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NATIONALISTIC BACKLASHES ALONG THE BALKAN MIGRANT CORRIDOR

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Abstract
The paper analyses the migrant influx in Europe, which has affected the national politics along the Balkan migrant and refugee corridor and European politics in general. It created a momentum for political actors to present the phenomenon of migration as a threat to national interests and ideals, cultural attitudes, social structures and demography etc. The moral duty to help others in need was replaced by the patriotic calls for defense of the nation-state. The influx of refugees and migrants in the EU has caused strong nationalistic backlashes in the transit and receiving states. The paper examines the reasons why the anti-immigration parties and movements, in general, have stronger presence in post-Soviet countries than in Western member states.

Key words: Balkan, migrants, refugee corridor, nationalistic backlashes.

The migrant influx in Europe has affected the national politics along the Balkan migrant and refugee corridor and European politics in general. It created a momentum for political actors to present the phenomenon of migration as a threat to national interests and ideals, cultural attitudes, social structures and demography etc. The moral duty to help others in need was replaced by the patriotic calls for defense of the nation-state. The influx of refugees and migrants in the EU has caused strong nationalistic backlashes in the transit and receiving states.

According to Charles Kupchan,[1] "Europe has historically embraced more ethnic than civic approaches to nationhood, unlike the United States.[2]" This is clearly visible during the migrant crisis when leaders of eastern European states like Hungary, Poland, Slovakia, and the Czech Republic have all expressed a strong preference for non-Muslim migrants.[3] Slovakia came out with a statement that it will only accept Christian arrivals and that Muslims should not move to Slovakia because they will not easily integrate with the country's majority Christian population.[4] This wave of statements was additionally encouraged by Hungary, whose Prime Minister Viktor Orban said that his country did not want to accept Muslim refugees and he did not want to create an impression that Hungary is ready to accept

[1]Council on Foreign Relations, Senior Fellow
[2] Europe's Migration Crisis. Council on Foreign Relations. Available at: https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/europes-migration-crisis Accessed on 15/6/2018.
[3] EU states favour Christian migrants from Middle East. EUObserer, 21/8/2105. Available at: https://euobserver.com/justice/129938. Accessed on 27/03/2018.
[4] Slovakia to EU: We'll Take Migrants — If They're Christians, Foreign Policy, 19/8/2015. Available at: https://foreignpolicy.com/2015/08/19/slovakia-to-eu-well-take-migrants-if-theyre-christians/ Accessed on 20/6/2018.

everybody. According to Orban, "the moral, human thing is to make clear: please don't come."[5] Poland was one more country in a row that encouraged Syrian Christians to apply for asylum because "religious background will have impact on the refugee status applications.[6]" The selection of migrants based on religion as main criteria is an openly discriminatory policy, and a strong indicator of the growing nationalism. The issue about Muslim migrants was one of the key topics for debate at national elections, debating on "how many people should be accepted" and what are the most suitable EU mechanisms for dealing with the crisis.

The 2016 French presidential elections were affected by the migrant crisis, strengthening the position of Marine Le Pen's National Front. Even incumbent French President Macron stood for controlled migration.

The pressure over this issue made changes to German policies, which initially promoted its "welcoming culture" for the migrant policies. In later stages, in order to avoid the breakup of government "due to immigration fight "with her coalition partner, Chancellor Angela Merkel reached a compromise on immigration policy with Christian Social Union (CSU). The deal proposed new screening at the Germany-Austria border to "prevent asylum seekers whose asylum procedures are the responsibility of other EU countries from entering the country." A network of "transit centers" would serve as processing points from which ineligible migrants would then be sent back to relevant countries, but only if those countries consent. If those countries do not agree, Germany's rejected migrants would be sent to Austria, "on the basis of an agreement."[7] Certainly, this "deal" had to do much more with political maneuvering and crisis public relations than substance. Germany's so called "open door policy" maintained cautious support at the last elections in 2017, although heavily damaged on its right flank. Chancellor Angela Merkel at her first speech at the beginning of the latest term to Parliament said that "there is no question that Germany is historically Christian and Jewish. It is also true that Islam has in the meanwhile become part of Germany" and she acknowledged that some Germans find that hard to accept.[8]

Even the latest 2018 Italian election campaign was based on allegations regarding the immigrant influx. The former Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi claimed that there are 600 000 illegal migrants living in Italy which are a "social time bomb"[9] promising mass deportations. Issues of race and violence took centre-stage in the election campaign. The party winning plurality majority at the elections, the Five Star Movement mounted heavy criticism "to

[5] Amid refugee crisis, Hungary prime minister says Muslims not welcome, AlJazeeira America, 3/9/2015. Available at: http://america.aljazeera.com/articles/2015/9/3/hungary-prime-minister-says-muslims-not-welcome-amid-refugee-crisiMoreover,tml Accessed on 20/5/2018.

