

## **The Balkans and Refugee Crisis: Lessons Identified and way forward**

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### **Abstract**

During the refugee/migrant crisis in 2015 and 2016, through the Balkan countries from Turkey to Western Europe has passed more than 800.000 refugees and migrants. A relatively small number of them requested asylum protection in the countries of the Balkans, generally they all had the intention to come as quickly as possible to Western Europe. In fact, gaps between the large number of migrants and refugees, uncertainty of time (until when the route will be opened for massive passage), limited transport and accommodation capacities in all parts of route, limited humanitarian and security assumptions and different approaches towards this challenge, resulted in a political crisis between individual Balkan countries. Paradoxically, despite they were aware that refugees and migrants do not want to stay in their countries, at the beginning of the crisis the Balkan countries very badly cooperated, and some of them even confronted each other in some areas. As the crisis extended, slowly the cooperation between countries increased, although by the end of the crisis has not reached a satisfactory level of collaboration needed between the neighboring countries which lean on each other and depend on each other treatment. Under the assumption that crisis between countries was inevitable, it should be one of

organizational nature – which is the best way to help refugees and migrants in transit with clear implementation of necessary and available security measures that could be carried out – and not political character. Due to the real need of improving future cooperation between the Balkan countries, under the reasonable assumption of reopening the route for massive migration (either to Western Europe or the return of those who will not be able to stay and will be returned through same route), it is necessary to analyze the recent experiences and suggest ways and models of better cooperation in the future. The main focus of this research is the analysis of political processes and decisions, applied models of cooperation and detection of unused opportunities, all that with the aim of articulating these results in the form of recommendations for a wide range of actors involved at all levels of emergency management - whether in the refugee/migrant crisis or another potential crisis in the Balkans.

**Key words:** The Balkans, Refugee crisis, Lessons Identified, Way forward

## 1. Introduction

The migrant crisis which has during 2015 and 2016 shook the Europe, the European Union and most European countries (whether they are members of the European Union or not), showed and revealed many cracks, incomplete and/or partially completed political, security, humanitarian, social, organizational processes and their cons activities. To migrant crisis preceded a series of events and smaller crises that were supposed to warn and prepare responsible, and they all the rest, for major large scale crisis which will thoroughly shake up all institutions, processes and the actors involved. The above did not happen and all the key decision makers were taken aback with the volume of events and reacted reactive – from the representatives of the executive authority in European Union administration, most powerful members of EU as countries that should have more experience with migration then other because they are most common countries of destination for large number of refugees and migrants to countries on the transit route that due to its geo-strategic position found themselves in the corridor of mass migration.

So far in the academic and professional literature there are quality descriptions of the main factual indicators of migrant crisis 2015 and 2016 in terms of push and pull factors influencing the permanent migration and in this case the specific of mass migrations; relations between migrants and refugees, in this regard – mixed migration flows; on the conflict in Syria and Iraq, from where the largest number of refugees originated; figures on migration and refugee movements; of an open invitation of Germany for refugees; and disorientation of the European Union in the crisis. Therefore, we won't be focusing on mentioned domains which have so far been very well analyzed and described, yet scope of our interest is on much less researched organizational readiness and mutual cooperation between the states (Mikac and Dragović, 2017; Smajić, 2017; Tatalović and Jakešević, 2016; Mamić, Mikac and Dragović, 2016).

The special interest of this research in a broader perspective represents the region of Southeast Europe, the time frame of observation is 2015 and 2016, while the narrower perspective are the specific countries in the so-called Balkan Route, which are due to its geo-strategic position placed on the way of mass migrant movements from southeast to west Europe. We have observed and analyzed the situation in the following countries: Republic of Turkey, Greece, Republic of Macedonia, Republic of Serbia, Hungary, Republic of Croatia and Republic of Slovenia. It should be emphasized, that the Southeast Europe territory is wider geographic term than the Balkans, where in both cases a number of countries (beside these which are mentioned) are included. We have decided to observe above listed countries because they were more prominently exposed to major mass migration movements and there were political and other forms of mutual controversy. Likewise, so-called Balkan Route has long been known as two-way smuggling route through which from the East to the West predominantly were smuggled drugs, people and weapons, and in the reverse direction – cars, synthetic drugs and other value goods. In a specific crisis which is observed, mass migration of migrants and refugees is linked with the traditional smuggling route regardless of the partial correlation with the original smuggling route.

