University of Zurich[UZH]

Department of Geography

Opening and incremental closure of the Balkan Route

Understanding scales of migration management and the Serbian "open borders" stance

GEO 511 Master's Thesis

Author
Wennubst Francesco
07-333-222

Supervised by
Dr., Raeymaekers Timothy

Faculty representative
Dr., Korf Benedikt

27th of January 2017
Department of Geography, University of Zurich

Acknowledgements

I would like to express my most sincere gratitude to my supervisor, Dr. Timothy Raeymaekers. Thank you for your support and all the precious advices. But in particular, thank you for trusting me when everything seemed lost, and for letting me “freely” wander around the Balkans, giving me the liberty to develop my own research and fieldwork experience. Much appreciated.

Thank you also to the members of the Political Geography unit at the UZH. You provided me with precious advices and comments at the initial and final stages of this work.

A very special thanks goes to Julianne Funk. Without you telling me “Just go, now!”, things would have been completely different. Without doubt one of the best advices I ever received.

To all the great people I met and volunteered with during the time spent in the Balkans: I will never forget you. You made this experience something special. It was crazy, actually. But this is not about me at all: thanks for having been there, doing what you did. Helping, caring, distributing, talking, ... Your mere presence was important, and for those who are still there, it still is.

To the best flatmates in the world, thanks for making some space for me. It is great to be here. I wonder if I would have gotten where I am without your support.

Eh oui c’est bon, je te cite. Merci, Marc. Pour les photos, mais surtout de ta présence à Belgrade. C’était bien d’avoir un ami à côté. Et pour ça, merci à toi aussi, Tarek.

Un grande grazie a quei due amici lì. Grazie che tu ha riletto, bello. E Embo, senza di te non avrei mai né cominciato né finito.

E alla mia famiglia. Grazie di tutto. Ma di tutto tutto.

To the migrants. You are the bravest.

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

The emergence of the Balkan Route

Since several years, the migratory phenomena – bringing thousands of more or less desperate people to Europe – has been on the spotlight of governments, media and citizens. A lot of attention has been given to routes that became well known with time, for instance crossing the Mediterranean Sea to reach the coasts of wealthier European countries, in particular Italy and Spain. The tendency is to talk about a "migrations crisis", putting the emphasis on the struggle that migrants have to go through to reach their destination, as well as the difficulties associated with decisions on their management once they land into the first European country. In these regards, the term crisis takes a double connotation: if these migratory flows often result in humanitarian crises, a deep reflection on the governmentality of migratory fluxes must be done, since "the *European refugee crisis* is the crisis of the European border regime" (Kasparek, 2016b, p. 2, Bojadžijev and Mezzadra, 2015). The focus of authorities is mainly on re-establishing control over migratory fluxes[1] to restrict the number of arrivals as well as filtering out the undesirable (depending on nationality, education, income, etc. Agier, 2006). From this perspective, the humanitarian consequences of migration control policies are often falling in second place. With migrants being seen as a national security problem in many countries, restrictive asylum regulations are implemented without much consideration of their implications on a humanitarian level. At this moment, in Europe there is no way for a migrant to find asylum other than reaching the desired country and apply for it (Stokholm, 2016). This fact pushed many to embark on dangerous journeys, with generally heavy consequences for migrants. The number of those dying in the process of reaching Europe has been growing in the last years (IOM, 2016), but many of those that reach their destination are probably going to be marked and traumatized forever by the events lived and witnessed on their way.

The arrival of migrants fuels up a lot of debates in Europe. Discussions about asylum seekers, refugees and economic migrants constantly make the first page of main newspapers, and their management constitutes an important part of various parties and institutions' political agendas. All in all, it is not the first time Europe has to take care of the matter of migratory waves. What is relatively new is what happened starting from summer 2015 on. Whereas most saw the incoming flow of migrants as a unique and more or less established ongoing event, the reality proved to be much different, with new routes emerging and others being shut down constantly (Crawley, Duvell, Sigona, McMahon, & Jones, 2016, p. 1), the "newest" finding its way through the Balkans. Ever since the summer 2015, large number of migrants began to cross the Aegean Sea from the nearby Turkish coasts to land on various Greek islands (e.g. Chios, Lesbos). The native countries of these people were mainly Syria and Afghanistan, with a consistent part coming from Iraq as well (UNHCR, 2016a).

[1] - While the use of liquids and relative terminology (flux, flows, etc.) as a metaphor to describe the moving of migrants has been challenged as not adequate (Mezzadra and Nielson, 2013, p. 209), I will still use it throughout the text. They aim at analysing the creation and connection of global spaces, but in a situation like the one of the Balkan Route, mobility is the key factor. In this regard, the use of flow as a metaphor is useful to understand the different circumstances, and representative of the situation. Other metaphors, such as "route carving", also fit well in this context, precisely due to the fact that the Balkan Route as seen in the analysed time frame has been a relatively new phenomenon, created in part by the high numbers of migrants using it.

It is in this case relatively easy to understand migrants' reasons to seek asylum in Europe: a prolonged war in Syria and Iraq and great instability and insecurity in Afghanistan. Greece, despite being the first EU country on the way, was however only a transit point. Most of those wanted to continue their journey to reach mainland Europe, and in particular Germany and other countries known for their permissive asylum policies, such as Sweden. To reach their destinations, migrants carved out what became known as the "Balkan Route": from Greece to the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (fYRoM from now on), then Serbia, Hungary, Austria and further on. Although this was not a completely unknown and new route – with many migrants having used it before[2] – the peculiar aspect of the events of Spring-Summer 2015 can be traced back to the fast increase of arrivals in a very short time: around 30'000 migrants crossed the sea and reached Greece in June 2015, 54'000 in June, 107'000 in August and so on up to a peak of 211'000 monthly arrivals in October (UNHCR, 2016a). Slowly, European medias, authorities and citizens started to acknowledge the existence of this phenomenon. While the media coverage of the situation of migrants in the Balkans was present even before August (Bicanski, 2015; Daley, 2015), a few episodes helped to increase the visibility of the situation. One remarkable case was the discovery of 71 dead migrants inside a lorry abandoned on an Austrian highway, the 28th of August (Harding, 2015). A few days later, a photo of a dead Syrian child, Alan Kurdi – drowned in the sea and washed ashore by the waves – started to circulate in the media. It shortly had great impact, hence generating a wave of compassion and support for refugees (King and Johnson, 2015). The attention to this "new" crisis grew exponentially, along with an exacerbated debate about the fate of the people that decided to undertake this dangerous route towards Europe. Photos of migrants marching all their way through the Balkans became a daily routine on newspapers, while the humanitarian machine started to direct its efforts towards the area. Donations, volunteers, NGOs, etc. begun to pour into Greece and the Balkans to ease the difficult conditions of the migrants. Temporary registration camps were organized at the various borders on the Route in order to secure registration of those crossing them, and with time even collective transports from border to border were put in place by some of the governments involved. For a few months, the flow of people continued essentially without obstacles, with everyone being allowed into the countries of the Balkan Route and sent onwards to Europe, no distinctions made. In this light, we can describe to the Balkan Route as a "humanitarian corridor", as clearly described by Santer & Wriedt (in press).

