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IRREGULAR MIGRATION AS LATENT THREAT TO THE WESTERN BALKANS SECURITY

Abstract

Due to a number of different security challenges, risks and threats, irregular migration present a global security problem in the present day. Following Turkey's suspension of the agreement with the European Union from 2016, in circumstances of the COVID-19 pandemic, potential irregular migration has been gaining a new security dimension. Geographical position makes the Western Balkans an inevitable land transit route for migrants. Considering the restrictions on entry into the Schengen area, as in the previous period, attempts of illegal crossing of state borders would characterize the migrants' movement in this direction. Starting from the geopolitical determinants of the Western Balkans and considering different security aspects under the new circumstances, the aim of this paper is to identify real dangers, which emanate from irregular migration across the Western Balkans region, both for the migrants themselves and the local population, as well as for the national, regional and international security.

Keywords*: COVID-19, human rights, illegal crossing, migratory route, security.*

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INTRODUCTION

With Croatia entering the EU in 2013, the process of joining the EU was frozen and the remaining countries of the so-called Western Balkans have remained in the waiting room. The EU considers all countries under the geopolitical determinant Western Balkans to be problematic in the region and still not ready to be accepted as a member of this political and economic union (Djukanović, 2014, p. 32).

In that waiting room there is also Turkey, but with a completely different status and reasons for delaying its entrance. This delay has been ongoing for six decades, which in the meantime has hurt pride of not only the governing structures but also of the citizens themselves, hence the Turkish population's support for joining the European Union has significantly dropped nowadays (Șenyuva, 2019). Still, economic and political factors play a significant role in sustaining Turkey's official efforts to coax the European Union into finally accepting it into its community. This time, Turkey could play its strong trump card, so strong that it borders on blackmail. This trump card are migrants, more than 3,5 million of them stopped on the road toward the European Union. Owing to their massiveness, illegal manner of state border crossings, susceptibility to organized crime's effects, first of all developed human trafficking channels, as well as possible misuse for international terrorism (Pavlićević, 2016, p. 65), and a number of other security challenges, risks and threats, the irregular migrations represent a global security issue of the modern age (Marković, 2016, p. 10). It is a very serious security threat to the EU, particularly after Turkey's suspension of the agreement from 2016, and additionally the COVID-19 pandemic circumstances. After a huge migrant wave from the Middle East threatened to flood Europe in 2015, an agreement between Ankara and Brussels was signed in 2016. In exchange for keeping migrants in Turkey, financial assistance and speeding up the EU accession process have been agreed on. Four years later, Turkey considers that the EU has not fullfiled its obligations and at the beginning of March 2020 it started removing barriers that prevented exit from its teritory on the border with Greece. The outbreak of the COVID-19 coronavirus pandemic on the European soil has shifted the EU's security focus onto another track, which is an additional factor in possible intensification of the problem with migrants' attempts to breach the Schengen area.

Geographical position makes the Western Balkans an inevitable land transit route for migrants from Turkey to the EU countries. Considering the restrictions on entry

into the Schengen area, as in the previous period, attempts of illegal crossing of state borders would characterize the migrants' movement in this direction. Considering different security aspects under the new circumstances, the aim of this paper is to identify real dangers, which emanate from irregular migration across the Western Balkans region, both for the migrants themselves and the local population, as well as for the national, regional and international security.

In the first part, the geopolitical determinants of the Western Balkans are laid out so as to gain a comprehensive insight into the security aspects of irregular migration across this territory. The second part analyzes the security aspects of irregular migration in the Western Balkans from the aspect of human, national, regional and international security. Concluding remarks are presented at the end of the paper.

WESTERN BALKANS GEOPOLITICAL DETERMINANTS

The Western Balkans countries are today burdened by numerous economic, social, political and security problems. This region was significantly economically impoverished during the civil was that led to dissolution of former joint country. Security stability of this region has been disrupted by numerous international disputes between its countries. Although the European Union stimulates regional cooperation between countries of the Western Balkans, within the region itself there are several neuralgic points that are a challenge not only for the process of European integrations, but also for the regional and international security.

The most sensitive issue is the status of Kosovo and Metohija, autonomous province in the Republic of Serbia, which unilaterally declared its independence on 17 February 2008 under the name Kosovo. Since Sierra Leone's rescission of its recognition, 92 the UN member statess now recognize independence of Kosovo, opposite to 96 member states that do not recognize it. When it comes to the EU, 22 out of 27 member states recognize this self-proclaimed country. Among the states that formally recognize Kosovo's independence, five members do not vote for Kosovo at the UN, and thus Kosovo has lost the majority. The official representatives of Serbia are putting great efforts into preventing Kosovo from being accepted into the UN and other international organizations, for what they have active support from Russia, China and EU members dealing with the same problem of potential secession of their territories. On the other hand, finding a solution to this

situation has been further complicated with Kosovo's authorities introducing taxes on goods from Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina, and with stubborn implementation of this restrictive measure for more than a year. Bosnia and Herzegovina has been included into these measures because it is also one of the countries that did not recognize Kosovo. The existence of Serbian entity in Bosnia and Herzegovina makes relations with Serbia touchy, and it is precisely Republic Srpska making recognition of Kosovo by Bosnia and Herzegovina impossible.