Until the outbreak of migrant crisis 2015, Republic of Turkey has taken several million refugees mainly from Syria, Greece up to that point was the destination for a large number of African and Asian refugees and migrants who from there tried to move on to Western Europe. Republic of Macedonia has found itself on the way and in the unusual situation of pressure by entering and passing a large number of uncontrolled migrants from the European Union and the Schengen area. In Republic of Serbia there

was massively entering of migrants and refugees from Macedonia and to a lesser extent from Bulgaria. After Serbia, next transit country was Hungary and after setting the wire along the border with Serbia, migrants were routed through Republic of Croatia and continuously through Republic of Slovenia to Western Europe.

The starting point of the research is the claim that at the beginning of the crisis, observed countries very badly cooperated, and some of them even confronted each other in some areas despite they were aware that refugees and migrants do not want to stay in their countries. As the crisis extended, slowly the cooperation between countries increased, although by the end of the crisis has not reached a satisfactory level of collaboration needed between the neighboring countries which lean on each other and depend on each other treatment. From subjected, we are setting main hypothesis of research which says that under the assumption that crisis between countries was inevitable, it should be one of organizational nature – which is the best way to help refugees and migrants in transit with clear implementation of necessary and available security measures that could be carried out – and not political character. Humanitarian approach towards migrants in transit is not questionable nor security perspective that needs to be included in the protection of its own citizens as well as the migrants themselves. The focus of the research is the internal organizational aspect of countries and cooperation between them on the Balkan route where no one asked if they want, can and have the capacity and ability to receive and at a certain time in transit to take care of a large number of migrants and refugees.

Due to the real need of improving future cooperation between the Southeast Europe countries, under the reasonable assumption of reopening the route for massive migration (either to Western Europe or the return of those who will not be able to stay and will be returned through same route), it is necessary to analyze the recent experiences and suggest ways and models of better cooperation in the future. The main focus of this research is the analysis of political processes and decisions, applied models of cooperation and detection of unused opportunities, all that with the aim of articulating these results in the form of recommendations for a wide range of actors involved at all levels of crisis management – whether in the refugee/migrant crisis or another potential crisis in the Southeast Europe. For this purpose, we conducted an analysis of public policy of countries on the Balkan Route, interviewed scientists from those countries through unified questionnaire and interviews with individuals directly involved in the migrant crisis. The entire analysis process will be implemented through

the concept of crisis management and its four phases – prevention, preparedness, response and recovery.

## **2. Prevention and preparedness within countries on the Balkans route for the upcoming migration crisis**

The prevention represents measures and intent of completely avoiding the potential negative impacts that are being undertaken in advance and in this case the activities that should reduce the negative impact of mass migration. The stated is including: identification and analysis of the risk of mass migration, analysis of consequences, risk assessment and action plans, scenarios and risk management measures. Preparedness is related to crisis response planning as well as the state of readiness of operational forces for action. Exemplary these are: prepared action plans, trained scenarios for crisis situations, readiness of operational forces for reaction, linked early warning services with other competent services, well established exchange of information and clear coordination between public institutions, civil society and local self-government.

Key questions of interest to consider in this part of analysis are: What were the political stands of the government and the opposition on the challenge of mass migration at the beginning of the crisis? What are the most important political processes and decisions that took place before and during the refugee/migrant crisis in 2015 and 2016? How was assess the institutional and organizational readiness of the country to accept the mass migrations before the outbreak of crisis? Were there any existing pre-crisis planning documents for a specific event? If not, were they made ad hoc?

