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## **WEST BALKANS MIGRATORY ROUTE: CHALLENGE FOR REPUBLIC OF NORTH MACEDONIA AND THE SECURITY OF THE URBAN ENVIRONMENTS**

**Sande SMILJANOV**, MBA Spec.  
Ministry of Interior of the Republic of North Macedonia  
Head of Section for Protocol Events and Activities  
E-mail: ssmiljanov@gmail.com

**Abstract:** Migratory crisis were a great security challenge for all the European states, but above all the Balkan ones. Hardest hit were the states outside the European Union (EU) referring here to the region of West Balkans which was one on the main corridors for this migratory wave. Reason for this was the fact that these states had to bear the burden of additional border security. For Republic of North Macedonia all of this was additionally burdened with the fact that certain portion of its border which needed additional security was with an EU member state. Republic of North Macedonia was one of the transitory states of the so-called "West Balkan Route" which was very active and reached its peak during 2015 and the beginning of 2016, and which engulfed the entire region of South – Eastern Europe and Europe in whole. During this period some 800.000 people passed through North Macedonia. Their status varied depending during which phase of crisis they crossed its territory. One of the fundamental elements of this analysis are the planning, organizing, coordinating, and implementing of the complex action for managing the migratory crisis on the territory of Republic of North Macedonia in the period between January of 2015 and October of 2017. This period had proven it's self to be a serious test for the capacities of this country and its institutions.

**Key words:** migratory crisis, Republic of North Macedonia, West-Balkan route, urban environments

### **Introduction**

One of the key years for the migration towards Europe was without a doubt 2015. This is the year when we witnessed what was till then an unprecedented flow of migrants towards the European Union. Leaving their homes mostly in the Middle Eastern and North African states, due to poverty and armed conflicts, a large number of people reached a decision to cross hard, thousands of kilometers long journey into the unknown. Their final destination was to be the safety, stability, and prosperity which Europe or more precisely, the European Union has to offer. In this 2015, one of the main routes towards the "promised land" was the West Balkan route. Large portion of this route crossed through the states which were members of the European

Union (Greece) and its Schengen Zone (North Macedonia, and Serbia), ending up all over the European Union member states. Struck by poverty and the wars raging in the nineteen nineties, the West Balkan state themselves are "de facto" also migratory by tradition, which is why the migratory route through these states was just a "transit route". Still, regardless of the fact that these states were just "transitory points", their institutions, and especially the healthcare and social assistance ones, coupled with the insufficiently developed economy, proved not to be prepared for the great strains of the mass migratory wave. Migrants, especially those on the North Macedonian southern border with Greece, presented both a security and a humanitarian challenge for the residents of the city of Gevgelija, geographically located at the very border, and as such due to its location most often used as an entrance point on to the territory of North Macedonia.

## **1. DEVELOPMENT OF MIGRATORY CRISIS AND ITS PHASES**

### **1.1 Phase 1: Beginning of 2015 - June 18, 2015**

First phase marks the very beginning of the migratory crisis which came at the beginning of 2015, and lasted through to 18<sup>th</sup> of June of 2015 (date of adopting of the changes in the Law for asylum and temporary protection. During this phase the migrants entering the territory of North Macedonia had the status of illegal migrants who have basically illegally entered, transited, and exited our state.

During this phase, in the period between April and May of 2015, after realizing that the migratory crisis is progressing, and that with each passing day continually increasing numbers of people are coming into North Macedonia are requesting asylum, the Government of Republic of North Macedonia, established a so-called **Inter-ministry committee**, composed of large number of ministers. Its primary goal was to adopt an appropriate strategy regarding the challenges out in the field, and above all to conduct appropriate coordination in tackling the migration crisis.

There was also the establishing of an **Operative committee** consisting of representatives of numerous ministries. This committee gave suggestions and implemented the decisions of the inter-ministry committee. Operative committee was run by the state secretary at the Ministry of Interior Affairs, who later became point of contact for Republic of North Macedonia during the migratory crisis.

As pressure at the southern border increased, and in accordance with the evaluations of the Ministry experts out in the field, it was established that the person coming to North Macedonia, most often requested asylum just so that they can enter the country, possibly get a break at the Collection Center for asylum seekers, and then move on north to their "final destination". For them the final destinations were the west European countries such as Germany, Sweden and others. Till this point the people entering North Macedonia had to request asylum, by starting procedure for right to asylum, or get status of illegal immigrants and be held up at the Collection Center for foreigners.