Within the other entity, the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, harmonious relations between Bosniacs and Croats are lacking, which further hardens the political and security situation in this country. Bosnia and Herzegovina also has minor issues about demarcation with Serbia and Croatia.

The problem of demarcation also exists between Croatia and Serbia, and their mutual relations have been even more burdened by the past, both by the World War II and the civil war during the dissolution of Yugoslavia. In addition to all this, Croatia has been an EU member since 2013 and is therefore in a position to condition accession of Serbia, which is currently in the process of joining the EU. Such position of Croatia in relation to Serbia significantly affects resolving the irregular migrations issue, which we will discuss further on in the paper. We can say that Serbia is the most significant factor in the Western Balkans. Not only because of a number of unsolved issues with former republics of Yugoslavia, but also because of its position, size of its territory and population.

Besides Croatia, Serbia borders with three more EU member states - Hungary in the north, and Romania and Bulgaria in the east. In the last years, relations between Serbia and Hungary have reached perhaps the highest degree of mutual understanding in their long-standing history, which was abound with mutual hostilities and strained relations. Still, in addition to Russia and China, Serbia has had best relations with its eastern neighbor Romania. Good relations between these two Balkan countries have marked the entire history of their existence. Serbia and Bulgaria fought on opposite sides in World War I and II, and there have been armed conflicts even before that. Relations between these two countries have significantly improved after World War II and are nowadays on a neighborly level.

Between Serbia and North Macedonia there are no severe political problems, except for Serbia's criticism of their south neighbor recognizing Kosovo. The recognition came as a consequence of not only the fact that North Macedonia is a

member to the NATO, but also of the circumstance that there is a notable number of parliamentarians belonging to Albanian parties who participate in distribution of power. With the achievement of an agreement on the use of name Macedonia, one of the neuralgic points in the Western Balkans has been resolved. But, this is only in regards to relations between Greece and its northern neighbor. Still, because of interior problems, political and economic nature, countries at the south of the Balkan Peninsula are also a factor in instability and potential security issues in the entire Balkans, particularly in the area of Western Balkans countries. We have already mentioned the ethnic division in North Macedonia. According to the last census, 64.2% of ethnic Macedonians and 25.2% of ethnic Albanians live on the territory of North Macedonia, but natural increase trend has been changing from year to year with a rise in population of Albanian origin (State Statistical Office, 2018, p. 14). One should not forget that there were armed conflicts between ethnic Macedonians and ethnic Albanians in 2001, which concluded with the signing of the Ohrid Agreement, mediated by the European Union. Provisions from the Ohrid Agreement were embedded into this country's Constitution, but it would be incorrect to consider the issue between the two majority nationalities resolved, especially bearing in mind desires of the Albanians to unite territories populated by their people in the Balkan Peninsula into one country, Greater Albania. Current prime minister of Albania, Edi Rama, has not been hiding his support for this concept, which further burdens interstate relations in the Western Balkans. Such concept is also a matter of concern in Greece, an EU member state, where, according to data of the National Statistical Service of Greece, there are about 185.000 ethnic Albanians living on its territory. Since the opening of the border between Albanian and Kosovo territory, tensions in the Western Balkans region have risen (Emerging Europe, 2019), and with them security risks and threats of organized crime. And not only organized crime, but also terrorism, having in mind that a significant number of Albanians from the Western Balkans region have participated in the Islamic State formations in armed conflicts in Syria and Iraq (Shtuni, 2015).

The least number of security risks is connected with Montenegro. It is the smallest Western Balkans country, which peacefully exited its joint country with Serbia, making this the last act of Yugoslavia's dissolution. Recognition of Kosovo's independence disturbed political relations with Serbia, but there is a historic friendship between the two nations, strong enough to rule out any true danger of military conflict between them. For the same reason, even after relations tightened due to

a law on religion jeopardizing legal and economic status of the Serbian Orthodox Church in Montenegro, the risk of this kind of conflict is not realistic. Montenegro's recognition of Kosovo appeased ethnic Albanians' potential pretensions to join the concept of Greater Albania, but there is a demarcation issue with the Kosovo territory. Montenegro is predominantly a mountainous country, which on one side makes it more difficult for security authorities to monitor, while on the other side such terrain configuration discourages people smugglers from creating big smuggling channels toward Serbian territory, or that of Bosnia and Herzegovina, both being its northern and western neighbors respectively.