Political stands of the Government and the opposition on the challenge of mass migration at the beginning of the crisis 2015 were almost identical in all surveyed countries in a way that in the countries which approached to the issue primarily from the *humanitarian aspect* there was less disagreement with the opposition toward the measures to be taken, while with the primarily *security perspective approach* there was greater differences in opposition approach to the challenges. For example, in the Macedonia the attitude of the Government and the opposition on the challenges of the massive refugee and migrant crisis were largely identical and uniform. Even in some

period when was registered the highest intensity of refugee/migrant flow, the Government functioned in an expanded format with ministers from the opposition (Interior, Labor and Welfare). In Hungary from the very beginning of the crisis, the Hungarian government claimed that the massive influx of migrants is a significant threat to both Hungary and the Europe. This security-based approach persisted afterwards as well. The opposition was somewhat divided regarding the migration crisis. In the beginning, the left-wing opposition (including the Hungarian Socialist Party and the Democratic Coalition) communicated that there was not any migration crisis at all. The right-wing radical Jobbik, demanded more radical measures to address irregular migration. In the Republic of Croatia, the opposition of the right center and the President of the country elected from the party (which was then opposition party) have strongly criticized the approach of the governing, seeking a much stronger stance on the issue and the deployment of the Armed Forces to the border for stopping the migration wave. Occasionally, there were official disputes with the Republic of Serbia about the ways and models of accepting mass migrations from its territory. It is an interesting fact that in Republic of Serbia there is a shift of activities regarding migrants and refugees emerged as consequence of Hungary and Croatia reaction, countries on the route where there is no longer the situation that the general complaints towards neighboring countries are directed to those countries from which migrants and refugees are coming, but to those in which they are going on their way to Western Europe.

Under the pressure of the arose situation, all countries on the route have made some significant political processes and decisions. Every country has made harmonization of national legislation on the status of refugees and rights for asylum, and amendments to the Laws on Foreigners and the Protection of the state border. Thereby, countries closely cooperated with the European Commission. They established the reception and transit centers with the necessary infrastructure providing registration, adequate humanitarian and medical assistance. The coordination mechanisms were also established same as interaction between government institutions, humanitarian and international organizations and non-governmental organizations. In the Turkey, after the certain time, governing AKP party (Justice and Development Party) has changed "open door policy" approach due to the security reasons and Government has tightened the border controls. In the Greece, there was a major overhaul of legislation framework. The Greece has taken numerous measures on

acceptance and registration, created Reception service, mobile Units and Centers, executive structure of National Strategic Reference Framework, and certain agreements have been signed with specialized EU agencies (European Commission, 2015). Assembly of Republic of Macedonia declared an emergency crisis on the part of the territory of the Republic of Macedonia, in the areas of southern and northern borders. The stated condition was in force from 19 August 2015 till 30 June 2016 continuously (Kekenovski, 2016). Some countries like Macedonia, Croatia, Hungary and Slovenia provided a formal legal basis for the deployment of forces and capabilities of the Army of the Republic Macedonia to support the Police forces and civilian Crisis Management capacities. Some of them have used these measures to greater while some to smaller extent. The countries on the route which were in ability have done the following: improved border management, started the relocation programme, restarted return programmes and created adequate reception capacity. Some countries, like the Hungary, inducted the new "border procedure" prescribing the mandatory submission of asylum application in the so-called "transit zones", which are in compliance with EU legislation. In addition, the "safe third country" concept was introduced, including Greece, Macedonia and Serbia as countries to where rejected asylum-seekers can be sent back without exposing them to any threat. Simultaneously, the illegal crossing of the border fence became subject to the Criminal Code as criminal offence, punishable by actual or suspended imprisonment up to 10 years. At the beginning of this observed period, the countries were dedicated to the consolidation of their legal regulations and the establishment of new internal mechanisms and less attention was paid to cooperation with neighbors.

Institutional and organizational readiness of the countries to accept the mass migrations before the outbreak of crisis was at various stages of organization. Some countries like Turkey have already established the internal mechanisms because of the proximity of the crisis point. In the context of increasing number of refugees since April 2011, Directorate General of Migration Management was established as a body of Ministry of Internal Affairs on April 2013. Until the establishment of Directorate General of Migration Management, the problem was addressed by Directorate General of Police Forces (Ministry of Interior, 2015). In the Greece, there is the establishment of Ministry of Migration Policy. In the Macedonia, *Crisis Management Center* had a leading role in coordinating all activities in the refugee/migrant crisis. In the Serbia, the Commissariat for Refugees and Migrations conducted expert and other tasks related to migration