Because of this the Ministry of Interior Affairs suggested changes to the Law for asylum and temporary protection which was adopted on 18<sup>th</sup> of June of 2018. These changes allowing

immigrants the use of public transportation, served the purpose of protecting the safety of the Macedonian citizens and increasing the safety of the migrants, who were falling victims of the smugglers charging hundreds of Euros for transport. This also allowed the possibility to register the transitory migrants. Changes to this law also introduced category "Intention to submit request for recognizing the right to asylum (intention to asylum)" which basically means that at a border crossing or onto territory of Republic of Macedonia a foreigner can orally or in written form express intent for submitting request for recognizing right to asylum. Police officials would written down personal data of foreigners expressing this intent and issue them a paper confirming their intent. After this police officers would explain to these people that they have a 72 hours deadline for submitting official request for right to asylum before officials at the Collection center for asylum seekers or leave the territory of Republic of North Macedonia.

This action proved correct the presumption that most of the asylum requests (till then some 1500) were fictive, meaning these illegal migrants just intended to get access to Collection center for asylum seekers (open unrestricted center) instead of being put at the Collection center for foreigner (restrictive movement type center). There they would get a couple of days rest and move on to some of the west European states. After the adopting of this measure, by the end of 2015 only 86 asylum requests were made, and almost none of those 86 stayed in Macedonia to see their asylum request resolved, but rather left North Macedonian territory.

It is very important to point out that at this stage Republic of North Macedonia was suffering a lot of criticism by international organizations dealing with protection of human rights, as well as non-government organizations such as Amnesty International, for inappropriate behavior towards the illegal immigrants and inappropriate accommodation conditions at the Collection Center for Foreigners, where the migrants had to be held up in accordance with back then existing legislation.

## **1.2 Phase 2: Introduction of changes to the Law for asylum**

Second stage began after the introduction of the "intent for submitting request and recognition of right to asylum" which was adopted on 18<sup>th</sup> of June of 2018. This is a phase during which transit of migrants along the "west Balkan route" was allowed, while at the same time Republic of North Macedonia was facing serious challenges in managing the registration of migrants, their transit and transport from its southern to its northern border. During this period there was opening of two temporary transit centers. One was at the southern border, near Gevgelija seated company "Vinojug" and the other was at northern border crossing "Tabanovce".

Having in mind that with each passing day number of migrants coming from Greece to North Macedonia was constantly increasing, Inter-ministry committee started undertaking other measures for better border control. So, **on 19th of August of 2015, Government of Republic of North Macedonia reached a decision for introduction a state of emergency at its southern and northern border**<sup>60</sup>. This decision was to last for one month and served the following purposes:

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<sup>60</sup> First decision for introduction of state of emergency was adopted by the government of Republic of North Mace-

- Inclusion of the Army and its human and mechanized resources located out in the field along the Southern and Northern borders;
- Channeling the entrance of migrants through the registration check point constructed at famous "Rock 59" and initiation of their process of registration;
- Opening of two temporary transit centers near "Vinojug" Gevgelija, with capacity to hold 1,500 people, and at "Tabanovce" with capacity to hold 500 people, where there were conditions for hold back of 4 to 6 hours;
- Providing mobile first aid units at this centers, with the purpose of giving appropriate health care assistance for the people in need;
- Providing proper safety for the Macedonian citizens; When looking at the safety through the prism of the number of migrants transiting through this state one needs to have in mind that some 800.000 people transited through North Macedonia (this is more then 1/3 of the total Macedonian population). These measures proved correct because there was no single more serious incident where life and health of the Macedonian citizens was threatened. There were also no severe incidents between the immigrants themselves as well. It is interesting to mention that during this period there were cases of women migrants giving birth to their children on Macedonian territory and getting full medical treatment – children were often named after the doctors delivering the babies. There was even a male Macedonian police officer who met and grew fond of a female immigrant from Syria. They married and still live together in North Macedonia.