SECURITY ASPECTS OF IRREGULAR MIGRATIONS IN THE WESTERN BALKANS

At the beginning of 2019, 30 countries and 270 between militias-guerrillas and terrorist-separatist-anarchic groups were involved in armed conflicts on the African continent, while 7 countries and 261 between militias-guerrillas, terrorist-separatist-anarchic groups were involved in the Middle East (Wars in the World, 2020). One of the more serious consequences of not only these, but all armed conflicts in general, are massive departures of the population from territories caught in war. Bearing in mind the widespread presence of armed conflicts, migrations of population in danger are directed at the first safe continent - Europe. Beside the armed conflicts that directly make a normal and safe life impossible on the territories affected by them, there are numerous other push factors due to which local population massively leaves their home. Other than war, push factors can be undemocratic life conditions and economic instability and poverty. On the other hand, strong pull factors are developed democracy and economic development of the EU countries, which are targeted destinations for migrants from the Middle East and Africa. The explosion of the migration wave in 2015 has placed migration at the top of security priorities on all levels (Simić, 2017, p. 9). The biggest number of migrants from the Asian and African continent has been transported toward Europe across the Mediterranean. According to Frontex[3] data, from January 2009[4] to February 2020, a total of 3,651,421 illegal crossings of the European
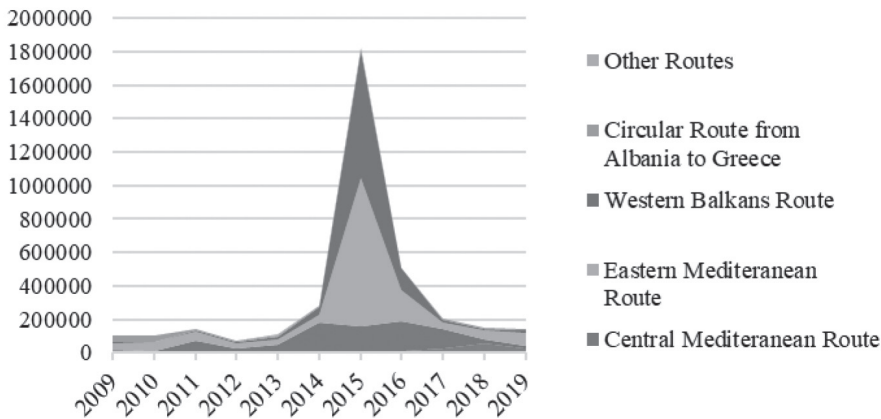
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[3] European Border and Coast Guard Agency (fr. *Frontières extérieures)*

[4] The initial month of record is in line with the entry into force of Directive 2008/115/EC of the European Parliament and the Council of 16 December 2008 on common standards and procedures in Member States for returning illegally staying third-country nationals

Union's external borders were detected, 2,259,797 of them across the Mediter-ranean Sea (Frontex, 2020).[5] Because of the highly risky travel across the Med-iterranean with people smugglers on unsafe vessels, a portion of migrants[6] from Africa moves toward Europe using land routes. On this route they are joined by migrants escaping war zones in the Middle East. Frontex singled out the Western Mediteranean Route, Central Mediteranean Route, Eastern Mediteranean Route, Eastern Borders Route and Western Balkans Route as the main migrant routes to the European continent. The so-called Eastern Mediterranean Route, which leads to Europe via Turkey and the Balkan Peninsula, is the busiest.

Chart 1

Relationship of migratory routes to a whole over time 2009-2019

Legend:
- Other Routes
- Circular Route from Albania to Greece
- Western Balkans Route
- Eastern Mediteranean Route
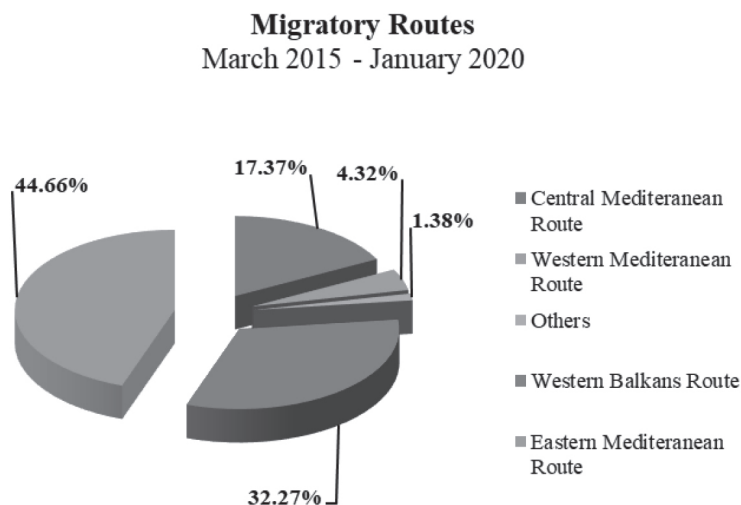- Central Mediterranean Route

Between March 2015 and January 2020, 1,248,759 illegal migrant crossings ar-riving via this land route have been detected, wherein as many as 885,000 were detected in 2015 alone (Frontex, 2020). In the total number of illegal border cross-ings detected between March 2015 and January 2020, almost half was on the East-ern Mediterranean Route and a third on the route leading through the Western Balkans.