Meanwhile, an intense debate concerning the arrival of such a high number of migrants in Europe arose in almost every European country or supranational institution (i.e. European Union). While some, such as Germany, advocated for an open border policy, stressing the need to protect people from war and suffering (also counting on the rules of the Common European Asylum System to redistribute these migrants in various other states), others manifested their opposition to the arrival of large numbers of migrants. An egregious example is the Hungarian decision to build a fence along its border with Serbia to prevent migrants to cross into the country and Poland's opposition to relocation plans (Krajewski, 2015). On one thing everyone seemed to agree: if people should have been given the possibility to seek asylum, this was not the right way and the numbers of migrants using the Balkan Route had to be reduced. A first restrictive entry policy started to be applied the 19th of November, when fYRoM, Serbia, Croatia and

[2] - Crossing the Balkans in order to reach Europe is not a new trajectory. This route is also known with other names, such as "Western Balkan Route". I will refer to it as "Balkan Route", "trans-Balkan migratory route", or sometimes just "Route".

Slovenia *de facto* introduced the "SIA rule": only nationals from Syria, Iraq and Afghanistan were allowed into these countries and onwards to the next one[3]. The "humanitarian corridor" described in the previous paragraph was (from November on) open only for this three nationalities. While only partially effective in reducing the numbers of arrivals, this regulation lead to the creation of large accumulations of migrants at the first border where it was enforced, that is the one between Greece and fYRoM, located close to the Greek village of Idomeni. With the normalization of the situation and the improvement of migrants' conditions, media attention on the Balkan Route diminished greatly. Briefly, the route was officially closed on the 13th of March 2016, when no one was allowed to cross it anymore, no matter what their nationality or claim was. After an initial debordering, this migratory wave has therefore been stopped by using restrictive policies. At a first glance, European border management strategies proved themselves effective in reducing the number of arrivals and eventually stopping the flow, but it is important to notice that while the Balkan Route was open, more than one million people managed to cross the Balkans and reach mainland Europe.

Specifically, in this research I will focus on two main points: first, I will look at the influence of regulatory norms for migrants in the Balkans, with a particular focus on Serbia. As previously stated, subsequent restrictive rules have been introduced between November 2015 and March 2016. These have had a deep impact on the functioning of the Balkan Route, creating different migrants' categories and therefore distinct ways of traveling, living conditions, and access to humanitarian assistance. Moreover, the introduction of increasingly restrictive border regimes seems to have ultimately facilitated the final closure of the Route in March. The second aspect I will focus on is the influence of different scales of migration control. The previously cited regulatory norms have been implemented in many different ways depending on the country or area. More precisely, I will look at the Serbian example, embedding it in a large scale including other Balkan countries on the Route: fYRoM, Bulgaria, Hungary, and Croatia. This second scale will then be analysed in the larger framework of the European Common Asylum System, including therefore the European Union as a major actor. Serbian border regime seemed to have been more permissive than the one of neighbouring countries: looking at their apparent "open borders policy" highlights the exclusionary tendencies of the European Union border regime and asylum system.

Fortress Europe and the illegalization of migrants

The events of 2015-16 have reinforced the idea of Fortress Europe, a prosperous spatial entity, hardly permeable to foreign populations with the wrong characteristics. During this episode of the enlarged and so-called "European migration crisis", entry barriers multiplied even more than before over the territory of the European Union, shaped in different forms and methods of control and top-down regulations: border controls previously abandoned thanks to the Schengen Agreement have been reintroduced by some European countries to prevent illegal entry of migrants (European Commission, 2016b), fences have been built (Slovenia, fYRoM, Bulgaria, Hungary, Austria), detention centres were opened in Greece, restrictions of entry based on nationality have been established, international waters between Greece and Turkey are now increasingly patrolled by the European Border Agency (Frontex) with the support of NATO's navy vessels, and an agreement between the European Union and Turkey concerning the arrival

[3] - From now on, I will refer to the category of migrants including Syrians, Iraqis and Afghanis as "SIA(s)", and as "non-SIA(s)" when talking about all the others.

and repatriation of migrants has been signed. These factors will be treated extensively in this research, but what emerges from this picture is that the concept of "Fortress Europe" is once again on the spotlight, and seems to find confirmation in these facts. European countries seem to be refractory to migrants, or at least to a certain typology of those. Beside physical barriers, migrants are also portrayed using negative connotations, emphasizing their position in the labour market in the destination country ("economic migrants"), disregarding other motivations that might bring them to seek asylum (Mountz, 2011). This distinction is then shaped by law into categories of legality and illegality, in other words, between genuine and non-genuine asylum seekers. As explained by De Genova (2002), this categorisation is deeply connected to the relation between migrants and states' legislations (p. 422). The discussion about illegal migrants represent a crucial point in this research: it is strictly connected to the concept of Fortress Europe and barriers to entry and integration. This closure has been – and still is – very visible in the Balkans. Over the time span of the opening of the Balkan Route, more than one intervention has been made by various states in the Balkans and in Europe that has changed the relationship between migrants and the state. The evolution of this relationship becomes important to subsequently analyse not only the mobility of the migrants, but also the one of the states involved (De Genova, 2002; Mountz, 2011). Migrants' illegality is a product of states' legislations and decision making, and this has been very clear on the Balkan Route. Moreover, as stated by De Genova (2002), this status of illegality is likely to have a deep impact on the everyday life of people "wearing this tag". The Balkan route has been opened in different ways for different people. Travelling along the Balkan Route seems to have been different "legal" (SIAs) and "illegal" (non-SIAs) migrants, with resulting unequal mobilities and access to humanitarian assistance, as well as other consequences for a group or the other.

From another point of view, definitions of illegality create the ground for the enforcement of border controls. To control who comes in – and especially to stop those that are not welcomed into a certain sovereign territory – checkpoints are established along the border line, and police or army officers are called to patrol these areas; furthermore, extension of the border line can be seen in other terms, such as the necessity for a visa (falling into what Cuttitta, 2009, 2015, refers to as "outward flexibilisation" of the border[4]). Falling into illegality is the major factor that allows deportation of migrants (De Genova, 2002, 2013). According to De Genova (2002, p. 439), this is reflected in the life of the migrant itself, who will feel "*a palpable sense of deportability, which is to say, the possibility of deportation, the possibility of being removed from the space of the nation-state*". To avoid all this, illegal migrants are pushed into a situation where, if they do not want to be caught and deported, they have to become invisible, a factor that contributes to an increase of abuses and exploitation. Moreover, illegality becomes a status as well, a sort of internal border that the migrant always carries along with him (Cuttitta, 2015).

In other words, the legislative interventions of the Balkan states, as well as the decisions taken in destination countries, have served the purpose of *illegalizing* migrants, creating the basis to stop their mobility and allowing their deportation. The increasingly restrictive policies applied between November and March on the Balkan Route can be read in terms of illegalization and deportability, shaping differential

[4] - As Cuttitta explains (2009), instruments of outward flexibilisation extend the border line to prevent immigration, while in the case of an inward flexibilisation, the stretching is done inside a state border. This second category is an instrument of repression.

exclusion or inclusion of migrants. The il/legal label was in this case mostly applied at the various borders, generating what has been called “border spectacle” by De Genova (2002, 2013). The border becomes a line where illegalization is produced, where the status of the migrant changes by stepping into the space regulated by a different sovereign authority. Exclusion is dictated by legislation, but it is shaped as well through practices and discourses that mostly turn around the protection of the borders of a certain space. The border is where it is decided who can come in and who cannot, it is the place were migrations are governed and managed (Casas-Cortes et al., 2015; Mountz, 2011).