By the end of August, and into September and October of 2015, situation became alarming. This was due to the fact that huge number of human and material resources were used for the purpose of providing appropriate border security, and properly channeling all the people who wanted to enter and transit through North Macedonia (usually daily numbers ranged between 3 and 5 thousand, while there were days when these numbers peaked to between 10 and 12 thousand). Ministry of interior affairs had to allocate 1 million Euros a month just for the purpose of managing the crisis. This presented a serious financial challenge for a country such as Republic of North Macedonia.

It is at this period that a financial aid was request straight from the European Union, as well as individually at bilateral level from some European states. On several occasions there were donation conferences held with the representatives of the diplomatic core in Macedonia, during which technical-material donations were made. These donations were directly intended for the migrants and consisted of blankets, beds, mattresses, thermo-isolation foils, sleeping bags, canned food, etc.).

On top of this material assistance, there were also requests for human resource assistance, due to the fact that largest portion of the border police was engaged in securing the Southern and Northern borders. Border police was under constant engagement bringing them under serious security risks, which additionally burdened the normal functioning of the security forces

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donia and in accordance with the law, it could last for maximum 1 month. After this period expired, Republic of North Macedonia parliament adopted a decision for prolonging the extent of the state of emergency till 31<sup>st</sup> of December of 2015, followed by several 6 month extensions.

out in the field. Initially, assistance was requested from the European agency for border and coastguard watch – FRONTEX. Unfortunately they pointed out that they have no legal possibility for sending their forces outside of EU territory.

What is characteristic of this period is that at bilateral level, the EU member states (as well as EU its self) started to acknowledge the needs for joint action, and providing of material-technical assistance for appropriate border security and registration of migrants. Republic of North Macedonia was becoming more and more present during EU’s political, strategic and operative level, meetings regarding this issue.

During all of these meetings the Macedonia side was pointing out the need for joint efforts by all the countries located along the route, regardless whether they were just transitory states or so called “final destination” states. It was also pointed out that these states need to share information regarding the numbers of migrants that can be processed at any given day. When it came to the migration policies and policies for recognizing right to asylum Republic of North Macedonia made it clear that it is prepared to respect all decisions reached at EU level, in spite of the fact that it is not an EU member state.

On 25<sup>th</sup> of October of 2015, at a high level meeting in Brussels, Belgium, where Macedonia was represented by George Ivanov, back then president of the state, it was agreed that each state nominates a single point of contact. There was also an agreement on forming of appropriate organizational network which would hold video conferences at contact points in Germany, Austria, Slovenia, Hungary, Croatia, Romania, Bulgaria, Serbia, North Macedonia, Albania, and Greece. These conferences were initially held once a week and later once every two weeks. This network was coordinated by the Office of the President of the European Commission, Jean Clod Junkers. Point of contact for the migrant crisis in Republic of North Macedonia was and still is the Ministry of Interior Affairs State Secretary. Goal of this network is to exchange information regarding the ongoing situation in all of the states, problems they have faced in the past two week period, as well as the number of new and existing migrants on their territories.

Additionally, requests for manpower assistance by North Macedonia were answered and on 21<sup>st</sup> of December of 2015, several countries started a joint operation participated by police officers from North Macedonia, Serbia, Croatia, Slovenia, and Austria. They were almost immediately aided by police officers from the “Vishegrad group” member state, meaning Hungary, Czech Republic, Slovakia and Poland<sup>61</sup>.

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<sup>61</sup> Initial plan was for the joint operation to last till 31<sup>st</sup> of December 2016, but after the great results out in the field as well as the newly created situation which was greatly helped by the foreign policemen (after the closing of the border foreign policemen proved very useful in security the border from illegal crossings), the joint operation was initially extended till 30<sup>th</sup> of October of 2017, and with the latest request by all states and their positive response – this mission was extended till 30<sup>th</sup> of October 2018. At any given moment there were about 150 foreign policemen at the Macedonian-Greek border helping the Macedonian police officers. So far as part of various rotations some 2,300 foreign police officials have taken part in this mission.