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[5] Since there is not a system within the EU that would detect the number of persons in an illegal attempt to cross a state border (the same person can do this multiple times), the data refer to the number of detected illegal crossings of the states borders.

[6] About 38% according to the source previously mentioned.

Chart 2:

Migratory Routes
March 2015 - January 2020

These indicators show that most migrants from the Eastern Mediterranean Route continue to move across the Western Balkans, so the reported number of illegal crossings on the Western Balkans Route is potentially far greater.

Having this in mind, there is no doubt that the flare-up of armed conflicts in the Middle East in the 21st century, and the related-to-it expansion of the so-called Islamic State (IS), have produced a serious security challenge for the entire Balkans, especially for the Western Balkans countries because they are on the migrants' route from those areas. The intensity of the migration route through the Western Balkans has been reduced following the signing of the agreement between the European Union and Turkey on 18 March 2016. After four years, Turkey rightly accuses the EU of failing to fulfill some of its contractual obligations of political nature (visa facilitations for Turkish nationals, reception of about 72,000 Syrians from Turkey, voluntary redistribution of refugees, enlarging customs union between the EU and Turkey, reviving negotiations on Turkey's accession to the EU). Following the March 9, 2020 meeting between EU officials and the Turkish president Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, Turkey's accusations that the EU failed to meet its financial commitments under the treaty appear to be unjustified. As for the other treaty obligations, both sides could be reproved for not having done enough to improve humanitarian conditions in Syria. Previously, in February 2020, Turkey

announced the opening of its border with Europe for migrants, which it did at the end of that month. According to Turkish Minister of Interior Suleyman Soylu, Turkey has released about 150,000 migrants to Greece (Daily Sabah, 2020). The Greek security forces responded repressively and the first wave of migrants was pushed back to Turkey. On March 12, Frontex sent another 100 border police officers from 22 EU member states (Frontex, 2020). Bearing in mind that about 3.6 million refugees from Syria have been officially registered in Turkey (IOM Turkey, 2020), the EU and the Western Balkans are facing a new security challenge of enormous proportions. This time, the security challenge is further compounded by the circumstances of the coronavirus COVID-19 pandemic, which has affected the entire world, especially Europe. COVID-19 is, among other things, a large security problem for Europe.

This means that all main reference objects of security are jeopardized. In some segments they intersect, yet each in its own right evinces certain specificities that distinguish it from other reference objects. With this in mind, and the fact that we are looking at this problem in relation to a very specific region, such as the Western Balkans, further ahead we will analyze this global security issue one by one from the aspects of human safety, national security, as well as regional and international security.

ASPECTS OF HUMAN SAFETY

Aspects of human safety can be viewed from several angles, and we think that in case of migrants, three angles should cover all elements of this reference object of security: legal security of migrants, personal safety of migrants, and safety of local population in transit and final destination countries.

Under the circumstances where they are forced to leave their motherland, most migrants are not in possession of travel or even personal documents. Next to this, the legal restrictions are an additional problem in attempting to legally enter another country, especially an EU member state, which is why they opt for irregular state border crossings. With the adoption of the Schengen Convention on 19 June 1990, a singular control of the EU's outer borders was established, whereby the inner borders were opened for free movement of population and merchandise. With this document, a unique visa policy was set up for all persons who are not

nationals of states signatories to the Convention so that a Schengen visa issued by one of the member states is valid on the entire Schengen Area territory. The same principle is applied with all measures taken by a member state toward a foreign national, including implementation of the safe third country concept in carrying out asylum policy. This concept was created through international practice, for it to be later brought into national legislations through laws on asylum. Essentially the concept is that the country where a foreign national applied for asylum is in no obligation to give them that type of protection if it was established that, on their way from country of origin where they were persecuted or their personal safety was endangered in any way, the person in question came from a country on the list of safe third countries. Recommendation of the Committee of Ministers of Council of Europe from 25 November 1997 has given guidelines about criteria that has to be met for a country to be considered safe for asylum seekers. In short, those are countries justifiably believed to respect human rights in accordance with signed international documents regulating the area of human rights, and not presenting jeopardy for safety and human rights of asylum seekers in any other way, along with the fact that the person in question previously stayed in that country. We believe that legalization of this concept is absurd because it is in violation of some of the most important international instruments protecting human rights. In order to remain on topic, we will mention only one example as a basis for our opinion. The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights guarantees that each person is free to leave any country, so preventing migrants from leaving transit countries and proceeding to destination of their choice, where they wish to apply for asylum, is in violation of this provision. This is precisely what is happening in the Western Balkans, where under the EU's pressure migrants are being held back and their further travel toward desired destinations is prevented. What makes the situation even more absurd is the fact that irregular migrants come to the Western Balkans countries' territories from the EU territory. Greece and Bulgaria, as members of the EU, fulfill all the criteria prescribed by the Council of Europe based on which they can be considered safe third countries. This initial legal obstacle that migrants are facing puts them in status of irregular migrants. They lose the possibility to legally continue their journey toward desired destinations. Usually, those destinations are Austria, Germany, France, Sweden, Denmark, and even Hungary as a transit country, so they are forced to try to achieve their goal in an irregular manner. By doing so they are exposing themselves to risks and threats to their personal safety. Besides being exposed to hunger, thirst, inability to maintain

