immigration dynamics and state decisions regarding the flow management of migrants at the beginning of 2019 regional security context in the Balkan Peninsula. Also, through a SWOT analyses, the article offers the most probable solutions Balkan States will have to follow in order to manage the immigration security issues identified as priorities for the near future. Finally, the main trends for the future of the European Union concerning immigration management are not to be neglected in the provided analysis.*

Keywords: *Regional security; European Union; Romania's national security; immigration; security challenges*

1. INTRODUCTION

Immigration opinions and attitudes encompass a variety of favorability judgments. Sentiment analysis of informal immigration discourse is often considered a binary approach of "thumbs up" vs "thumbs down" classification. The possible goals, aside from binary judgments could want to: classify according to some more general taxonomy, e.g. secured immigration vs illegal immigration, evaluate the degree of confidence with which the writer of the social media post is entitled, evaluate the degree of agreeability/argumentativeness with which the writer expresses views, identify particular issues regarding immigration of special importance to the audience and the writer.

The exponential growth of social media in the last years has brought new patterns of the way people interact and form perceptions and opinions related to important issues of the society they live in. Individuals produce digital data at an unprecedented rate by interacting, sharing, and consuming content through social media.

Knowledge operates at different levels, and when undertaking to examine the images different peoples have of one another, it would be a mistake to imply that such pictures are either evenly composed or uniformly imagined by all members of a particular people (FranciS, 2013:233).

The power of the state to define the legal status of aliens in the country is the decisive factor in the construction of "illegal aliens". The construction of immigrant illegality is a long-term process that is generated by the immigration regulations. These regulations are of course influenced by various factors such as political and economic developments, public debate on immigration and border control. It is precisely this process of deliber-intervention, differentiation and exclusion that is interesting when trying to understand illegality (Schover *et al.*, 2008:41).

Thus, territorial borders are, in spite of huge investments, still permeable borders. This has been seen as flows of migrants passed through the Greek-Macedonian border, the Serbian-Hungarian border and so on…

One reason for this is that borders have a double function. The smooth functioning of the modern economy requires an easy passage for some people and goods. Businessmen and cargo should pass the border with minimum delay. On the flipside, the border is meant to filter out contraband, terrorists and irregular migrants (Schover *et al.*, 2008:42).

The "toughening" of immigration rules is often associated as being a part of national antiterrorism legislation that stemmed from a new perception that terrorists or potential terrorists were exploiting national immigration and asylum rules. After all, not only had many known terrorists lived in Europe as legal immigrants (most notably the Hamburg cell of Mohammad Atta), but (much more troubling to the European press, public, and governments) many Al-Qaeda members and/or sympathizers were living in Europe as genuine refugees. Given the rather brutal tactics of some Middle Eastern governments towards fundamentalist clerics and their sympathizers, many suspected Al-Qaeda members faced genuine Geneva Convention-recognized persecution in their home countries, and thus were (apparently) legally entitled to shelter in the West (Givens *et al.*, 2009:134).

The informal economy is emerging worldwide as an antipode to the formal economy. Although only partially visible and parallel to the formal economic system, it is manifested in social and cultural activities in European cities in the tourist trade, in the form of vendors in the streets and squares or those selling flowers in restaurants. It has links to drug trafficking and prostitution, but also provides economic opportunities for immigrants, young people, and students. It has links with the formal economy, contributes to the forces of formal and informal social control, and is an important factor in the economies of European countries (Gottschalk & Gunnesdal, 2018:90).

2. INTEGRATION POLICIES IN THE WESTERN BALKANS

Integration policies in the Western Balkans are barely halfway favorable for societal integration, scoring below the European average and alongside other 'new' immigration countries in MIPEX, such as Bulgaria, Hungary, Poland, Romania and the Czech Republic. Newcomers in these countries will face slightly more obstacles than opportunities to participate in society. These countries are at different stages of their EU accession, with Croatia as the newest Member State. Interestingly, the