Czech Republic	507	Slovakia	245
Hungary	411	Austria	220
Poland	330	Serbia	219
Croatia	251	Slovenia	145

Faced with the challenge of registering the migrants, providing safe transit and their hand-over to other states, Republic of North Macedonia initiated organizing of meetings of Police Directors of states along the migration route (North Macedonia, Serbia, Croatia, Slovenia and Austria). This was also done with the purpose of improving communication between states along the West Balkan route and timely exchange of information with the goal of undertaking joint measures. As a result of this, on 18<sup>th</sup> of February 2016, in Zagreb, came the signing of a joint statement confirming agreement for introduction of a Joint Registration Form as way of profiling the migrants who would be let through. This form would be filled out at the Macedonian-Greece border in presence of police officials from the remaining four member state coming out of this initiative. This action made it possible for migrant background check to be done in one place, so that from that point on they could be more easily transported by train from North Macedonia all the way to Austria. There was also an agreement for more timely exchange of information about the number of migrants that the states could take in. This was done so that North Macedonia could let through only as much migrant as Serbia could accept. Same principal was introduced between each of the bordering states all the way north to Austria.

It is also necessary to point out that during this period (18<sup>th</sup> of June 2015 – 08 March 2016) there was an introduction of the category “refugee” and “economic migrants”. This came as a result of a recommendation from UNHCR which suggested that residents of Syria, Iraq, and Afghanistan, get statue of refugees, while all the others get status of economic migrants. Goal of this recommendation was to give people from the states engulf in war priority over residents of the other Middle East and North African states who were trying to exploit the West Balkan route for the purpose of requesting asylum in some of the West European states.

Unfortunately the measures of this joint statement were short termed. On 08 March 2016, Republic of North Macedonia got a notification from Republic of Slovenia that “a decision has been reached for reintroduction of a full Schenge control” which basically meant that this state can no longer accept migrants on its territory, thus bringing to official shut down the West Balkan route!

### **1.3 Phase 3: Closing the West Balkan route**

Period from accepting of Slovenia’s notification on to May of 2016 which is basically the period right before the shutdown of the route was very hard. Republic of North Macedonia security forces were faced with great challenges. Same went for the members of the foreign police forces who were very helpful in managing this process. After the closing of the route and due to untimely notification about its closing<sup>62</sup>, some 2000 migrants found themselves stuck on North Macedonian territory, while at one point in the so called illegal camp in Evzoni there were about 13.000 people applying constant pressure to be let in on territory of Republic of North

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<sup>62</sup> Republic of North Macedonia was informed that from this point on no migrants will be allowed to come through. This did not allow sufficient period for preparations and gradual reduction of number of people who at that moment were transiting the route. Because of this many people found themselves stuck in the countries along the route, without a proper status and a possibility to move on.

Macedonia so they can advance on towards the West European countries, despite the fact that this was forbidden.

During this period there were daily attempts by these migrants to illegally enter the state – in mass and forceful manner. On daily basis there were over 100 attempts for illegal border crossing. We witnessed several more serious incidents when larger groups of migrants, most of which grown up males, pushed on the fence, stoned the Macedonian police (policemen were injured in the process). Police was forced to use tear gas and shock bombs to repel and disperse the gathered.

After constant alarming about this situation and with the help of the international community, Greek authorities were pressured to dislocate this camp further from the border and deeper into Greek territory. This led to significant easing up of pressure in the period between May and June of 2016.

It needs to be pointed out that this situation was also aided by the two agreement signed during this period, one being the EU-Turkey agreement for resolving the refugee crisis<sup>63</sup> and the other was the Agreement for relocation within the EU (so-called quota agreement).

Unfortunately these agreements had flaws and setback in their implementing<sup>64</sup>.

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<sup>63</sup> Agreement between EU and Turkey for the resolving of the refugee crisis predicts that by 2018 among other things Brussels gives Turkey 3 billion Euros. These funds came on the top of the 3 billion Euros which the Union already promised in November of 2015.

The Union will also have to provide termination of the visas for the Turkish citizens by the end of June of 2016. Key part of the agreement is that for each refugee or migrant returned from Greece to Turkey, one Syrian will directly be moved from Turkey to some of the EU member states.