Looking at the Balkan Route in these terms is essential, but we might tend to generalize and focus only on the flows as a whole, depicting a situation where migration policies are homogenous. It this case, the vision we have is the one of a strict collaboration among all countries of destination and transit in order to stop this migratory flow. I am not claiming that there is not collaboration in this sense, but that there is much more than a wide spectrum analysis can show. Different scales of migration governance on the Balkan corridor become therefore an important tool of analysis. Dissecting the Route in different parts represents an important way to understand migrants and state mobility in this particular context. Looking at what happened in the Balkans in 2015-16 considering them as a united entity while focusing on European migration policies is indeed important, but it makes it difficult to clearly understand what happened and what is happening now. These events have generated a situation that is incredibly complex, with discourses that touched the hearth of European identity and unification. As clearly stated by Bojadžijev and Mezzadra (2015), countries in Europe fought over refugee quotas and their redistribution or the right border regime to apply, and citizens have been divided between those supporting asylum seekers and those firmly against them, adding fuel to the flames of racist talks. In other words, the portrayal of the migrants has changed over time, from an initially strong perception of them being genuine asylum seekers to the more negative concept of “economic migrants”. A generalization has been made, using nationality to supposedly identify who is a good asylum seeker and who is not.

Counter-intuitive migration management? The Serbian case

The reality of this migratory wave is therefore incredibly complex. I decided to start focusing on one precise aspect of it: that is, the apparently paradoxical event of the opening and subsequent closure of the Balkan Route. What I want to say here is that the route has changed over time, it is not the same today as it was from the Summer to Winter 2015-16. The Route has changed significantly both in scale and in levels of migrant flows. While in October 2015 the number of arrivals was still very high, migrants’ conditions were bad, and the migratory flux was unified, later on a series of regulatory norms have been introduced. Migrants have been divided in groups, some allowed to legally cross the various borders on the way, some not. This fact reduced the numbers on the Route and caused a division of the flux, signing the beginning of a phase of migration management instead of humanitarian interventions. Meanwhile, an agreement between the European Union and Turkey – arguably the starting point of migrants' journey – has been negotiated. The conclusion of the agreement has been the crucial factor that allowed the completion of the incremental closure of Balkan countries’ border. This factor is crucial: the control of European Union external border in the East is delivered to Turkey, showing its outward transformation. The border regime is the definition of migration management, and it is in this case delegated to an outside sovereign power located in a geographical position that makes its enforcement easier.

Between October 2015 and June 2016 I had the occasion to spend several months in the Balkans to directly observe the ongoing situation. Beside a short time in the registration and first-reception camp of Opatovac in Croatia, I spent the rest of the time in several locations in Serbia. Since my arrival in Belgrade at the end of December, the difference with the previously observed situation in Croatia struck upon me immediately. The country seemed to act in a much different way, in particular because of the freedom of movement enjoyed by the migrants: if in Croatia migrants were strictly controlled, following a point to point route dictated by the authorities, crossing the country from Opatovac to Dobova in Slovenia, in Belgrade migrants were a daily reality in the streets of the city. No one was there to tell them what to do, to lock them in camps or deport them. This seemed to be slightly in counter-current compared to the information I could gather about the attitude shown by other countries on the route. Moreover, even after the introduction of the SIA rule, a good part of the migrants in Belgrade were not from any of these three countries. Pakistani, Moroccans, Iranians, Algerians, etc. could be easily found in the city of Belgrade. The impression was that the Serbian government was acting differently and applying different policies in their regards. It was somehow not bothered or worried by their presence. This first insight brought me to the decision of focusing on this country. Is migrants' reality really different in Serbia? How is it different? The situation seemed mostly under control, the humanitarian system being in place and able to provide for the necessary basic needs of migrants, and the authorities mostly concentrated at the ports of entry and exit to ensure registration procedures. In other words, Serbia seemed to "manage not to manage" this "migration crisis". While other countries applied strict rules for entering their territory, Serbian authorities granted access to everyone that reached their land. Even if there are reports of migrants being bounced back at the Serbian border (Belgrade Centre for Human Rights, 2016), a simple request of asylum in the country was generally enough to enter and start the asylum procedure. Even within the country, situations like the modern witch-hunt in Bulgaria have not been witnessed[5].

This attitude stimulated migrants' mobility, giving them the possibly to find their own way to continue their journey. Many migrants stayed in Belgrade for a few days, organizing their next steps, others never stopped in Belgrade and continued directly to the Croatian border. All in all, two kinds of mobilities could be witnessed in the country: the SIAs' one, and the others' one. The first kept a fast pace, generally from border to border, the second one slower and differently organized. Yet the most important factor is that this second mobility existed and seemed to be stimulated by a general "*laissez-faire"* attitude of the Serbian authorities. If many non-SIA have been blocked at the borders of fYRoM and Bulgaria, others managed to find their way into Serbia. The difference in Serbia is simple: the status of migrants was not the same as in other countries. Serbia allowed non-SIA people to seek asylum in their country, letting them inside its territory to file an asylum request according national and international asylum legislations, making them visible, and giving them the rights prescribed by refugee laws. The mobility of migrants was greatly influenced by this status change: if their illegal status in fYRoM or Bulgaria pushed them to walk most of their journeys, hiding in woods and avoiding major inhabited centres, in Serbia they had the possibility to use other means of transportation such as train and buses, as well as having the possibility to stay in reception centres. In other words, migrants found themselves legalized again once entering

[5] - Patrols of individual citizens were spontaneously created in the country to search and detain migrants crossing through the forests. See Cheresheva (2016) for a report of their activities.

Serbia, at least for a certain period of time. This seems to have brought generally positive consequences for them. Serbia is therefore a peculiar and very interesting case, but to understand the reasons and, more importantly, the consequences of this approach to migration management, other major factors have to be taken into consideration.

The temporality of the migration is crucial here. There have been multiple rupture points in policies and attitude of authorities towards the migratory flux, where new rules or regulations have had an important consequence on migrants' mobility, as well as their use of ports of entry or exit[6]. The changes of migrants' inclusion and border regime have been crucial to the final outcome of closing the Balkan Route. This has not been operated from one day to the other, but it seems to be the result of a puzzle made of multiple pieces, introduced one after the other to allow a final closure of the route. I decided therefore to focus on the evolution of restrictive entry policies and on the consequences of these exclusionary practices. To understand them, it is necessary to bring back the discussions about the externalization of border control and the mobility of the states. The main exclusionary practices have been put in place far away from the destination countries. In other words, they have been established at the border of the European Union, following an already established pattern in the European management of migrants (Mountz & Kempin, 2014; Huysmans, 2000; Tsianos & Karakayali, 2010). The states, as well as the European Union became more mobile, pushing their power further than their border line in order to reduce the mobility of migrants (Mountz, 2011, p. 319). The analysis of Mountz (2011) is particularly important in this regard, as it shows how the mobility of one actor gives important insights on the immobility of another. It is therefore important to analyse "*a number of time – space trajectories at once: not only those of migrants, but of mobile states whose authorities, policies, and enforcement infrastructure also migrate*" (p. 320). The mobility of national or supranational actors – as well as the influence of different scales of management – in the context of the Balkan Route are easily visible at a first insight, examples can be the cooperation meetings held during the "crisis" between various authorities of the Balkan countries or the previously mentioned establishment of detention centres in Greece. It is in these regards that the temporality of the migration becomes a crucial point, as it allows to see the mobility of the states involved and of the European Union.