policies that could contribute the most to integration are EU law-driven. Despite these improvements, the conditions in law are undermined by authorities' rather discretionary procedures in all Western Balkan countries, a problem across Central and Eastern Europe. In addition to the negative impact of this uncertainty on integration, newcomers critically lack many basic citizenship, education and political opportunities that are becoming best practice across Europe. (Huddleston, 2016:2) (See figure no. 1).
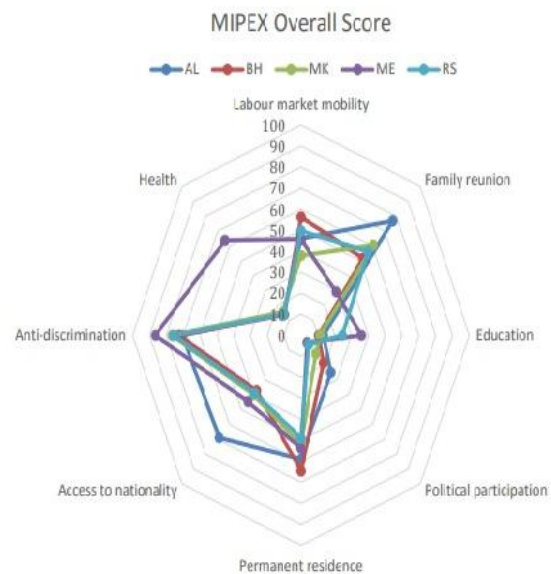

Fig.1 Diagram of MIPEX Overall Score for AL, BiH,MK,ME,RS (Source MIPEX.eu)

3. LONG RESIDENCE IN WESTERN BALKANS

Do the immigrants stay or do they do towards the Western Europe?

This question is hard to respond to due to the lack of data and information about the flows that pass through the Western Balkans. Some of the immigrants tend to go in Germany, France or other countries that are seen by the migrants themselves more favorable for long term residence.

Based on the provided MIPEX data, the long term residence in the Western Balkans is more than different than in the European Union countries. Thus, EU Member States agreed and implemented the EC long-term residence directive (2003/109/EC), with the common objective that the integration of long-term residents will promote economic and social cohesion. Most legal immigrants should be eligible to apply after 5 years

for equal opportunities to integrate in economic and social life. This is not the case in the Western Balkans, where several categories of temporary permits are not considered for the 5-year residence requirement. As in the case of family reunion procedures, applicants who meet the legal conditions in these countries can still be rejected and can lose their residence permit on several grounds due to state discretion that is common in the region. They also have few protections against expulsion. Therefore, migrants in most of the Western Balkan countries do not enjoy the security of status that is afforded by the Directive. The conditions are especially unclear in Albania. Applicants in Bosnia and Herzegovina need to meet a vague language requirement. The 2009 CZ language test for long-term residence is an example for a good practice in terms of integration requirements, aimed to ensure equal and reasonable conditions. With an attainable level (A1), free support and professional examiners, this model creates conditions for applicants to succeed, rather than creating more bureaucratic obstacles. Huddleston, 2016:7)

All the Balkan states have claimed that they have closed their borders as Austria has already long time told that has do so… In fact the immigrants find always a way to pass the borders unnoticed by paying a lot of money to smugglers using some of the most unconventional routes with big success. The message the internet, the social media and also the television wants to send to those that have not yet flew their countries of origins is that it's impossible to get into the European Union. One of the intermediate points of arrival in the Western Balkan route is Bihac (Bosnia and Herzegovina) close to the Croatian border (practically the border of the European Union).

Many people were not granted the possibility of applying for asylum. Europe is failing to deal with big numbers of arrivals but is failing to deal also with small numbers on income immigrants. As migrants seek help in smugglers they improvise rafts made from plastic bottles to cross the Drina River. Bosnia, as other countries on the Western Balkan route, is trying to give to immigrants a human welcome but is a country with the necessary resources to cope with this new trend. Most of the immigrants come from Serbia as the news of closed borders with Hungary spreads mainly on social media and also due to the free visa regime for the Iranian citizens. The immigrant come by plane to Belgrade as there are flights weekly from Iran.

According to data from Bosnia's Foreigner's Affairs Service, 16 Iranians have requested asylum in the country last year. But only until September this year, this number stands at 1,647 already.

After 27 years, the first Iran Air airplane has landed in Belgrade in March this year. Two more followed suit the same month - Qeshm Air and Mahan Air. More than 20,000 passengers have arrived in Serbia from Iran since then.

According to Serbia's Statistics Agency, nearly 16,000 Iranian tourists have stayed in Serbia within the first seven months of the year.