In accordance with this agreement, the EU “will help Greece tackle the mass influx of refugees” and will provide an “efficient response to the hard humanitarian situation out in the field.” Basically the EU took it upon its self to provide Greece with additional help for managing its borders, including those with Macedonia and Albania, provide proper functioning of the refugee accommodation centers by 100 percent identification, registration and security check, of the refugees, and provide sufficient admission capacities. Agreement with Turkey also obligates top men of the 28 EU member states to continue close cooperation with the West Balkan states which are not EU member states, “With the goal of providing them with all the necessary help.” It was also agreed that all existing agreements about relocation and voluntary humanitarian admission with Turkey be immediately put into action. This agreement also predicted opening of new routes for refugee movement and increasing efforts in the fight against smugglers. EU was to conduct close cooperation with NATO for the purpose on deploying large number of ships into the Aegean Sea with the goal of talking smuggling efforts.

<sup>64</sup> Estimates about success of implementing the **agreement between EU and Turkey** vary – for some experts number of people sent back to Turkey is small and this process is taking far too long, while for others it is a success and considered as the only possible way for preventing greater influx of migrants from Turkey into Greece. According to information from Greek counterparts, Greece is facing many problems when sending back the migrants from Greece to Turkey, mostly due to mass applying of the migrants for asylum and prolonging of process for processing these requests, as well as Turkey’s stance to allow back only migrants found on the Greek islands and not on Greek mainland. According to data coming from Macedonian Ministry of Interior Affairs, just in August of 2017, some 3,650 new migrants showed up at the Greek island. Looked at on monthly level this is the greatest number of newly arrived migrants since June of 2016.

#### 1.4 Phase 4: Calming of tensions

Forth phase started with the closing of the route and easing up of tensions at the Macedonian-Greek border and has lasted ever since. This phase is characterized by constant efforts for reviving the route in illegal manner, through use of service of smugglers or through individual attempts for illegal transiting towards the final destination.

After the closing of the route, some 2,000 migrants found themselves “stuck” in Republic of North Macedonia. In the past period their numbers have come down to only some 40 being left.

Portion of these 2,000 immigrants voluntarily went back to Greece and tried to get integrated into the program which was result of the EU-Turkey agreement, others were sent back to Greece as part of the readmission process, some used the possibility for family unification with members of their families who had already gained asylum in some of the European states, and some simply left the interim refugee admission center and have most likely illegally left territory of Republic of North Macedonia, most likely heading to Serbia.

In this period (May 2016 – October 2017) efforts have constantly been invested in:

- Support for further strengthening of capacities of the border security system;
- Support in protecting states borders, and prevention of illegal crossing into the state;
- Support for more efficient and speedy voluntary and forced return to the country of origin or to the state from which migrants have entered North Macedonia;
- Support in the fight against migrant smuggling trade;
- Timely exchange of data and information;
- Joint and broad approach in managing the migrants.

In the first two areas significant support is already provided through special EU<sup>65</sup> measures and programs and through direct aid from the EU members states provided at bilateral level as

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<sup>65</sup> **EU regional project conducted by IOM**

##### **Regional support for managing sensitive migration in West Balkan and Turkey**

**Final goal:** Final goal of this project is the development and putting in action a system for managing migration in all seven states users of the IPA funds (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Republic of North Macedonia, Kosovo, Montenegro, Serbia, and Turkey) and all of this in accordance with EU standards. Countries using the IPA funds are in different stages of EU membership negotiations but all of them are working together towards improving their policies, laws, and institutions for managing migrants/borders. This is why all states which use IPA and strive for membership into the EU share common strategic goal which is a well balanced regional approach in resolving the migration problem.

**Specific goals:** Specific goals will be directed towards strengthening some of the key areas in the system for managing of the process of migration, with focus on exchanging non-personal information with other regional states, thus contributing towards establishing of mechanism for assisted voluntary return to the country of origin.

**Target group/users:** Seven states who use IPA, (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Republic of North Macedonia, Kosovo, Montenegro, Serbia, and Turkey)

**Activities/Special measures:**

1. Improvement of exchange of insensitive information and data at different regional levels;
2. Establishing of mechanisms for voluntary return at regional level and operative cooperation with certain states of origin outside the West Balkans;

part of the Joint operation. So far at various points in time various states that are part of the Joint operation have deployed more than 2.300 foreign police officers. At any given point in time in the period of almost two years (21<sup>st</sup> December 2015 – 30<sup>th</sup> October 2017) there was a constant presence of 150 foreign police officers.