[6] Poland favors Christian refugees from Syria, Financial Times. Available at: https://www.ft.com/content/6edfdd30-472a-11e5-b3b2-1672f710807b#axzz3ktymzs8n Accessed on 20/5/2018.

[7] Germany's Angela Merkel prevents the breakup of her government with immigration deal, The Washington Post, 2/8/2018. Available at: https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/europe/germanys-angela-merkel-may-have-won-fight-over-migration-but-her-coalition-is-in-doubt/2018/07/02/d4e02b60-7da2-11e8-a63f-7b5d2aba7ac5_story.html?noredirect=on&utm_term=.757ce4af7a98 Accessed on 20/5/2018.

[8] Merkel insists Islam is part of Germany in the first speech of her new term, Quartz, 21/3/2018. Available at: https://qz.com/1234662/angela-merkel-says-islam-is-part-of-germany-in-her-first-major-speech-of-her-new-term/ Accessed on 28/03/2018.

[9] Silvio Berlusconi says illegal migrants are 'social time bomb', as race dominates Italian election campaign. The TELEGRAPH. 5/2/2018. Available at: https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2018/02/05/silvio-berlusconi-says-illegal-migrants-social-time-bomb-race/ Accessed on 20/6/2018.

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Brussels" for the way it dealt with the migrant crisis, promising to roll back liberal policies and "take back control" over the migration movements through its land and seas.

Generally, the migrant crisis has created numerous divisions along Europe. It affected internal divisions in the European states and activated populist parties. After the 'empty chair' crisis in 1965 and the Euro crisis in 2009, the issue of refugee influx has created the deepest divisions between the EU Member States. The political leaders aimed to preserve the "core European values", disagreeing on the hierarchy of values in need of protection and the methodology how to proceed, even if something is vaguely agreed.

Externally, it aggregated two groups of countries in the European politics. The first group decided to accept migrants and adopted quota for refugee intake and the second group rejected migrants on all the possible ways, empowering anti-immigrant and anti-establishment politics. These politics were fueled by the economic and debt crisis in Europe that started in 2008 and were followed with austerity programs in the Eurozone under the German plan. These economic policies were proclaimed as opposing the national interests and serving to the governing elites. The populists used almost the same rhetoric when they strongly criticized the way Brussels managed the migration influx.

Anti-immigration parties and movements in general have stronger presence in post-communist countries than in Western member states of the EU. There is a different historical experience with immigration in these two regions, since after World War II, Western European countries took in large numbers of non-Christian migrants from multiethnic backgrounds, particularly from former colonies. France, for example, saw an influx of Algerians fleeing the civil war from 1954 to 1962. In Britain, immigrants arrived from the Indian subcontinent and the Caribbean. In general, from the 1960s onward, the majority migrants to Western Europe came from outside the Continent, including people arriving as guest workers.[10]

Post-communist countries, on the other hand, historically have had fewer migrants of diverse ethnicities, religions and cultures. And since the collapse of the Berlin Wall, there have been no large waves of non-European migrants to Eastern Europe.[11] This circumstances affected the population of Eastern Europe to have less contacts with people from different ethnic, linguistic, religious and cultural backgrounds, making populist parties sound "relevant" when presenting migrants as a serious threat for the counties and its nations. What none of these populists can answer is how their societies will maintain the demographic power for their needed economic and societal development, in the context of their rapidly aging populations and galloping brain-drain towards the West.

The second reason anti-immigration parties have a stronger presence in post-communist Europe is that those parties typically reject liberal social values that are more prevalent in Western member states and instead support Christian-based values.[12] The re-emergence of these values in politics are related to the fall of the communist ideology, a sacred victory for these newly re-established democracies. It replaced the atheism and became strong part of the national identity of the population living in Eastern Europe. Religion is one more reason why the populist rhetoric was more successfully accepted on the East and the threat of Islam

[10] In Europe, as Migration Falls, Nationalism Rises, Geopolitical Futures, 17/5/2018. Available at: https://geopoliticalfutures.com/europe-migration-falls-nationalism-rises/ Accessed on 25/09/2018.
[11] Ibid.
[12] Ibid.