personal hygiene, which then leads to illness, irregular migrants are also putting their own freedom and life in danger. A particularly sensitive category are children travelling unaccompanied. Due to insufficient capacities for temporary accommodation of migrants in the Western Balkans countries, minors are placed on the same premises as the adults, where they are often exposed to different types of maltreatment and exploitation. Those who do not receive any type of accommodation stay outside, usually hidden with adult migrants within more wooded areas, where besides the risk of being maltreated, they are additionally exposed to getting sick. Because they are unable to resolve their final status in a legal way, migrants go to people smugglers, therefore putting themselves in danger of falling victim to human trafficking, robbery, rape or torture. On account of debt, people smugglers force some of the migrants to become guides for other migrants in order to pay off what they supposedly owe. Also, there is the risk of them being threatened or blackmailed so they could be recruited for terrorist acts or doing tasks for organized crime (e.g. smuggling drugs). Terrorist acts on the European soil have occurred even before this large migration wave from the Middle East. Today we know that ISIS used migration channels to infiltrate terrorists onto the EU territory, and from January 2014 to June 2018, 44 migrants participated in 32 terrorist attacks in 12 different countries in Europe (most of them in Germany), wherein 182 persons lost their lives and 814 were injured (Simcox, 2018, p. 1).

Furthermore, the aspect of human safety also has to be viewed from the standpoint of nationals of countries that irregular migrants are passing through. There are several reasons why it should be observed from this standpoint. The massiveness of migrations on the Balkan route give us right to claim with great certainty that among irregular migrants there are criminals from their countries of origin. The fact that the majority of migrants does not have personal documents on them makes it difficult for them to be identified. Likewise, even when such documents do exist, chances are small that those individuals could be checked for criminal records. Regardless of their criminal past, because of the weight of the situation they are in, deprivation of many life needs for a longer period of time, individuals tend to commit crimes while moving through transit areas, such as the Western Balkans. In this region, cases of rape have been recorded (Novosti, 2018),[7] or attempts of

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[7] A 23-year-old migrant from Pakistan raped an eighteen-year-old girl in Bihac, Bosnia and Herzegovina.

rape, physical assaults on citizens and robberies as well (J.L., 2016).8 Such events increase the fear in local population, which further causes intolerance, which on the other side potentially threatens safety of the migrants themselves. What is even worse, it has been realized that irregular migrants are not even safe when meeting security authorities' representatives in transit countries. According to reports of organizations for human rights protection, the number of migrants passing across the territory of Bulgaria has dropped, but there are still cases of them being mal- treated by Bulgarian border police, either physically or by stealing. According to the same source, there have been cases in North Macedonia where migrants were detained by police, including children, who were witnesses in criminal proceed- ings against people smugglers. Additionally, there have also been cases of forced returns of migrants onto Greece's territory. A drastic repression over migrants was noted in Croatia, where there have been many cases of mistreatment of migrants, including asylum seekers, including their forced return to Serbia or Bosnia and Herzegovina, against provisions of the Dublin Regulation on the procedure when there are applications for asylum. In one of such cases in November 2017, a five- year-old girl from Afghanistan passed away after being hit by a train while she was on route from Croatia toward Serbia, which ensued after Croatian border po- lice officers forcibly sent her family down the railroad back to Serbia in the night hours. The international organization Doctors Without Borders (Médecins Sans Frontières) documented severe body injuries on even 80 patients among migrants in Velika Kladuša in Bosnia and Herzegovina between June and November 2018, whereby the injuries were inflicted by Croatian police officers before the migrants were forcibly returned to Bosnia and Herzegovina territory (Tondo, 2018).