Methodology

To sum up, what I try to do in this research is to give a clear insight on the functioning of the Balkan Route, and specifically to show how the migration has been managed in Serbia. Focusing on this country, which by definition is a transit country that migrants do not see as a possible final destination where to start building their lives again, is the perfect choice to really understand the journey of the migrants, along with all the obstacles or facilitations that they might have found on their path. Serbia has been in the centre of the route of migrants, and, given the previously mentioned practices of externalizing instruments of migration control, it is therefore obvious that it has been touched at least in part by the migration policies

[6] - For port of entry and exit I mean the main border points used by migrants to enter or exit a country. As stated by Mountz (2011), ports of entry are main spatial points where the migratory routes find their way in a new country. As she states, they can be seen as "*static locations, material infrastructure built along the edge of sovereign territory*" (p. 324) but the reality is much more complex, as ports of entry can shift, and represent "*a material expression of the mobile nation-state*" (p. 318). This mobility is clearly seen along the Balkan Route, as migrants' shifting strategies forced the various states to not only change the rules of these ports, but also their locations.

of destination countries. Moreover, we can see Serbia as being at the periphery of the European Union, but it has on the contrary been at the (geographic) centre of the Balkan Route. Serbia was not on the frontline of migrants' arrivals and might have benefited from the screening previously operated by countries upstream. I will build my arguments basing myself in particular on two aspects: from one side the evolution of the procedures of screening operated at the ports of entry and exit of the countries involved, comparing to identify existing differences, and from the other side on the trajectories and mobilities of migrants outside and inside the Serbian Territory.

I will use a mix of literature research, analysis of official documents, and observations on the field. I spent several months in the Balkans between October 2015 and June 2016, more precisely in the locations of Opatovac, Šid, Adaševci, Principovac and Belgrade (see Table 1 for the details of my fieldwork). During this time, I made my observations using ethnographic methods, in particular participative observation and unstructured and semi-structured interviews. Participative observation revealed itself to be an effective method to access the field, as there was great need for help and volunteers. Unstructured interviews were used mostly with migrants, as they allowed for a more relaxed approach and conversation. Interviews that are semi-structured were preferred to unstructured ones when talking with governmental authorities and other organizations. Moreover, literature research consists and important part of my work: existing research on migrations and borders allow to frame my particular context in a wider scale in order to understand the range of consequences and techniques of migrations management.

Table 1: Location and Dates of the Fieldwork

Location	**Date**
Opatovac	12.10.2015 – 19.10.2015
Belgrade – Winter	22.10.2015 – 11.01.2016 23.01.2016 – 28.01.2016
Šid/ Adaševci/Principovac	11.01.2016 – 23.01.2016 25.03.2016 – 26.03.2016
Belgrade – Spring	26.03.2016 – 08.05.2016
Belgrade – Late Spring	28.05.2016 – 15.06.2016

CHAPTER ONE: UNDERSTANDING MIGRATIONS AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE BALKAN ROUTE

First part – Migrations and asylum legislations

In this first part, I will initially give an overview of the various definitions and regulations surrounding migrations. Defining the various typology of migrants – along with the related systems regulating them – It is important to understand the functioning of the border regimes seen on the Balkan Route and in Europe. I will provide an overview of the most important points of the Geneva Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees and its Protocol, along with the official view on migrants of the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and UNHCR. In a second part, I will describe crucial aspects of the Common European Asylum System. Being most migrants that travelled on the Balkan Route directed to Europe, and considering the great effort shown by the European Union to reduce the number of arrivals, a description of the available asylum modalities at this scale is important to understand the regulations introduced, as well as to shed light on some of the fears and strategies of migrants. Further on, I will describe the asylum laws of the Republic of Serbia. This country is the centre of my research, and such system can therefore not be overlooked.

Definitions and reflections on migrations' vocabulary

Migrants

Throughout the whole research, I will refer to the people going through the Balkans towards Europe as migrants. This decision is mostly a choice to facilitate the writing, and not a political statement. When I talk about migrants – if not specifically stated – I include everyone traveling towards a destination, therefore not taking into consideration the reasons of their moving. I will not differentiate between economic migrants, asylum seekers and refugees. Different categories have been created to filter migrants all along the Balkan Route, with only some of them being allowed to use it legally and cross the various borders at official points. Talking about refugees/asylum seekers/economic migrants becomes therefore difficult and not of particular use in this context, since the new categorization system used to filter them was mainly based on their country of origin, and not on their reasons to migrate. Moreover, being the research focused on management policies, and being these aimed at different target groups from the usual classification of migrants, I retain the use of different terms unnecessary besides acknowledge and describe them. I will however use them when describing particular contexts or policies aimed at categories of migrants fitting these definitions (such as when describing asylum laws). This decision fits with the definition given by the IOM, that describes migrants "*as any person who is moving or has moved across an international border or within a State away from his/her habitual place of residence, regardless of (1) the person's legal status; (2) whether the movement is voluntary or involuntary; (3) what the causes for the movement are; or (4) what the length of the stay is"* (IOM, n. d.-b). This definition is not the only one in use, but I chose it as it fits with my previous observations. UNCHR suggests to use the term migrant as someone who "*choose to move not because of a direct threat of persecution or death, but mainly to improve their lives by finding work, or in some cases for education, family reunion, or other reasons*" (UNHCR, 2016c). This appears to me as excessively restrictive and simply representing a point of view, in particular the one of an international organization that has to make a clear distinction between refugees and other categories of people on the move. This is not the case in the context that is going to be described and with the scope of this research. Moreover, Mezzadra and Nielson (2013) use

the same term, adding that *"categories such as refugee, asylum seeker, or "illegal" migrant [are] invented by state bureaucracies or their international counterparts"* (p. 142). I agree with their point of view.

Irregular and mixed migrations

Regardless of my choice of the term to use, when discussing migratory fluxes migrants are generally differentiated and categorised. There is great variety of reasons to move from one country to another, as there are different categories of migratory flows. For a situation like the one we assisted in 2015-16, the definition of "irregular migration" will be used, as it fits the description given by the IOM. That is, a "*movement that takes place outside the regulatory norms of the sending, transit and receiving countries*" (IOM, 2011). However, the IOM recognises that this definition of irregular migrations is not universal. I still deem it appropriate for the migratory flow described in this work.

There is one more important point to make about irregular migrations: they are usually dangerous for the migrants. The fact of being forced to move outside of regulatory norms makes them vulnerable to all kinds of threats. Abuse by police officers and criminals, as well as the dangers posed by natural events or barriers (e.g. cold, lack of food and hygiene, sea crossing on overcrowded boats) are accentuated by the need to hide from state laws and institutions (Amnesty International, 2014, 2015). In other words, the institutions that will punish migrants for crossing illegally into the territory of one country are the same that can protect them from these threats. Therefore, restrictive migratory regulations will push migrants into illegality and invisibility, increasing their vulnerability.

In today's world, irregular migrations are often composed of people of all ages and gender, coming from various countries and moving for diverse reasons (UNHCR, 2007). There is therefore the tendency to talk about "mixed migrations", or "mixed flows". These – according to the IOM (2011) – are defined as "*Complex migratory population movements that include refugees, asylum-seekers, economic migrants and other migrants, as opposed to migratory population movements that consist entirely of one category of migrants".* When discussing with migrants on the Balkan Route, the majority of them told me that their reason to leave was the unstable and dangerous situation in their country. There was however no lack of other reasoning: in more than one occasion, a migrant revealed to me of his will to reach Germany because life is better there and he could earn more money. Regardless of the percentage totalled by any migratory logic, the flow of migrants through the Western Balkan can be defined as mixed.

Refugees, asylum seekers, economic migrants

Further definitions are at this point necessary, as refugees, asylum seekers and economic migrants can still be seen as broad categories.

The word refugee is clearly defined in international law by the Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, or 1951 Refugee Convention. The Convention states (Article 1.A.2) that a refugee shall be defined as someone "*owing to well founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of his former habitual residence as a result of such events, is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it*" (Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, 1951).

A refugee is someone who has already gone through the "refugee status determination" procedure, and has legally obtained asylum. The form and modalities of the procedure are generally defined by national asylum laws. A variety of articles in the convention define then the rights and obligations of refugees towards the host country. An especially important and debated right is stated in the Article 33.1 of the convention, that is, the "*Prohibition of Expulsion or Return ("Refoulement")*", otherwise known as "principle of non-refoulement". It states that "*no contracting state shall expel or return ("refouler") a refugee in any manner whatsoever to the frontiers of territories where his life or freedom would be threatened on account of his race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion*" (Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, 1951).