According to the director of Serbia's Info Park, a refugee centre in Belgrade, part of the Iranian tourists coming to Belgrade continue their path illegally toward Western Europe. (N1 Sarajevo: 2018)

The free regime visa is for now suspended.

For years, the global migrant crisis was a remote concern for Bosnia. Migrants traveling along the Balkan corridor first arrived in Greece by sea from Turkey and then moved toward Macedonia and Serbia in order to enter Croatia and Hungary, both EU member states. As in 2015 and 2016, countries along the route have closed their borders, sending migrants fanning out across the Balkans.

Now, migrants leaving Greece go through jagged mountains and dense woodland to reach Albania, then Montenegro, only to find themselves stuck in Bosnia. This small, ethnically divided country with a dearth of economic opportunities has found itself at the epicenter of the crisis, as more people make their way in and can no longer find a way out (Kalan, 2019).

3.1 The numbers. The number of refugees and migrants arriving to Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) saw a noticeable increase late in 2017. In contrast to an average of 32 arrivals per month recorded in the period January-November, in December (2017) the number of arrivals reached 198. The trend continued into 2018 and the number of recorded arrivals has more or less doubled each month this year, increasing from 237 in January to 666 in March. Between 1 January and 31 March 2018, the authorities registered 1,314 new arrivals. The most common countries of declared origin were Syria, Libya, Palestine, Afghanistan, Iran, Algeria, and Iraq. Over the same period, 741 attestations of intention to seek asylum were issued by the Service for Foreigners' Affairs (SFA). Nineteen percent of these arrivals had registered an asylum claim by the end of March. As of 31 March, 253 people had lodged their asylum claim in BiH. Of these, 30 percent were from the Syrian Arab Republic, 19 percent were from Pakistan, 11

percent were from Afghanistan, 9 percent were from Libya, and 8 percent were from Palestine. Many of the refugees and migrants cross the border in an irregular manner (i.e. at non-official border crossing points) and the majority arrive from Montenegro and Serbia. Currently, a large proportion reside in Sarajevo and its vicinity. At the same time, there is an ongoing accumulation of refugees and migrants at various potential exit points along the border with Croatia. This accumulation is particularly visible in Velika Kladuša and Bihać; further short-stay accumulations are visible at entrance points in Trebinje and Goražde (arriving from entry points in Rudo and Čajniče). National and regional media, with memories of increased refugee and migrant arrivals in the neighboring countries in 2015-2016, have taken keen interest. Although the number of recorded arrivals has not yet reached humanitarian crisis levels, the current trend calls for increased support, engagement, and coordination from a range of actors, as well as increased funding. It should be noted that capacities to respond are already being tested and strained. A prime example of this is the available accommodation, or lack thereof: the Asylum Centre, managed by the Ministry of Security (MoS), is now regularly at or close to capacity and limited sustainable alternatives exist (United Nations, May 2018:11).

3.2 The successful route – Bosnia and Herzegovina. From the migrants perspective the successful route passes through Bosnia, 3 out of 4 migrants have successfully passed into the EU and continue onwards towards Croatia, Slovenia, Italy and so on. For the resident people themselves in Bihac and Velika Kladusa the perception of insecurity in face of the growing numbers of migrants was clearly an issue. Bosnia and Herzegovina is a decentralized state. So, for an issue like the fast growing of immigrants flow the response should come from the state government, the authorities of the Federation, the cantonal authorities and the local municipality which in term of cost-time efficiency the response comes always late. Another issue is the cost of dealing with migrants that fairly for Bosnia Herzegovina is something that the economy can't support as is the situation in Greece where the EU has a better implication with financial support and where the administration is more centralized.

The "ongoing rush" towards the Croatian border on the Western Balkan route of migration was also fueled by rumors (especially on the social media – Facebook, Twitter) that the Croatian Border Police will open the border for the flows of migrants. This rumors, even if hard to prove, were generally spread across the social media by the smugglers themselves that saw in the "migration stall" a threat to their business. Another issue is that immigrants have leaders in the groups that promote action when "the time comes". Usually the leaders in the groups know themselves and act as a whole when critical mass is gained. This model of action could explain why the migrant flows suddenly moved towards the borders of the EU (Croatia) from Bosnia Herzegovina at once.