management. In the Croatia, the Government of the Republic of Croatia on 17 September 2015 adopted a Decision on the establishment of a Committee for coordination of activities regarding the arrival of the migrants in Republic of Croatia. This Committee was given executive powers concerning activities of the acceptance and transfer of refugees/migrants through the Republic of Croatia. The main institution named for the implementation of all operational requirements was the Ministry of Interior. It is important to point out that countries in the territory of the former Yugoslavia (Macedonia, Serbia and Croatia) because of the wars waged in the 1990s have historical experiences with refugee crises and a certain level of institutional memory, some organizational capabilities and faster adjustment possibilities from other countries on the Balkan route. In the Hungary, due to the unprecedented mass influx of 2015, the institutional framework had to undergo massive changes in order to be adequate for the management of irregular mass migration. The planning of these measures had to be fast, efficient as well as lawful. As a result of these changes, Hungary became capable of protecting its own and the Schengen external border. In case of Hungary, from all of the analyzed countries, there is the most evident approach based on the security aspect of protecting their sovereignty.

Pre-crisis planning documents for a mass migration event are important because they determine the organizational structure, mechanisms, and procedures in preparation and afterward in reaction to the situation. In the Turkey were *established and implemented policies and strategies related to migration and ensured coordination between the related agencies and organizations in these matters* (Ministry of Interior, 2015). The Greece had national plans for related events, but 2015 and 2016 events far exceeded them. The Macedonia did not have such plans but they were immediately prepared in 2015 and are applied consistently. The Republic of Serbia Governments response plan for sudden inflow of migrants was adopted in September 2015. Within the Plan, there was determined activities and measures of the institutions and organizations that will be undertaken in the case of mass transit of migrants (The Government of the Republic of Serbia, 2015). The Hungary had a migration strategy for the period 2014–2020 adopted before the outbreak of the crisis, laying down the basic principles, goals and characteristics of the Hungarian asylum and migration policy (The Government of Hungary, 2013). This strategy served as a platform for the required activities in the observed period. Interestingly, while the Strategy was the basic starting point for the Hungary, Croatia's migration policy as a key document in this area has just



ceased to be valid in 2015 (it was adopted for the period 2013-2015). Additionally, Croatia did not have any plans for a specific event, although some preparatory internal procedures had been drafted, but was relying on the action plans of the Civil Protection System, which proved to be very successful one year earlier with dealing with consequences of catastrophic floods. Such a situation is somewhat worrisome because it was a different kind of an event and with that, different necessary response procedures to the crisis. In Republic of Slovenia there was some preparations done by the government, and some exercises of the Civil Protection. The preparations were made for the asylum seekers, not for the people in transition. When it became clear that Slovenia was only a transition territory the organization of work and processes changed. A decision to use the national earthquake plan to cope with the refugee and migrant crisis was adopted. The documents show that there was a so called contingency plan adopted in June 2015. However, the flow of the migrants was a surprise, because the government was not prepared for the transition of the migrants (the plan contains the solutions regarding the settlements of the migrants in Slovenia) and also not prepared for the number of the incoming people (Torkar, 2016).

All observed countries have made significant steps and political measures in response to massive arrival and transit of refugees/migrants, but it is noticeable how in all countries in the first period of the crisis, there were important problems in terms of institutional and organizational readiness. The countries were not ready to manage the enormous number of flows (Torkar, 2016; Kekenovski, 2016). From that, the general conclusion is that their prevention and preparedness measures and mechanisms were not at the required level for this specific event. After a short time, from an organizational and institutional aspect, situation has stabilized in the certain extent within each country, with the great effort of all involved resources, and the transit of migrants and refugees further towards Western Europe was enabled.

### **3. Crisis Response: Cooperation and Coordination with Neighboring Countries**

The reaction represents timely provision of services during and immediately after the crisis to save lives and reduce negative impacts. The quality response is aimed at reducing the likelihood of cascading effects and new crises. This is possible to

achieve with effective operational activity of Emergency Services and Crisis Teams, mobilization of equipment and personnel, essential staff type activities, timely enforcement of inclusive decisions, inclusion and coordination of all domestic and international relevant institutions.

Key questions of interest in this segment of research are: Which body was responsible for the coordination and management of the crisis? Which main national and international associates were involved in the implementation of crisis management? What were the main challenges in country? What were the main challenges of cooperation with neighboring countries? How was assess the cooperation with neighboring countries and at which levels it took place?