The validity of this concept is often debated as it is linked directly to the criteria applied by a certain state to determine the status of refugee of an applicant. While it forbids states from repatriating refugees in zones where their life would be in danger, the definition of such areas is at times very subjective, giving space for an interpretation of who is a genuine refugee and who is not. Declaring certain areas as "safe" (concept also known as "safe third country", or "third country of asylum") allows a state to deport migrants and refugees without violating the non-refoulement principle. This technique also reduces the chances of obtaining the refugee status for applicants in provenance from "safe" countries, and it is used to operate "push-backs" of asylum seekers at the borders. Simply stated, if someone travelled through a "safe third country" before demanding asylum in the preferred host state, its request can be denied without violating the 1951 Refugee Convention, since the applicant had already the opportunity to become a refugee in a safe area. The same applies to the concept of "first country of asylum", that is, a state where a person has already been granted asylum.

An asylum seeker is defined as "*a person who seeks safety from persecution or serious harm in a country other than his or her own and awaits a decision on the application for refugee status under relevant international and national instruments. In case of a negative decision, the person must leave the country and may be expelled, as may any non-national in an irregular or unlawful situation, unless permission to stay is provided on humanitarian or other related grounds*" (IOM, 2011). An asylum seeker is therefore someone that pursues the obtaining of refugee status, or another kind of protection. Reasons to be an asylum seeker are various. For instance, fleeing economic misery might be considered one. An asylum seeker is therefore not a refugee, and it is not necessarily going to become one. Another form of international protection exists beside the refugee status, that is the "subsidiary protection status". Into subsidiary protection will fall people that do not fulfil the previously seen criteria to become a refugee, but would still face a serious danger of being harmed in their home country. In the Article 15 of the "Council Directive 2004/83/EC" of the European Union, the risks of harm necessary to obtain the subsidiary protection are defined as "*(a) death penalty or execution; or (b) torture or inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment of an applicant in the country of origin; or (c) serious and individual threat to a civilian's life or person by reason of indiscriminate violence in situations of international or internal armed conflict" (*Council Directive 2004/83/EC, 2004).

Moreover, another important declaration protects the rights of asylum seekers: the "The Universal Declaration of Human Rights". At Article 14, it is stated that "*Everyone has the right to seek and to enjoy in other countries asylum from persecution*" (UN General Assembly, 1948).

There is still one definition missing, probably the most used and loved in anti-migratory discourses: the un-famous economic migrant. The IOM defines an economic migrant as someone "*leaving his or her habitual place of residence to settle outside his or her country of origin in order to improve his or her quality of life*" (IOM, 2011). This is not necessarily done using illegal means, since it might be possible to obtain a permit to work in another country. However, illegal immigration in this sense is a documented fact in many countries (e. g. United States of America, Australia). Especially when there is a high disparity of income between countries, a legal way might be difficult to find, and a desperate economic situation might push people to migrate illegally to seek a better income (Mountz & Hiemstra, 2014). Economic migrants are often using the same routes as asylum seekers to reach their desired destination, and might in the first place claim persecutions and danger of harm in their own country to obtain legal status. If these claims are found to be false, an expulsion from the country might be possible.

Common European Asylum System

The Common European Asylum System (CEAS) is the European regulation tasked with determining if the conditions for asylum of one applicant are met. It provides guidelines concerning the treatment of asylum applications, as well as for the rights of refugees that have obtained protection. Basically, the asylum system in the European Union is shared between the various member states. Asylum conditions are however still different depending on the state, factor that might push some into requesting protection it in a particular country instead than another.

Two very important pillars of the CEAS are the Dublin Regulation and the EURODAC database. Shortly, the first one serves the purpose of determining which state is going to be responsible for the treatment on an asylum application, while the second one is a shared database of fingerprints meant to easily identify applicants. I will describe these two aspects of the CEAS more in detail in this section. It is however important to note, that the only legal way for an asylum seeker to fill an application in Europe is to reach the border of a European country. Asylum cannot be asked from abroad.

The Dublin Regulation

As previously stated, the Dublin regulation determines the member state that will take care of one's asylum request. Even if it is not stated clearly in the law, the state responsible is also the one of first entry into the European Union (Kasparek, 2016a, p. 62). The Regulation has undergone various modifications[7], but find its origins in the creation of the Schengen Convention of 1990. The convention established the Schengen Area, a space of free-circulation inside the borders of EU states. The lack of internal controls is an important aspect to understand the Dublin Regulation: the focus is shifted on the protection of the external border of the European Union, and the regulation serves the purpose of avoiding the so called "asylum-shopping" (choosing the preferred state where to ask asylum). The convention is therefore effective in "*prohibiting the free movement of asylum seekers within the Schengen Area*" (Kasparek, 2016a, p. 62).

[7] - The details of the changes are not of particular importance in this context. What is today still known as Dublin Regulation however, finds its origins in the Dublin Convention of 1990. It was replaced in 2003 by the Dublin II Regulation and in 2013 by the Dublin III Regulation. I will simply refer to it as Dublin Regulation, or just Dublin.

An important aspect in the Dublin Regulation is its application of the “safe third country”. Since all member states of the European Union are declared as safe countries (no matter what their conditions of asylum), deportations to the first country of entry are allowed without being against the non-refoulement principle stated by the Geneva Convention (Kasparek, 2016a, p. 63). Application of the “safe third country” principle can also be seen in other agreement done by the European Union, such as the EU-Turkey Statement: deportation of migrants from Greece to Turkey would not violate the non-refoulement principle as Turkey is declared as a safe country.

For further understanding the situation on the Balkan Route and in Greece that I will describe in the following part, it has to be noted that Greece has been excluded from the Dublin Regulation in 2011 (Kasparek, 2016a, 2016b). This has therefore stopped deportations of migrants that were first registered in Greece when detected in another country of the European Union.

EURODAC

To complement the Dublin Regulation, the EURODAC database has been created in 2003. This database contains the fingerprints of asylum seekers registered inside the European Union and it is shared by all state members. It effectively makes the application of Dublin much easier, as fingerprints are a clear and unique identification of one person. When applying for asylum in the European Union, fingerprints are a mandatory requisite for migrants, as well as a photograph used for facial recognition. It not only serves the purpose of first identification of asylum seekers, but also the one of re-identifying them in a second time, in case of a re-application for asylum in another member state, becoming therefore a tool to enforce Dublin (Scheel, 2013). Changes in the EURODAC database were applied in July 2015, generating important critiques from human rights' associations. In fact, if previously the database was used only for asylum purposes, the changes of June enable its use by police forces to identify the authors of a crime. This change worries human rights' associations for the dangerous association between asylum seekers and criminals (Dernbach, 2015).

Other critiques of the EURODAC system are linked to the eventuality of the refusal to give one's fingerprints when reaching a EU state. The European Commission recommendations of the 15th of December to create the legal framework in Italy to use force for fingerprinting migrants are one example of possible violation of human rights dictated by the necessities of EURODAC and Dublin (European Commission, 2016a).

Frontex

With the creation of the Schengen Area and the CEAS, control of the external borders of the European Union became a crucial factor to manage the entrance of people in the various states. To be able to enforce the various regulations concerning migrations in the European Union, Frontex – or the European Agency for the Management of Operational Cooperation at the External Borders – was created in 2004. It can be seen as a common European border agency, with the main tasks of controlling the migratory flows coming into the European Union. Apart from deploying border guards and surveillance technologies to detect illegal entries, Frontex effectuates screening of documents, fingerprinting and identification of migrants as well as using interpreters to verify the declared nationality and the validity of travel documents (Frontex, n. d.).