Besides everything above mentioned, and bearing in mind from which areas ir- regular migrants are coming to the Western Balkans region, as well as their modes of travel, there is founded fear of spreading diseases. Prior to the occurrence of the COVID-19 coronavirus pandemic, this type of risk has shown to be minimal in the area of Western Balkans because special attention is given to it even be- fore the migrants reach this region. According to the World Health Organization's data, there have been no cases of MERS-CoV infection among migrants from the Middle East (World Health Organization, 2020). This is a respiratory syn- drome coronavirus transmitted by camels. Also, according to the same source,

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[8] In Subotica, a city in the north of Serbia (on border with Hungary), there were several cases of house robberies, particularly on the outskirts of the city, physical assaults on male minors, and an attempt of rape of a 14-year-old girl by 9 migrants was also recorded.

the number of HIV positive persons in the Middle East is low, and hence the risk is within the limits of normal. However, there have been several cases of malaria among migrants from Pakistan on the Greek territory, which still gives reason for increased caution to be taken by health authorities at the entry into Western Balkans countries, and fear among local population as well. With the flare-up of the COVID-19 pandemic, health precautions have become priority security measures, which are difficult to implement in the circumstances of physical conflicts between migrants and Greek border forces. In addition, this is not only a matter of security for the local population, because the vulnerability of migrants to the possibility of spreading contagion among themselves must not be neglected. Considering their massiveness, lifestyle and living conditions in refugee camps, migrants stationed in Turkey are a potentially serious threat to further spread of the said pandemic. A new shock wave of this epidemic would seriously shake Europe, above all the Western Balkans, as migrants have been at the door of this region for a long time. Recent developments on the Turkish-Greek border have been warning of this.

NATIONAL SECURITY ASPECTS

State border is a country's first security column and is therefore given a priority importance in every analysis of risks for national security (Dostić and Marković, 2016, p. 26). The very fact that there are irregular migrants on a country's territory indicates a break in that country's national security. This is firstly because the state border's security was already breached with illegal crossings, and then it is because of all the other security risks and threats that such circumstances imply. Using organized crime channels and people smugglers' services on their way, irregular migrants use weak points in border services and illegally cross state borders. They do it on the very border crossings to a smaller degree, while in majority of cases they cross between two border crossings, at the so-called green border. There are three main modi operandi on border crossing points - use of counterfeit travel documents, use of someone else's (legal) travel document and evading border control by hiding between, on or inside the vehicles. Weak points of the police authorities controlling persons and vehicles at border crossings and who, with their negligent or unprofessional work, enable irregular migrants' passage bring into question national security as well, because the same manner to enter a country could be used by terrorists, individually or in groups, and there is also smuggling of arms, nuclear and radioactive substances. Under the new circumstances related to the

COVID-19 pandemic, passenger traffic across the border crossings on the route leading from Turkey via the Western Balkans to the EU Schengen area has been suspended. Even without these circumstances, a very serious threat to national security is porosity of the so-called green borders, i.e. the part of the border line between two border crossing points. The seriousness of that threat derives from the fact that state border can be illegally crossed by a larger number of people at once. If it can be done by irregular migrants as civilians, it can definitely be done by armed groups with aim to commit terrorist attacks. Nowadays, this has been given a great significance, because in the recent times national security has been more connected with fight against terrorism and organized crime than with military and economic segments of security (Ejdus, 2012, p. 230).

With the collapse of bipolar order and escalation of regional warring, organized crime and terrorism have become the most pronounced forms of threats to internal security (Zirojević, 2008, p. 347). The massiveness of migration in the past years has forced countries of the Western Balkans, and even some of the EU members (Hungary, Austria), to include military into securing the state border together with border police. This is the so-called combined (military-police) model of safeguarding state borders, which was abandoned before this migrant crisis, at least when it comes to Europe. Within the European Union, and even in countries of the Western Balkans, model of integrated border management has been developed. Basically, this is a police model that includes coordination of all subjects on the state border, because with the integration of Europe it is deemed that the biggest risk to its countries are not military threats, but cross-border organized crime and terrorism (Dostic and Markovic, 2017, p. 98). However, radical measures on a country's border can lead to its neighboring country feeling endangered. This is precisely what happened after Hungary, as an EU member state, erected a wire fence along its border with Serbia. Hermetically closing its south border, Hungary caused fear within Serbia that, instead of a transit country, it would become the final destination for a number of migrants above its economic capacities. In the national security interest, and in that situation, Serbia transferred to a military-police model on state borders with Bulgaria and North Macedonia from 2015 to 2018. Given the significantly reduced number of irregular migrants in comparison to previous years, such a combined model of border security in Serbia has been suspended indefinitely in mid-2018. In a situation where the Western Balkans, and especially Serbia as a central territory and transit route, are threatened by a new, even more serious migrant wave than in the previous period, it is uncertain how Serbia would

respond to this challenge in terms of re-establishing a combined model of state border security, since both police and military forces are focused on ensuring observance of the state of emergency introduced due to the pandemic.