In most analyzed countries, the main coordinating body was the Ministry of the Interior (Croatia, Hungary and Slovenia), or component within the ministry (Turkey). In the Macedonia, according to Crisis Management Law, the Crisis Management Center has main responsibilities for coordination and implementation of recommendation and decision done by Steering Committee and Assessment group (Governmental body in the crisis management system). In the Serbia, the Commissariat for Refugees and Migration is the main body for refugees/migrants crisis management. In the Greece, that is the Ministry of Migration Policy.

It can be highlighted how the structure of migrants and refugees changed during the crisis itself in relation to the period before it occurred. In Greece, from January 2015 until 4 January 2016, 859,508 third country nationals have entered the Greek territory. While in 2013 and 2014 the main country of origin was Afghanistan, in 2015 it was Syria. Another significant change was the increase in the number of families and unaccompanied minors seeking asylum (European Commission, 2015).

Within each country, state-level cooperation has been established with all relevant and necessary bodies as well as with local and regional self-government. Likewise, beyond the level of authorities, contact and cooperation with international and intergovernmental organizations in the field of migration and asylum, such as: organizations like the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, International Organization for Migration, International Committee of the Red Cross, International Centre for Migration Policy Development. Significant activities were undertaken also with relevant European Agencies, like: European Asylum Support Office, European Border and Coast Guard Agency (FRONTEX). Apart from the authorities, the non-governmental organizations are also crucial actors, who often fill in the niches in the system.

In this section, it is necessary to highlight the following activities of individual countries. In 2016, Turkey decided to build a separating wall on its border with Syria. With launching of Operation Euphrates Shield on 24 August 2016, Turkish Armed Forces has engaged in fight against ISIL in the northern Syria. Thus, it is aimed to provide both security needs of Turkey against terrorist penetrations into the country and de facto safety region for refugees in Syria's territory. As the lack of cooperation, some countries have decided for measures such as setting up a wire fence on the border (which has made the Hungary fully towards Serbia and Croatia, Slovenia partially towards Croatia as well as Macedonia towards Greece). It is interesting how some international organizations, for example, UN High Commissioner for Refugees Started developing their own plans for action on the crisis in Serbia and as part of a broader perspective, i.e. planning a regional response which in addition to Serbia, includes Turkey, Greece and Macedonia (UNHCR, 2017). Such an initiative is understandable and necessary, but also something that all countries on the Balkans route should undertake in that period by themselves.

The challenges differed from country to country, but the main common feature is that there was not enough cooperation and trust between the neighboring countries – every one of them was primary protecting their own national interests. The specifics of challenges also depended on the context of each crisis situation and they changed over time. In view of one's own challenges and the relation with neighboring countries, it is necessary to understand the challenges with which countries has additionally encountered. Turkey and Greece felt the greatest pressure. The specificity of Turkey is her geographical position and its long borders with Syria and Iraq, black holes in the northern parts of Syria and spill-over effects of Syrian civil war same as terrorism and terrorist actions like ISIS and Al-Qaeda which no other country on Balkan route encountered. Also, social disorder in the southern provinces of Turkey due to their demographically multicultural social structure, economic burden in terms of hosting more than 3 million refugees, same as enormous spreading of organized crime such as human, arms and drug trafficking. For Turkey, Greece and all other countries, the important question was social and political reactions of citizens to refugees and migrants, preservation of public order, public security, and protection of the local population, their properties, and the protection of security (humanitarian,) medical and other for migrants and refugees, as well as environmental protection. For the Greece, in addition to all above stated, as a special problem has been highlighted emigration of

young and highly educated Greeks. In Serbia worrying were incidents between refugees of different ethnic backgrounds, some of whom have had a deadly outcome. For Slovenia, besides the above mentioned, there was a specific holding of protests against the Government's official policy. The Hungarian Government clearly committed itself to a security-based approach at the very beginning of the crisis, claiming that irregular migration must be stopped in order to ensure the security of the Hungarian and European citizens and borders. For all countries, it was common the issue with number of incomers which has surpassed their capacity for acceptance and management and it was constantly presenting the challenge (problem) of insufficient cooperation with the governments and services of neighboring countries same as lack of police personnel and personnel in other services because they could not use all of their resources on an existing crisis.