> It opens the space for smugglers, both internationals and locals. There are human traffickers who offer Bosnia's route to migrants in Greece, Bulgaria, even in the countries of origin, and there are ones who drive them from Bosnia to Croatia, there is another that drives them to Slovenia,

said Peter Van der Auweraert, IOM Coordinator for the Western Balkans (Panic, 2019).

3.3 The strength – the European Union. The European Union itself is the true strength in the immigration crises and in managing the Western Balkan route. The EU - through the financial support it offers to Western Balkans states for dealing with the migration related issues should be seen as the equation S (strength) now and in the future.

It's clear that without cooperation and financial support many transit states in the Balkan Peninsula cannot cope with the migration phenomena.

3.4 The question of smuggling immigrants – the week point. The process of smuggling immigrants into the Western Balkans is far from easy to manage. Some of the criminals exploit the migrants as they go forward while some of them deliver them to the points of border crossing as promised. In both cases huge amounts of money are being pulled away from the immigrants. The transit states cannot face this issue alone as there has to be close cooperation and coordination from the EU countries in terms of police and intelligence data sharing to deter and stop the criminal actions. The joint investigations teams may be an option but the actions remain basically tributary to the financial resources allocated.

Another issue that EU has to respond to is the irregular immigrants working in some economic sectors (agriculture, housekeeping) where is a big demand of labor force. If this demand is kept informal not to say it is on the mercy of the black market, the growth of immigrants that fuel this

domains is going onwards as for now. So, the systematic analyses of the pull factors (that attract immigrants into the EU) has to be done internally in the EU and decisions have to be taken into account as soon as possible, as most of the immigrants themselves are willing to work in order to support their life.

3.5 The opportunity: increased political collaboration between the European Union and the Western Balkan states. To this extent the Western Balkan route should be more and more a plan of the European Union in dealing with migration.

Another opportunity that has to be seen in managing migration flows is a common set of European values that are inner to the people living in the Western Balkans that many researchers have neglected in their papers. The fact that people are different in the Western Balkans proved that humanitarian support was coming from the simple social actors that actually live in the Western Balkans. Where states have failed simple humans have not failed. To underscore my point of view I just want to give a short example for when my car engine has failed back in December 2017 near Sarajevo and in just a couple of minutes local people stopped their cars to help me with good advices or recommendations for auto services that made my Christmas holydays a little better.

3.6 The threat: the "where to go issue". If people do opt for asylum and they stay but they have a negative decision over their asylum claim there is no political ant technical capacity to return the immigrants to their countries of origin. Examples come from Germany or Finland that have huge problems when they decide to return immigrants (that have not the right for refugee status) from Pakistan or Irak into their home countries. This is even more obvious for countries like Serbia, Albania, Bosnia, Montenegro that have not so much political influence in the origin countries of migrants in order to accept their return back home. The solution is cross-political collaboration between the countries of origin, countries of settlement and countries of transit. The solution may be simple but in reality it's complicated.

4. CONCLUSIONS

n the eyes of many European Union countries the Balkan Peninsula is still seen as a place of tensions and unrest. The rise of nationalism and delicate issues of interethnic relationships continue to impale the common trust in the way of good

inter-state relationship. The promotion of the European Union in the benefit of all the citizens in the Western Balkans is to be seen as a strategic objective in the years to come. The Balkan states need to support each other and cooperate with the common goals in mind: to help the states that are not yet members of the European Union and to prepare themselves with the cooperation with the European Union.

As far as they can be seen, the Western Balkans represent, in my opinion, the European Union iceberg tip to the common security and welfare perspective for the years to come. Needless to say that for Romania's regional and common European interests, the security issues in the Western Balkans have a great impact, in both terms of national security and common regional/European security. Thus, Romania is supporting the European Union enlargement in the Western Balkans and is continually upgrading the comprehensive action programs is part of, as stability, security and economic development in the region is a must for the future to come.

At a closer look the European Union should be aware that basically, the Western Balkan route used by the immigrants is just a way from the EU to the EU. It's a corridor from Greece to Croatia, Slovenia, Austria, Italy and onwards and the issue of the Western Balkans is by that an European Union issue more than a single state issue.

In terms of immigration flows the "lessons learned" in the years that have passed need to be the central key in dealing with the new flows of migrants that might arrive in the Balkan Peninsula.

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