The seriousness of the irregular migrants issue also shows in the danger of possible destabilization of economic security of the hosting country due to a large inflow of cheap labor force, but also emergency humanitarian and social expenditures (Simeunović, 2017, p. 37). Although the final aim of irregular migrants is to go to one of the more prosperous countries, predominantly within the EU, the longer period of time they spend in one of the transit countries of the Western Balkans places that country in a position where it has to confront this security risk, as well.

REGIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL SECURITY ASPECTS

Political events and armed conflicts that led to dissolution of Yugoslavia, as well as the economic crisis during the transition process that ensued, aided organized crime to develop in the region we now call the Western Balkans (Brière and Prifti, 2013, p. 48). This, together with the fact that not all disputes between countries of the region have been resolved, gives the Western Balkans characteristic of a regional security complexity. Such complexity is defined as "a group of states whose primary security concerns link together sufficiently closely that their national securities cannot realistically be considered apart from one another" (Buzan, 1983, p. 106). The pressure of the migrant wave from the southeast and the resistance of the north and west to ride this wave present a joint problem of the Western Balkans. The specificity of this joint problem is in the fact that it is not being solved with a joint agreement, but with each country searching for a solution for itself. Simply put, it is difficult to find a solution that would satisfy all parties concerned. The economically more developed and politically better organized region, the EU, cannot seem to do it either. With that, these two regions' interests do not overlap, but because of the EU joining process, the Western Balkans countries are in a position where they modify their own interests according to the interests of the wider European community. The Western Balkans countries are expected to not only amortize, but to stop spillovers of migrant crisis' security implications onto the EU territory. Such expectations contain absurdities, because, let us remind you, migrants arrive to the Western Balkans via territories belonging to the European Union (Greece and Bulgaria). After exiting the EU territory and entering

the Western Balkans area the migrants become an exposed target to the already existing organized crime channels. The Europol has identified several basic human trafficking routes on the European continent, and one of them is the so-called Balkan route. After Bulgaria and Romania joined the EU, central direction of this route has led from Turkey and Albania, via Macedonia and Serbia, toward Hungary and Croatia and further on toward west and north of Europe. The borderline between Albania and North Macedonia is porous, and from Albania it is very easy to enter the Kosovo territory because there is practically no border (Ćopić, 2008, p. 62). It is important to mention the fact that organized criminal groups, especially from Albanian speaking areas (Albania and Kosovo), have a developed network of organized crime in the EU countries (Brière and Prifti, 2013, p. 48). Practically the same speaking language in the Slavic countries of this region, including the EU members Croatia and Slovenia, with slightly bigger differences when it comes to Macedonian and Slovenian languages, facilitates criminal groups' connecting, which strengthens organized crime. A massive migration flow such as this is good ground for human trafficking because it takes time for countries of the region to "develop ways of identification, mitigating and overcoming risks related to migrations" (Berman, Bradic and Marshal, 2014, p. 20). Even though the migration crisis has been ongoing already for a couple of years, identifying high-risk individuals and groups is still difficult, and sometimes even completely impossible. This presents a particularly serious problem when identifying potential terrorist threats. Even besides such difficulties, there are numerous confirmations that among migrants there are persons coming to Europe with the intent to commit terrorist acts. At the beginning of 2019, in Bihac (Bosnia and Herzegovina), five Afghans were put under surveillance of the Service for Foreigner's Affairs because they were suspected of being connected to international terrorism (Huseinović, 2019). With the advent of ISIS, the number of jihadists from the Kosovo area has been increasing, and it is also known that they have participated in several terrorist attacks in Europe, or have prepared terrorist attacks in Belgium and France (Loyd, 2018). According to the U.S. Department of State Country Reports on Terrorism for 2017, approximately 403 persons from Kosovo were in Syria and Iraq as fighters of ISIS, and 133 of them have returned home (U.S. Department of State, 2018, p. 97). Because of all that, the danger of migrants being recruited for terrorist acts or giving logistical support to terrorists travelling as migrants toward EU countries becomes very realistic. If this is not sufficient, the fact that the European Border and Coast Guard Agency (Frontex) has been engaged on this territory proves that

the migration route across the Western Balkans presents a serious source of security risks and threats, not only for this region, but also for a broader international community, first of all the European Union. One of the three liaison officers outside of the EU territory is in Serbia (the other two are in Turkey and Niger). Increased presence of Frontex officers in the Western Balkans has been caused by the migrant crisis, but the effects are also present in fight against organized crime. For example, in only two weeks of implementing action on the eastern borders of the EU and the Western Balkans in October 2018, in cooperation with border police and customs authorities of the countries in the region, Frontex discovered more than 500 stolen vehicles and more than one ton of drugs (Frontex, 2018).