Main challenges of cooperation with neighboring countries were significantly expressed at the beginning of the crisis. In some cases, as between Croatia and Serbia, they have led to the blockade and official closure of the main road border crossing for commercial freight traffic. Hungary has retained the train composition of Croatian Railways that carried migrants and refugees from Croatia to Hungary. There were no sufficient and effective institutional mechanisms between Turkey and its neighboring countries in terms of refugees and migrants. And also, Turkey has crucial political problems with Iran, Syria and Iraq as the refugee and migrant producer countries. Moreover, looking from Turkey perspective, Greece and Bulgaria as the neighboring countries of Turkey have objections for sharing refugee/migrant burdens. The Greece had its own challenges with Turkey from which migrants and refugees arrived, as well as with Macedonia, which was the next on the refugees/migrants route. Macedonia had major challenges with coordination and exchange of information and data on refugees/migrants transit, their composition, vulnerable groups and security intelligence information. Similar was related with countries in the continuation of the route: Serbia, Hungary, Croatia and Slovenia. From Hungary's perspective relationship with its neighboring countries shows a varying picture. With Serbia, the relationship – apart from minor tensions – has been basically harmonica. This is reflected in the fact that Serbia accepted the system of the fence and transit zones. However, major tensions and conflicts arose between Hungary and Croatia, just as the case was between Hungary and Austria. The problems with these countries originated from their totally different standpoint on migration, as well as from uncertainties in the

application of international and EU regulations and standards (e.g. Dublin Regulation) in force. The Republic of Croatia wanted to secure one entry point to the country and to transport migrants and refugees to the Hungarian and Slovenian borders with maximum efficiency and speed with their own resources, wanting to avoid (by all means) a congestion of this route and redirection of the migrant wave from Serbia to Bosnia and Herzegovina, and from there to Croatia – which then would not be able to effectively manage the migratory wave and potentially the Greek scenario would happen. For all countries, the main challenges were coordination and cooperation with the neighboring countries, but as the crisis progressed, the countries were forced to better cooperate.

Cooperation with neighboring countries was of a crucial importance for transit of migrants and refugees from Turkey to Western Europe. Despite all the common challenges, individual countries have achieved a very limited cooperation. The crucial for relations between the countries on the Balkan route and what has defined them, are activities between the European Union and Turkey. In March 2016, EU and Turkish leaders agreed on a statement to tackle irregular migration following the massive influx of migrants into the EU. From 20 March 2016, all new irregular migrants arriving on the Greek islands will be returned to Turkey if they do not apply for asylum or if their claim is rejected. For every Syrian returned to Turkey from the Greek islands, another Syrian will be resettled in the EU. The EU-Turkey statement builds on the EU-Turkey joint action plan, which was adopted in November 2015, to increase coordination on migration management. The action plan aims to tackle the refugee crisis created by the situation in Syria (European Council and Council of the European Union, 2016). The Greek relationship with Turkey was based on the above-mentioned activities and procedures agreed upon by the European Union, but it was partially followed. Cooperation with Albania, Macedonia and Bulgaria was predominantly effective. The Macedonian perspective is similar and it is accentuated how co-operation was relatively good on all issues, with some problems at the beginning of the crisis, that during the crisis have been reduced, and the cooperation was improved. The same situation was both in terms of cooperation between Serbia and Croatia, Croatia and Slovenia.

Mostly, cooperation with neighboring countries existed but was not at an optimal level. Since the initial cooperation which was at a low level, as time has passed, cooperation has improved. To that contributed the initiatives that came from the European Union and through which the meetings of EU representatives with countries

officials from the analyzed countries took place. The meetings were organized with the aim of calming the tension after the incidents and resolving the situations which happened in the context of the migration crisis. In addition, the countries on the Balkan route have independently organized and conducted meetings. Obviously, all mentioned initiatives and processes had reactive approach.