On top of the EU donations which were part of the special measures, at bilateral level on two occasions the Czech Republic donated funds in the total amount of 1.8 million Euros. These funds were used for obtaining 25 terrain vehicles, as well as 45 other vehicles. Also as part of bilateral assistance Slovakia donated 1.500 pairs of boots for the border police. This assistance was worth 110 thousand Euros.

It is also important to point out that as part of the efforts against illegal migration there was a constant battle with the migrant smugglers. During 2015 and 2016 as well as from 1<sup>st</sup> of January to 28<sup>th</sup> of September of 2017, some 361 smugglers have been apprehended and prosecuted for the attempted smuggling of 2.118 immigrants.

### **1.5 Special measures for Republic of North Macedonia**

This chapter offers presentation of the three special measures introduced for Republic of North Macedonia with the goal of reducing the consequences of the fact that the migratory route crosses its territory:

1. Special measure directed at strengthening the capacities of the West Balkan states for more efficient tackling of the increased migrant wave from 7<sup>th</sup> of October of 2015. As part of this measure Republic of North Macedonia was given 3 million Euros. These funds were used by the Macedonian Ministry of Interior Affairs, Macedonian Ministry of Health, and Gevgelija and Kumanovo municipal authorities, and resulted in the buying of 33 terrain vehicles.
2. Special measure for support of Republic of North Macedonia and other West Balkan states users of the IPA2 (Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance) for improvement of the capacities for managing the borders and the migrant crisis - IPA 2016 starting from 15<sup>th</sup> of February 2016. Implementing of this measure was done through a contract with the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and led to allocation of 10 million Euros, of which 9 million were used while 1 million Euros were left as a reserve. Funds from this special measure were used for obtaining equipment (3.5 million Euros) hiring Foreign advisor for migration (Croatian former chief of border police), covering of expenses for the engagement of the foreign police officers (accommodation, food, and petrol for the vehicles they came with and used for border supervision), interpreters, different types of training and other similar measures.
3. Evaluations of the scope and numbers of interpreters needed for forming a regional West Balkan interpreters pool in cooperation with the Migration Asylum, Refugees Regional Initiative (MARRI), as well as designing and implementing of a pilot project in two key West Balkan states;
4. Improvement of identification and evaluation of the vulnerability of the migrants and refugees, and ensuring the inner state mechanisms have functional crisis management system.

3. Special measure for voluntary return of the people “stuck” along the route, including those in Republic of North Macedonia, after the closing of the West Balkan route. This measure greatly helped reducing the number of migrants who found themselves in North Macedonia after the closing of the route, through their returning to Greece, and from there on to their country of origin or inclusion in some of the EU programs for relocation.

## **1.6 New trends and developments**

From the last trimester of 2016 onward, there have been cases of so-called secondary movement of migrants which means movement in direction opposite from the general movement of migrants – attempts for illegal movement from Serbia through North Macedonia and into Greece. In most cases these are individual cases of people who have spent certain time in Serbia, and after several unsuccessful attempts to move towards Hungary or Croatia have decided to head back to Greece. Main reason for such decision is the fact that in Greece they can enter the EU relocation Program, option which is not available in North Macedonia or Serbia. Additional motive are the financial funds that are being given to them in Greece while they wait for their request to be resolved.

Having in mind the fact that in Serbia and North Macedonia these options are not at their disposal, as well as the fact that prices for smuggling have increased due to increased state introduced measures, it can be expected that in the future there will still be illegal crossing of the Macedonian-Serbian border in direction opposite from the general course of movement.

It is hard to express any predictions on the possibility of new mass wave of migrants towards West Europe because such a prediction depends on many factors – above all the implementing of agreement between the EU and Turkey. As for the role of North Macedonia in such new development, well this will depend on the actions of the services of its neighboring states in the region – Greece, Bulgaria, and Albania.

## **1.7 Expected future threats and possible new wave**

North Macedonia is still used as a transit state by the migrants. Security situation along the borders with its neighboring states is stable and favorable. Although illegal migration and waves of migrants have decreased, the main threat in tackling the migrant crisis remains to be the illegal attempts and migrant smuggling coming from Greece.