CONCLUSION

Migrant wave from the Middle East and the African continent toward Europe reached its peak in 2015, and was then blocked in Turkey with the signing of the Turkey-EU agreement in March 2016. The migrant crisis, albeit of decreasing intensity after the said Agreement, has significantly changed the security image in countries that were caught in it. Transit countries and members of the European Union have faced the biggest security challenges, risks and threats caused by this migration crisis. The Western Balkans region, as a geopolitical and not geographical term, is on the main land route of these migrations. Considering that this route coincides with the so-called Balkan route of smuggling people, arms and drugs, as well as human trafficking, migrants' movement along this route multiplies the already existing security issues.

From the aspect of human safety, constraining migrants' movement, in accordance with the safe third country concept, is in violation of one's freedom of movement, which is guaranteed by international legal documents. In order to finally resolve their status, migrants use illegal routes and manners in order to reach their target destinations, which are majorly countries within the so-called Schengen Area. Putting themselves into a status of irregular migrants, they expose themselves to additional risks for their personal safety, wherein falling victim to human trafficking is the biggest one. Lesser, yet not insignificant risks exist in relation to possible exposure to violence and theft in migrant camps, as well as to hunger, thirst and damage to personal health bearing in mind the bad overall and hygienic conditions on their route, particularly in the COVID-19 pandemic circumstances. Besides

this, while they are moving toward their desired goal, migrants are exposed to mistreatment from security authorities of almost all countries they pass through. Severe bodily injuries have been recorded, and even fatalities among migrants, which were directly caused by unlawful behavior of border police. On the other hand, local population's safety is jeopardized as well, both by thefts/robberies, physical violence and rape, and also possible spreading of diseases.

From the national security aspect, countries in the region are exposed to their state borders' security becoming vulnerable, which is particularly significant from the standpoint of fight against terrorism and cross-border organized crime. The very fact that irregular migrants enter a country of the region without previous control makes that country vulnerable already on its state border. For the Western Balkans countries this is a serious cause for concern if one bears in mind the still fresh memories of the civil war, as well as the fact that there are unresolved issues between most of these countries. The irregular migrants' stay in one of the countries of the region creates risk of destabilizing its economy with the appearance of illegal labor market. Additionally, a country's economic stability is further weakened with social and humanitarian expenditures, as well as material resources given for engaging additional security forces. National security of countries in the region, especially Serbia, has been additionally jeopardized with measures taken by the bordering EU countries (Hungary and Croatia), to which the region (particularly Serbia) has become an "appendix" where the migrants' road ends. Besides the fact that such measures threaten the economy of countries in the region, other security risks that increase as well were analyzed in this paper.

Intercrossing of people smuggling channels with other forms of organized crime, as well as terrorism, presents a serious security risk not only for the countries of the region, but also for the region as a whole and broader international community, especially the European Union. Therefore, security risks deriving from irregular migrations have to be resolved with respect for all threatened parties included. The reason for this is because the migrant crisis issue, in its entirety, cannot be solved only where the security risks manifest the most, but have to be solved at the source. Solution to that problem is in the hands of the international community, and not countries of the Western Balkans.

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ИРЕГУЛАРНЕ МИГРАЦИЈЕ КАО ЛАТЕНТНА ПРЕТЊА БЕЗБЕДНОСТИ ЗАПАДНОГ БАЛКАНА

Резиме

Полазећи од геополитичких детерминанти Западног Балкана, циљ овог рада је да кроз различите безбедносне аспекте у новим околностима идентификује реалне опасности, које произилазе из ирегуларних миграција преко подручја Западног Балкана, како по саме мигранте и локално становништво, тако и по националну, регионалну и међународну безбедност. Због низа различитих безбедносних изазова, ризика и претњи, ирегуларне миграције представљају глобални безбедносни проблем данашњице. Након турске суспензије споразума са Европском унијом из 2016, у околностима пандемије ЦОВИД-19, иако опадајућег обима и интензитета, ирегуларне миграције добијају нову безбедносну димензију за европски континент. Земље у транзиту и чланице Европске уније суочиле су се са веома озбиљним и комплексним безбедносним изазовима, ризицима и претњама узрокованим овом мигрантском кризом. Географски положај чини Западни Балкан незаобилазним копненим транзитним правцем миграната из Турске ка земљама ЕУ. Имајући у виду ограничења за улазак у Шенгенски простор, као и у претходном периоду покушаји илегалних прелазака државних граница обележили би кретање миграната на овом правцу. С обзиром да се та рута поклапа са такозваном балканском рутом кријуумчарења људи, оружја и дроге, као и трговине људима, кретање миграната овим правцем умножава постојеће безбедносне проблеме. Стога безбедносни ризици који произилазе из ирегуларних миграција морају бити решени уз поштовање свих укључених претњи. Питање мигрантске кризе у целини мора се решавати пре свега тамо одакле су миграције и потекле, на њиховом извору, те је очигледно да је решење овог проблема у рукама међународне заједнице, а не земаља Западног Балкана.

Кључне речи: *COVID-19, људска права, илегалан прелазак, миграциона рута, безбедност.*