I will here discuss some of the major operations of Frontex aimed at reducing the arrivals of unwanted migrants: Poseidon, Triton, and the Italian operation Mare Nostrum. These operations comported the deployment of land, naval and aerial means to intercept migrants' boats in the Mediterranean Sea and register the arrivals once landed. The objectives of the operations are veiled in humanitarian terms, with an accent on their rescue effort to save migrants at sea. This is however criticized, as their real scope can also be interpreted in controlling the migration and discouraging further arrivals with increasingly militarized border practices (Aas & Gundhus, 2015).

Poseidon

Operation Poseidon was launched in 2006 with the objective of patrolling the Aegean Sea to prevent boats from landing on Greek islands, controlling the land border between Greece/Bulgaria and Turkey, performing registration and eventually the return of people (European Union, 2016). It was replaced at the end of December 2015 by Poseidon Rapid Intervention operation to tackle the increased influx of migrants seen in the second part of the year. While covering basically the same tasks, the new operation saw an increased number of personnel deployed to patrol the waters and enhanced screening capacity of migrants on Greek islands (Frontex, 2015). The mission was supported by NATO vessels starting from February 2016, effectively militarizing the operations of migration management.

Mare Nostrum and Triton

Operation Mare Nostrum started in October 2013 by the initiative of the Italian government. The aim of the mission was to control the waters of the Strait of Sicily with two main purposes: "*safeguarding human life at sea, and bringing to justice human traffickers and migrant smugglers*" (Ministero della Difesa, n. d.). The objectives stated by the operation are only humanitarian, and while many lives were indeed saved during its period of activity, it is also true that the same time frame registered a new record of deaths at sea. The mission was criticized for its alleged pull factor on migrants (Death by Rescue, n. d.). Mare Nostrum was terminated one year after its deployment, the 31 of October 2014. At the same time, operation Triton started, this time led by Frontex. The accent of Triton is more on border management and surveillance and less on search and rescue operations. The introduction of this new mission and the end of Mare Nostrum did not result in a reduction of the arrivals, and in the years 2015/16 the number of migrants that died in the Mediterranean kept growing. This led to critiques of the reduction of search and rescue operations with the end of Mare Nostrum and the introduction of Triton.

Fortress Europe and the protection of the European Union external borders

The registration processes part of the CEAS, as well as the creation of Frontex and its operations are the main factors that led to the view of the European Union as a fortress difficult to penetrate for unwanted migrants. In the light of my research, the registration procedure, as well as the various operations in the Aegean Sea and the Greek/Bulgarian borders with Turkey, aimed at reducing the arrivals are very important factors. During the development of the Balkan Route as seen in 2015/16, there has been an exception in the functioning system of the Dublin Regulation, with migrants being registered in Greece at their entrance in the European Union, but then continuing to other member states. The registration process was repeated in Croatia and in the following countries, but Dublin deportations have not been applied to everyone.

Serbian Asylum System

In 2007, the first Serbian asylum law was introduced, under the name of Law on Asylum of the Republic of Serbia (Zakon o azilu Republike Srbije. Serbia: Law of 2007 on Asylum, 2007), but started to be applied only from the 1st of April 2008 (IOM, n. d.-a, p. 46). This law is added to the 2002 Law on Refugees, which specifies the rights and obligations of refugees, but does not consider any procedure for obtaining this status in Serbia (Serbia: Law on Refugees, 2002). This was mandated to the UNHCR until 2008, and with the new law is transferred to the hands of the Ministry of Interior (MoI).

The law of 2008 serves the purpose of defining "*principles, conditions and procedure for the granting and cessation of asylum, as well as the status, rights and obligations of asylum seekers and persons granted the right to asylum in the Republic of Serbia"* (Article 1, Law On Asylum, 2007). Moreover, it gives a precise definition of refugees based on the Article 1.A.2 of the 1951 Convention on the Status of Refugees, and specifies another modality of protection (subsidiarity protection). Other important points added are those of third country of asylum and safe country of origin (for these concepts Serbia specifically created a list of countries in 2009. Belgrade Centre for Human Rights, n. d.-a), as well as the one of non-refoulement. Interesting for the further analysis are Article 7, "*In the asylum procedure in the Republic of Serbia, any discrimination on any grounds shall be prohibited, and in particular on the grounds of race, colour, sex, nationality, social origin or a similar status, birth, religion, political or other beliefs, financial standing, culture, language, age, mental, sensory or physical disability*" (p. 4), and Article 8, stating that "*An asylum seeker shall not be punished for unlawful entry or stay in the Republic of Serbia, provided that he/she submits an application for asylum without delay and offers a reasonable explanation for his/her unlawful entry or stay*" (p. 4).

Comprehensively, the asylum system in Serbia is in line with international regulations, and grants all the necessary rights to asylum seekers and refugees. Anyone - from any nationality or stateless - is allowed to file a request for asylum and follow the procedure. Asylum can be requested at the border or at any asylum centre, police officer and police station. The fact that entering the country illegally to file an asylum request is not seen as an offense is crucial to understanding the functioning modalities of the Balkan Route in its Serbian segment. During the registration for an asylum request, identity photos and fingerprints are taken. Moreover, after having expressed the intention to seek asylum in Serbia, there is the obligation of presenting oneself to an asylum centre within 72 hours.

Serbian asylum system is national and independent from other countries. Even if Serbia is starting the procedures to align its regulations in many fields to those of the European Union, it is not part of the Common European Asylum System. This means that Serbia is also excluded from the Dublin Regulation, a factor often valued and discussed by many migrants. During our conversations, many migrants told me "*Here it is good. I can apply for asylum and stay until I can leave for Europe. And then I can apply again for asylum there, no problem*".

Once the application for asylum is filled in, the applicant has the right to stay in an asylum centre, where he will be assigned to a room, receive free meals and have access to other services (e.g. kitchen, laundry...). Before the migratory wave of 2015-16, 5 asylum centres were available in Serbia for asylum seekers and refugees: Banja Koviljača, Bogovađa, Tutin, Sjenica and Krnjača, for a total of 1'060 places.

With the promise of enlarging the asylum capacity made at the Western Balkan Summit in August, temporary facilities were built in Preševo, Miratovac, Subotica, Kanjiža, Sombor, Šid, Adaševci and Principovac, bringing the total available places to ca. 3'700 (Kilibarda & Kovačević, 2016). The Serbian Commissariat for Refugees and Migration (KIRS) claimed a higher capacity of ca. 5'500 places, but also stated that most of them were empty and unused, except the one in Krnjača (just north of Belgrade). During the crisis (as confirmed in my interview with the KIRS; Annexes 2), the European Union donated funds to Serbia to improve reception of migrants. Only migrants in possession of a document stating their intention to seek asylum and identification papers which allow them to stay in these facilities. At the entry of the camp the migrant had to be registered and submit an application for asylum. This situation was changed over the time frame analysed in this research.

Second part – The Balkan Route

Short overview of the Balkan Route

Starting from June 2015, media attention started to focus on the situation in the Balkans and in Greece. Big numbers of migrants began to arrive in Greece, traveling by boat from the Turkish coasts. In June 2015, 31'318 people were registered on the Greek islands according to UNHCR (Figure 1). The numbers were steadily on the rise already from January 2015, when 1'694 people were registered, and more or less doubled every month. With the arrival of summer and easier travel conditions, the importance of this migratory movement caught the eye of authorities and population. In July 54'889 migrants landed in Greece, and the numbers kept growing: 107'000 in August, 147'000 in September, 211'000 in October. Thereafter, the figures started to shrink, but were still very high: 151'000 in November, 108'000 in December, 67'000 in January 2016, 57'000 in February, 26'000 in March. From March 2016 on, the situation became more stable, with only around 2'000 migrants per month arriving in Greece. The total of arrivals by sea in Greece in 2015 summed up to 856'723 people, 165'750 for 2016. There is no doubt, looking at the statistics, that this situation represents a very particular migration case.