Reports by Europol point out to the fact that lately there has been use of alternative routes along the West Balkan route. Due to increased security measures along the Hungarian border and the rest of the West Balkan states, large number of immigrants are now trying to reach Romania, Croatia, and Slovenia. This is confirmed by the increased number of migrants apprehended along the Serbian-Romanian border or the Romanian – Hungarian border. At the same time there are indications that the Romanian city of Temishvar located close to both the border with Serbia and Hungary is developing into a migrant’s smugglers center.

“New form” for smuggling migrants into the European Union is the use of charter flights from and to small regional airports, due to the fact that often the smaller airports do not have strict security checks as the case is at the bigger airports. Prices for this type of service vary, but in some cases smugglers charge ten times the price of the regular plane ticket for the same destination. Smugglers use this form of smuggling because it makes easier the secondary movement of the migrants thus countering the increased security measures for border management along the migration corridors and the main transport centers.

### **1.8 Statistical data for the period between 2015 and 2017**

- From the beginning of the migrant crisis to October of 2017, Republic of North Macedonia has been transited by about 800.000 migrants, while validation paperwork has been issued to a total of 477.861 foreign citizens;
- During the course of 2015 and 2016, five border incidents have been registered along the Macedonian-Greek border, while throughout the entire 2017 not a single incident has been registered;
- From 21<sup>st</sup> of December 2015, to October of 2017, about 2,300 foreign police officers have taken part in various rotations as part of aid to Macedonian border efforts along its southern border;
- From 19<sup>th</sup> of November 2015 to 28<sup>th</sup> of September 2017, about 46.782 migrants have been caught in the act of trying to illegally cross the southern border. All of them have been sent back to Greece;
- Throughout entire 2015, 2016, and all the way to 28<sup>th</sup> of September 2017, some 361 people have been caught trying to smuggle 2,118 immigrants. These 361 smugglers have been subjected to criminal charges.
- Confirmation that Republic of North Macedonia has been used only as a transit state can be seen through the fact that during 2015 there have been only 1.578 requests for asylum, while in 2016 that number got cut almost in half with only 760 such requests.

When it comes to accommodating of migrants in the Skopje located Collection center for foreigners, it can be stated that during 2016, some 750 migrants have been accommodated. Of those 750 migrants, 581 were male, while 169 were female, if put through age perspective 563 adults, and 187 minors. If looked at by state of origin, most of the migrants came from Syria – 184, followed by Afghanistan – 162, Pakistan – 119, Iran – 100, Iraq – 66, Morocco – 41, Algiers – 17, and smaller number of them from other states.

On 28<sup>th</sup> of September of 2017, there were only 21 person (migrants) in the Collection center for foreigners.

## **2. INFLUENCE OF MIGRATORY WAVE ON URBAN ENVIROMENTS**

Migrant crisis along the West Balkan route proved to be a great challenge for Republic of North Macedonia, and especially the city of Gevgelija. General public showed concerns regarding safety and security issues. Relief came in the fact that North Macedonia was just a transit point,

which is why the migrant's first and most important goal was to leave territory of Republic of North Macedonia as soon as possible, and head out for some of the West European countries. This is why the subject of influence of the migratory waves over the urban environments will be looked at through the prism of worldwide experiences. All over the world there are great number of examples which can be used to look at the challenges urban environments meet when faced with the pressure of uncontrolled influx of greater number of people, most of which in the form of migrants.

## **2.1 Cities as more desirable centers**

Cities are usually always in the front lines of migratory wave hits. Greatest numbers of refugees or migrants almost always follow the same pattern of migration – from villages through smaller cities and on to the greater urban city environments<sup>66</sup>. According to data coming from the UNHCR (United Nations Refugee Agency), in 2018, 13.5 million refugees (about 58 percent of the total number of refugees worldwide) and 32,2 million internally displaced (about 80 percent of people from this category) have found safe haven in larger, middle size, or small urban environments.

We should not be surprised at all by the fact that the refugees (migrants) chose the big cities as their safe haven – mostly due to the fact that globally the number of city environments is increasing.

It is expect that by 2050, over 68 percent of the global population will be living in urban areas, with Africa and Asia leading the way in this centralization of population<sup>67</sup>.