#### **4. Identified and lessons learned as part of post-crisis recovery process**

Recovery from the crisis lasts until the system, society and institutions return to pre-crisis conditions (if it is possible). We differentiate short and long-term recovery, depending on the consequences that are caused by the mass migrations and how permanent they are. As a segment of special interest within the recovery phase, stands out the process of identified and subsequently learned lessons as extremely important for learning from immediate experience, creating institutional memory, avoiding repetition of learned mistakes, better responsiveness in similar cases, reducing resource consumption, and standardization needs.

Key questions for this section are: Is there an institutional process of identified lessons and lessons learned in crisis situations? If there is, whether it was used after the crisis for the purpose of event analysis? After end of crisis, which recommendations were isolated for better organization within the country for this type of crisis in the future? Which recommendations are abstracted for improving cooperation with neighboring countries in this type of crises?

The institutional process of identified and lessons learned in each analyzed country is understood in a partially or completely different way. The Turkey has established The Council for Coordination of Fight Against Irregular Migrations, as an institutional body and integral part of Directorate General of Migration Management. The Council has and still is conducting numerous activities in the process of identified and learned lessons (Ministry of Interior Directorate General of Migration Management, 2016). Meanwhile, in the Greece, policies and actions (at all levels) are still based on ad-hoc decisions and assessment of the situation. There is no systematic procedure to build upon lessons learned that exists currently. In Macedonia, some lessons have been identified and incorporated into standard operating procedures and thus became lessons learned. In Serbia, the Ministry of Labor, Employment, Veteran and Social

Policy, in cooperation with the Commission for Refugees and Migrations of the Republic of Serbia, UNHCR and the NGO sector, organized conferences and panels where eminent experts discussed the (field) experiences gained during the crisis, with the aim of giving impulse to start the institutional process of identifying the lessons learned during the migration crisis. Similar activities were also undertaken in Republic of Slovenia (The Government of the Republic of Slovenia, 2017). In this research, for Hungary was not found any form of institutional processes of identified and learned lessons but many new regulations were adopted in the last two years which has improved the readiness and capability of Hungary to react to crisis situations – that means such process exists, although during the research we have not obtained it. Regarding the Republic of Croatia, the process of identified and subsequently learned lessons, does not exist at the level of the system or the country, but it is institutionally implemented by certain organizations, and there is no information exchange on how to react more effectively in similar situations in the future.

After each crisis (and also during), it is necessary to draw up recommendations that will enable more successful proceeding (dealing) of all involved in the crisis management process. In Turkey and Greece, it is obvious how the crisis has not been over yet. There is no further recommendation for better organization within the both countries. Turkey and Greece has already tried to cope with the crisis through newly established and/or operationalized institutions and mechanisms. For Macedonia, we have not gained any cognition on certain recommendations that can be used to improvement for the future. Serbia's recommendations for a better organization are made and listed in the Government of the Republic of Serbia Response Plan (with additional amendments) in case of sudden inflow of migrants as well as within the UNHCR Regional Plan and the International Migration Organization plans. In Hungary, the focus is on resolving the crisis beyond the borders of Europe and is considered how it is clear that the irregular migration wave must be stopped outside the territory of the EU. This way it becomes possible to prevent the massive entry of economic migrants into Europe. In this regard, the idea of hotspots to be set up in Libya can become part of the solution. Besides, the system of transit zones proved to be an effective tool in managing the crisis situation, also enabling the authorities to allocate their resources much more efficiently. There have also been some changes in legislation of Republic of Slovenia. As in the previous step, Croatia did not do as much as it could and/or was expected from the process of making recommendations for action in similar situations.