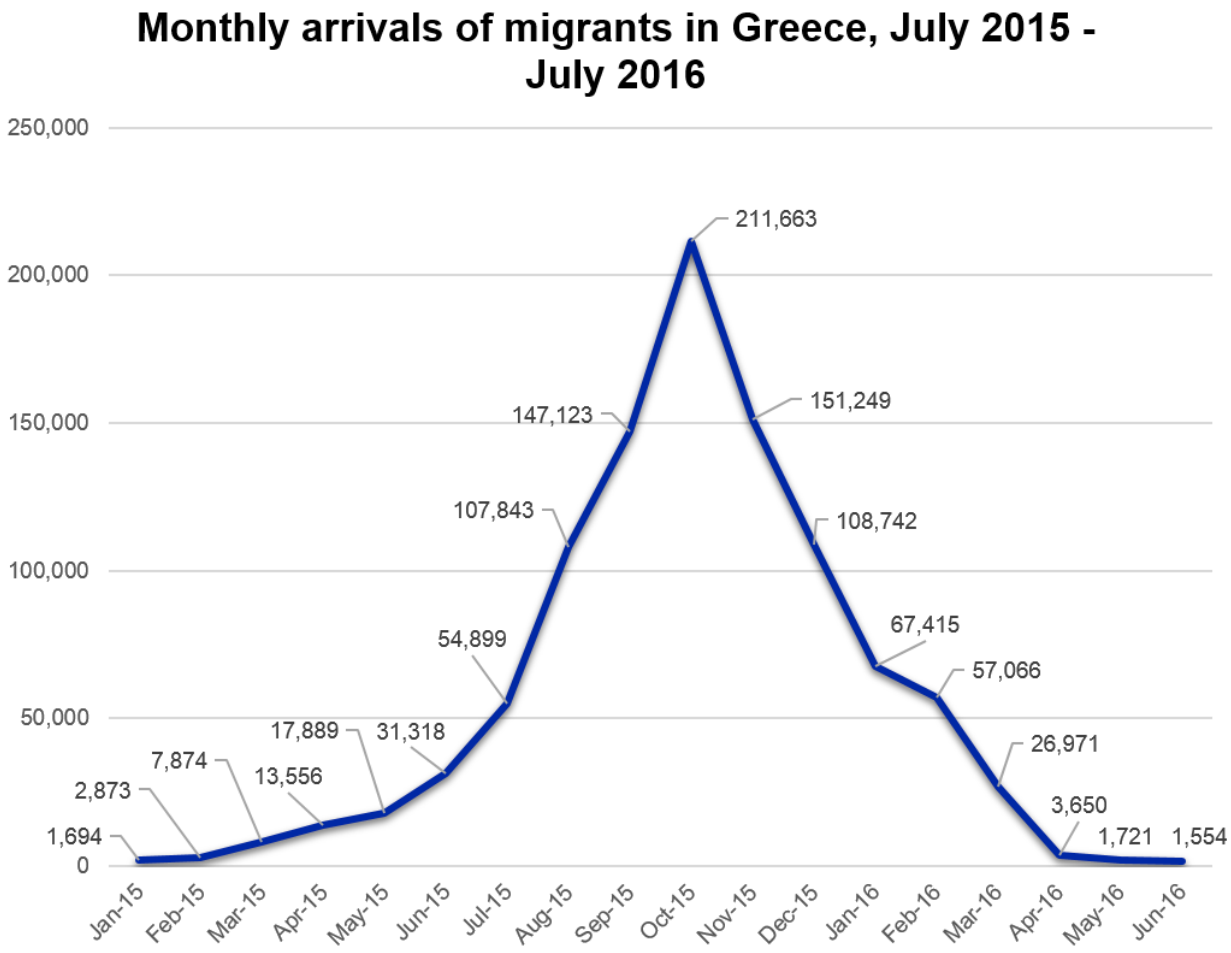


Figure 1: Monthly arrivals in Greece, July 2015-July 2016. Source: UNHCR.

All these migrants had no intention to stay in Greece, their preferred final destination being wealthy European countries (e.g. Germany, Sweden, France, UK). To reach them, they travelled on the so called Balkan Route. The most used itinerary in summer 2015 was going from Greece to fYRoM, then Serbia, Hungary and Austria. Alternatives consisted in using the land route crossing the Turkish-Bulgarian border, or avoiding fYRoM by entering Bulgaria to reach Serbia. Starting from September 2015, Hungary sealed its border with Serbia, forcing the migrants to find an alternative through Croatia. Being the Croatian-Hungarian border still open, the route continued for a while from Croatia to Hungary. From October 2015, Hungary sealed also its border with Croatia, pushing the migrants to pass in Slovenia in order to reach Austria. From March 2016, the Balkan Route has been declared closed by the states on its way. This means that there is no more accepted legal way for migrants to cross the Balkans, but many continue their journey, crossing green borders with the help of human smugglers and avoiding official controls.

Causes of the migration and nationality profile of the migrants

The primary causes of this migration can be found in open armed conflicts and increased insecurity in the home countries of the greater part of the people on the move. According to Frontex (2016), the majority of the migrants crossing the Balkans in 2015 were mainly from three countries: Syria, Afghanistan and

Iraq. Other important nationalities found were Iranians and Pakistanis. These five nationalities accounted for more or less 60% of the total. Astonishing is the number of migrants registered with unknown nationality, accounting for 28% of the total. Statistics from UNHCR for 2016 – counting only the arrivals in Greece – showed the same trend, with an even stronger presence of the first three nations: 48% for Syria, 25% for Afghanistan and 15% for Iraq (total of 88%. UNHCR, 2016a). The long conflict in Syria and Iraq pushed millions of people to flee the country to find refuge, most of them in Turkey and Lebanon (UNHCR, 2016b). Afghanistan is not in a better situation, with an open conflict going on since the invasion of the coalition in 2001 (and an even longer civil war, which can be seen as ongoing since the late years of 1970). Moreover, recent development in Iran – host of a vast number of Afghani nationals – can be an important push factor for them to leave (Frontex, 2016). While the reasons to leave reported by individual migrants were various, including avoiding military service, religious persecution, etc. pull factors can also be identified in the state organized transportation system that appeared on the Balkan Route since September, as well as the open border policy of some countries on the way (Frontex, 2016).

Development of the Balkan Route, June 2015-June 2016

In this section, I will provide a more detailed description of the events that happened on the Balkan Route in 2015 and 2016, using an official perspective. I will describe the development of the route in chronological order, and point out the main events and their consequences. From a spatial point of view, I will take into consideration both transit and destination countries.