It is understandable that a great influx of people can cause serious consequences when it comes to availability of public services – transport, healthcare, and police. Still it should be taken in consideration that larger metropolis areas have better capacities to absorb these kinds of influxes. Some of them create their own strategies for protection and care for refugees, while other work on resolving this issue with the central authorities , as well as other cities which have experience in this area.

Fact and experience lead to the fact that the best strategy is the all-encompassing one, which includes great number of government organizations, private sector, and non-government organizations. Especially effective are strategies which offer easily accessible accommodation (cheap housing), access to labor market, education and job training.

It should also be pointed out that that at global level, greatest number of refugees do not live in the well developed cities of Western Europe and North America. Reason for this is the fact that in most cases they are part of the population with lowest monthly income, and as such can live in the “makeshift” homes. This is why access to the services offered by urban settlements is far from the reach of these people. There is also the fact that in the urban areas themselves

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<sup>66</sup> Moggah, M.R. (2018) “Refugees and the City: The Twenty-first-century Front Line” in World Refugee Council Research Paper No.2. Vol.2, p.p. 18

<sup>67</sup> [www.un.org/development/desa/en/news/population/2018-revision-of-world-urbanization-prospects.html](http://www.un.org/development/desa/en/news/population/2018-revision-of-world-urbanization-prospects.html), looked at on 10<sup>th</sup> of May,2019;

there are very large social and economic discrepancies. When you add to this the political turbulences, growing insecurity, xenophobia, and marginalization, it is not hard to presume that these people will become easy subject of criminalization (real and perceptive one).

## **2.2 Urban migration: challenges and possibilities**

Numbers show that in 2015 and 2016 about 1.5 million refugees have stationed themselves in the cities all over Western Europe.<sup>68</sup> When faced with such influx of people city infrastructure and services always find themselves under pressure. This caused tensions which can be used by all sorts of nationalistic elements and political parties, thus changing and influencing state migration policies. Initial perception of city residents is that these incoming people represent a threat to the public law and order. Ignition capsule are usually individual cases in which young migrants and refugees conduct illegal activities against old town residents (one of the more famous cases is the police report according to which in 2015 and 2016, in the German cities of Cologne, Hamburg, Dortmund, Dusseldorf, Stuttgart, and, Bielefeld, about 1.200 women have been sexually assaulted by about 2,000 people of Arab or North African descent). This kind of new or information brought new wave of migration policy restrictions, while all migrants were generally perceived as criminals and sexual offenders.

Contrary to those believes, most commonly the refugees cannot be brought in connection with the increase of crime at a certain location – research has shown that refugee communities are less prone to crime then the rest of the communities at certain urban areas. A 2017 research by „New American Economy“ has shown that level of crime in cities with constant refugee communities has actually gone down. Most often reason for this is their fear of violating the law which would directly lead to their deportation, thus leading them to have greater self-control. Same conclusion can be reached when looking at data in connection with the rise of violent extremism and terrorism at urban environments.

When it comes to availability of job vacancies, most often there is a short term negative effect caused by influx of available workforce, while and mid and long term this situation actually turns into a positive influence, especially in the part of deficient work forces positions, or for job positions which are considered undesirable for the other residents of the urban environments.

Taking into consideration all the factors it can be concluded that city – urban environments have better capacity and potential to integrate the migrants without any greater difficulties (both mid and long term). What needs to be done is preparation and implementing of adequate strategy for promoting, protecting, and supporting refugees (migrants), organizing a system for collecting and sharing information with the goal of improving institutional coordination. This can be done by encompassing greater number of state and non-government element for the purpose of promoting equality in use of services promoted in favor of the immigrants, such as training and adaptation programs, educational programs, and other similar type of programs, which are most often organized the United Nations and other non-government organizations.

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<sup>68</sup> ec.europa.eu/echo/node/4115, looked at on 11<sup>th</sup> of May 2019;

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IN THIS NUMBER: SIMONE BORILE  
FRANK REININGHAUS  
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PAVEL BUČKA, RASTISLAV KAZANSKÝ  
JOVAN PEJKOVSKI, MIRJANA KAEVA PEJKOVSKA  
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IVAN DIMITRIJEVIĆ, ANA PARAUŠIĆ  
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DENKO SKALOVSKI  
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ALEKSANDAR PAVLESKI, NIKOLCO SPASOV