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spread by the Muslim migrants was considered as a danger for the national identity. The Western states have different historical background and tend to be more secular, so that's why populist parties gained more success in Eastern than in Western Europe.

As Ivan Krastev[13] says, just three decades ago "solidarity" was the symbol of Eastern Europe. Today it suffers from disappointment, distrust, demography and democracy. He points out that "faced with an influx of migrants and haunted by economic insecurity, many Eastern Europeans feel betrayed by their hope that joining the European Union would mean the beginning of prosperity and an end to crisis, while many government leaders fear that the only way to regain political support is by showing that you care for your own, and not a whit for the aliens." So, at the core of moral panic provoked by influx of migrants lies fear of Islam, terrorism, rising criminality and a general anxiety over the unfamiliar. In addition to this, as Krastev points out, the demographic panic is one of the least discussed factors shaping Eastern Europeans' behavior because the alarm of "ethnic disappearance" could be felt in many of the small nations of Eastern Europe.

To paraphrase Krastev, while the issue of large influx of people politically divided Western European societies, the very same issue united Central and Eastern European societies against the prospects of these people coming to their countries. Whereas one in seven Germans found a way to volunteer or assist the people coming in their country, many of the latter group of countries saw volunteers for the exact opposite.[14]

But the pressure over the migrant issue is present today even in Germany, which promoted 'welcoming culture' for the migrant policies. Germany recently has imposed certain restrictions on the migrant regulation. In order to avoid the breakup of government due to immigration fight with her coalition partner, Chancellor Angela Merkel reached a compromise on immigration policy with Christian Social Union (CSU).

The deal proposes new screening at the Germany-Austria border to "prevent asylum seekers whose asylum procedures are the responsibility of other E.U. countries from entering the country." A network of "transit centers" will serve as processing points from which ineligible migrants would then be sent back to relevant countries, but only if those countries consent. If those countries do not agree, Germany's rejected migrants would be sent to Austria, "on the basis of an agreement[15]."

The effects of the nationalistic backlashes were visible at some points of the Balkan migrant and refugee corridor during the migrant crisis. Most of the main restrictions of migrant movement on the Balkan route were due to political decisions. Migration and asylum regulations stratify rights based on racialised constructions of citizenship, which in interaction

[13] Eastern Europe's Compassion Deficit by Ivan Krastev, The New York Times, 8/9/2015, Available at: https://www.nytimes.com/2015/09/09/opinion/eastern-europes-compassion-deficit-refugees-migrants.html Accessed on 27/03/2018.
[14] Refugee crisis: 'Not the same values in East and West', Ivan Krastev, Deutche Welle, 8/3/2016. Available at: https://www.dw.com/en/refugee-crisis-not-the-same-values-in-east-and-west/a-19102868 Accessed on 29/03/2018.
[15] https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/europe/germanys-angela-merkel-may-have-won-fight-over-migration-but-her-coalition-is-in-doubt/2018/07/02/d4e02b60-7da2-11e8-a63f-7b5d2aba7ac5_story.html?noredirect=on&utm_term=.757ce4af7a98

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with socio-economic hierarchies, stipulate or deny rights to entry, transit, or stay.[16] Within Europe, there are several legal mechanisms that regulate the movement of people: The Schengen Agreement, the Dublin Convention, the EU's Visa Regulation, and corresponding carrier sanctions. Although at some points these legal acts are overlapping, they reinforce and multiply the external borders of the European Union. Their regulative function very often affects individuals entering Schengen zone to make it impossible to meet unfulfillable visa requirements[17]. Therefore, many people that are not citizens of Europe are forced to travel across borders of the old continent upon illegal routes, which are unsafe and often their trips result with violent border rejection. The migration influx in 2015 and 2016 along the Balkan route has changed and destabilized the border controls, leading to partial suspension of restrictive legal mechanisms. On the other hand, after September 2015, a number of Schengen zone countries chose to reintroduce temporary controls at the internal borders. According to the European Commission, the reintroduction of internal borders controls from Schengen zone States was a unilateral action, which was in line with the legislation.

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[16] Santer, Kiri and Wriedt, Vera. "(De-)Constructing Borders : Contestations in and around the Balkan Corridor in 2015/16". *Movements* Jg. 3, Heft 1/2017
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[17] See more at Bigo, Didier and Guild, Elspeth "Controlling Frontiers: Free Movement Into and Within Europe. London", 2005. p.234.

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