Cooperation between neighboring countries is of crucial importance for effective preparation and response to major events that have cross-border influence. Only the successful cooperation in events such as large migrant transit reduces stress, costs, and political tensions. It is extremely important to identify in which areas and how cooperation can be improved. Regarding Turkish experiences, it is emphasized that it is recommended that institutionalized cooperation with neighboring and partner countries and international institutions should be established and existing ones should be improved. The responsibilities for meeting the basic humanitarian needs of refugees/migrants should be shared by the international community, since refugee/migrant flow is not felt locally, and can easily transform into a regional and international problem. It is important to highlight Macedonia's quality proposal regarding continuing and deepening the cooperation with neighboring countries and facilitating unique database for registration of refugees and migrants. In Republic of Serbia, authorities and the civilian sector agree that international cooperation is a main prerequisite for resolving the refugee/migrant crisis. Data exchange and intensifying cooperation between security services are key factors for improving cooperation with neighboring countries. Hungary suggested a 10-point action plan for the migration crisis in April 2016 (Schengen 2.0). The measures included therein aim to give full effect of existing EU and Schengen legislation (Schengen Border Code) related to the control of external border, to make compulsory registration of biometric identification data of all persons crossing the external border, to modify the Common European Asylum System, to organize the asylum procedures outside the EU, to conclude and enforce agreement on readmission and return of the migrants, as well as to consider the answers to demographic and labor market challenges and matter of sovereign decisions of the EU member countries. These measures can be divided into protective measures such as the tightening of border control, a measure that many European countries have been calling to since the beginning of the migration crisis. There are also preventive measures such as the application for asylum outside the EU. The reform of the Schengen system and the interests shared by the member countries offer the chance for a closer, more harmonic and more balanced cooperation between each member country of the EU. Other surveyed countries had general observations on how to work better with neighboring countries.



## 5. Conclusion

Refugee/migrant crisis in 2015 and 2016 has shown a different level of countries readiness on the Balkans Route in facing major complexed challenge where it was necessary to provide support to people in transit as long as an open call from Western Europe was in force and thereby to protect their own interests. This crisis has put all the observed countries front of the challenge and they were not asked whether they want or can handle it, they were involved for the reason of their geostrategic position. The functions of effective crisis management are precisely the one that are needed to anticipate major events, as much as possible preventively react to them and to response most appropriate in given circumstances. In the observed case, apart from internal organization and procedures within each country, cooperation with neighboring countries was also crucial.

The analysis of refugee/migrant crisis in 2015 and 2016 indicates the justification of this research and the chosen approach. Turkey and Greece were under the pressure from a large number of refugees and migrants, years before the outbreak of the observed crisis, whole time having their own crisis of a similar nature, related to settling and providing humanitarian aid to a large number of migrants and refugees. There is an impression that other countries primarily anticipated that the European Union would be more engaged in preventing the expansion of the crisis. Since that did not happen and in parallel there was a call for migrants and refugees to come to Western Europe (primarily Germany), analyzed countries found themselves in a situation where they did not prepared the necessary preventive measures so they had an ad hoc reaction. At the beginning of the crisis, cooperation between Balkan Route countries did not exist at all, or in some cases was at a very low level, so among them appeared political crises, instead of common preparation and focus to have an agreement how to approach to this challenge. This has confirmed the initial hypothesis which says that under the assumption that crisis between countries was inevitable; it should be one of organizational nature – which is the best way to help refugees and migrants in transit with clear implementation of necessary and available security measures that could be carried out – and not political character.

The research results shows that basically most of the countries on the Balkan Route reacted retroactively and not preventively in relation to the size of the challenges they faced. Also, it was corroborating that no country had at all times established

sufficient capacity to provide assistance and support to migrants and displaced persons movement. Regardless there was the real premise of passing a large number of people, the procedures and plans were developed in the later phase without the possibility of checking their functionality. The reaction was different from country to country depending on the approach to the challenge. The particular interest in this observation is related to the mutual cooperation between the countries, because none of them could solve total or individual challenges on the Balkans Route. In this part of the analysis, it was found that from the initial distrust cooperation has improved and reached a certain level of minimum eligibility to meet many aspects of the crisis. There are also examples of searching substantive solutions in this crisis.

The Balkans Route is currently closed for mass transit of migrants and refugees, but individuals and smaller groups of people are still trying to pass through. Upon the crisis is terminated it is a basic need to make a breakdown to determine the manner and appropriateness of procedures and to see what is possible to do better, so in similar situations and with less invested resources we could be prompt and more efficient. The research found that each country understands and perceive process of identified and learned lessons in a different way. From those who have changed and established new organizational units and procedures to those who has complete inactivity in this area.

This research has shown the complexity of dealing with challenges that are not common or expected, reached a certain aspects of dealing with a refugee/migrant crisis from the perspective of crisis management with the primary focus on the need for cooperation between the states in solving the common challenge/situation. It is necessary to continue with this kind of researches because it is more than obvious we will be increasingly exposed to refugee/migrant crises such as one of 2015 and 2016.

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