From a humanitarian crisis to the development of a corridor

Discussions about the strategies to manage the situation started from the early months of summer 2015. With the measures of border control present at the time, it was very difficult – if not impossible – to control every migrant passing through the Balkans. fYRoM found itself on the first line, seen its geographical position in the North of Greece. On the 16th of June, fYRoM changed its asylum law, introducing the delivering of a 72 hours transit pass for migrants in order to cross the country (ACAPS, 2016; Frontex, 2016). The pass allowed people to board trains and other public transports, as well as using services such as hotels, legalizing their presence in the country. This was a first major change of policy from fYRoM: before this, entering the country without a valid visa was considered as an offense punishable by law. This juridical status pushed many into finding alternative routes, often walking along the train lines all the way to Serbia. Apart from deteriorating the conditions of the migrants, the difficulty of this route this route and the situation of invisibility caused the death of a number of them, killed by incoming trains, and exposed them to theft and kidnappings (Amnesty International, 2015; Navai, 2015; Frontex, 2016). Before the changes of June, migrants were supposed to declare their intention to seek asylum to the border police or at any police station. Many were imprisoned by Macedonian authorities from 2014 till June 2015 for illegally entering the country. Detention's conditions were difficult, with many reported mistreatments and human rights' abuses happening inside Macedonian prisons (Amnesty International, 2015). The border crossing located in the town of Gevgelija – in front of the Greek location of Idomeni – became the main entry point in the country. From there, a partially subsidized train was established to bring migrants to Tabanovce, a small town at the border with Serbia. The introduction of the transit pass – along with the establishment of a special train to bring migrants from the Greek to the

Serbian border – marked a first important change in the border regime of the Balkan Route, as well as the beginning of the state-led "humanitarian corridor".

The 17th of June 2015, Hungary announced the beginning of the construction of a fence at its border with Serbia to prevent illegal entries (Dunai, 2015). It was the first country that decided to take an obvious anti-migratory stance, and attracted considerable criticism. In contrast with the debordering operated by fYRoM, we assisted in this case to an increased militarization and control of the border. This was a first individual decision taken by a country to restrict access to migrants.

Serbian authorities reacted rather quickly to the increased number of arrivals. As a first step, they created a working group with the aim of solving the migratory situation (5th of June), and soon after they established a temporary reception and registration camp in Preševo, at the border with fYRoM (8th of July). Soon after, another reception centre was created between Preševo and the Macedonian border, in Miratovac (KIRS, 2016). At the same time, Serbian prime minister Aleksandar Vučić announced – as a response to the Hungarian decisions – that Serbia would have put in place stricter measures to prevent illegal immigration (Than & Vasovic, 2015). In some regards, the newly opened registration centres of Preševo and Miratovac could be seen as one measure in this sense: registration as asylum seekers allowed people to have a legal basis to enter Serbia. I am not however sure that this is what Vučić meant. The establishment of this reception centres shows as well a change of previously seen Serbian practices at the border: many migrants were reportedly pushed back to fYRoM in the previous months (Amnesty International, 2015). Increased registration capacity ensured an easier passage, and the establishment of these centres seems to go in the direction of an open border policy.

In Serbia, migrants were photographed, fingerprinted, went through a health control, and their belongings were checked for security reasons. Registration as asylum seekers at the border allowed people to enter Serbia, with the obligation of presenting themselves before 72 hours in an asylum centre to enter the refugee determination procedure. In practice – despite everyone declared their intention to seek asylum – only a few people actually entered the procedure, and the vast majority left the country without showing up at an asylum centre. Also in Serbia, there were no restrictions on who could enter the country and ask asylum.

Things started to move in Europe as well, as Germany announced on 25th of August that they were suspending the Dublin Regulation for Syrian nationals (Holehouse, 2015). This decision shows – as stated by Bojadžijev and Mezzadra (2015) – the real size of this migratory "crisis", which included not only Greece and Balkan countries, but the entire Europe and its institutions.

Another important decision coming from the European Commission was taken in September, with (along with other points) the introduction of a list of safe countries of origin including Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, fYRoM, Kosovo, Montenegro, Serbia and Turkey (European Commission, 2015). The declaration of Turkey as safe country of origin would allow the deportation of migrants to Turkey based on the concept of safe third country, important factor needed for the EU-Turkey Agreement (c.f. further).

The Balkan Route changed trajectory a first time on the 15th of September, when the fence between Serbia and Hungary was completed ("Hungary begins border crackdown", 2015). Hungarian authorities

announced stricter rules to enter the country, basically sealing the border to migrants. Other laws became effective, for instance making it a criminal offense to damage the border fence. This unilateral decision was widely criticized, in a moment when the number of migrants traveling towards Europe was very high (Figure 1). As a consequence, alternative routes had to be found. Migrants started to aggregate at the border with Croatia, demanding to enter. After a moment of hesitation, Croatian authorities started to let people in and directed them at the quickly built temporary registration camp of. Shuttle buses were organized between the camp and the border crossings of Berkasovo-Bapska and Šid-Tovarnik, with migrants not being allowed to travel by their own means. Seen the high number of people and the slow process of crossing the border, many migrants arrived in Opatovac in very poor conditions.

On the 24th of September, a new governmental decree was introduced in Serbia to create a differentiation between those willing to seek asylum and those with the intention to travel to another country[8] (Belgrade Centre for Human Rights, n. d.-b; Vučić, 2015). This presidential decision is similar to the one taken by fYRoM a few months before. It allowed for an easier control and communication of the number of arrivals to the next country, as well as legalizing the stay of migrants in the country for 72 hours. If this certificate was in the first place issued to everyone arriving at the border, later on – with the introduction of the SIA rule in November – only nationals of these three countries received it, while others had to declare their intention to seek asylum to be allowed inside the country. The transit document gave the same rights as the intent to seek asylum, and maintained the same time limit of 72 hours. The difference is that with the transit pass, migrants had to either leave the country in the given time period or present an asylum request, as opposed to the intention to seek asylum that asked them to present themselves in an asylum centre. Even if there is no official statement, owning this pass was a prerequisite to enter Croatia, fact that has caused problems to many that did not have it or waited too long (Belgrade Centre for Human Rights, n. d.-b). The introduction by Serbia of this pass seem to go in the direction of the establishment of a common system of registration of migrants on the Balkan Route. It can be read as a collaboration measure with neighbouring countries, which strengthened the establishment of a humanitarian corridor in the Balkans. Moreover, from November on it highlighted even more the distinction between SIA and non-SIA migrants. The transit pass stopped being issued on the 19th of February 2016 (Bordermonitoring Bulgaria, 2016), immediately after the joint collaboration meeting in Zagreb of police heads of the Balkan countries which signed the introduction of a different common system of registration (c.f. further).

After a month where the main route still passed through Hungary after Croatia, this border was also sealed the 15th of October following a decision of Hungarian authorities and the construction of a fence (Dunai & Vasovic, 2015). Migrants accumulated for a while in Opatovac, but with more and more people coming Croatian authorities had little to no choice but taking them to the next border, that is the one with Slovenia. Slovenian authorities also had little choice, and to avoid a humanitarian disaster they allowed migrants into the country and organized transportation to the Austrian border. The flow of migrants was therefore at this point relatively free, despite another change of route.

[8] - Translated from Serbian: “Decision on issuing a certificate of having entered the territory of Serbia for migrants coming from countries where their lives are in danger” (Odluka o izdavanju potvrde o ulasku na teritoriju Republike Srbije za migrante koji dolaze iz zemalja u kojima su njihovi životi u opasnosti)

On the 25th of October, the leaders of Albania, Austria, Bulgaria, Croatia, fYRoM, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Romania, Serbia and Slovenia, as well as the President of the European Parliament and the one of the European Council, met in Brussels. The goal was to discuss the current situation of migrants in the Balkans, and find solutions in cooperation with each other. This first meeting highlights even more the involvement of different regions and scales in this "crisis", as well as the necessity to manage the migration on the Balkan Route, showing a will to cooperate in that sense. This is clearly stated in the first lines of the final declaration: "*The unprecedented flow of refugees and migrants along the Eastern Mediterranean-Western Balkans route is a challenge that will not be solved through national actions alone"* ("Leaders' Meeting on refugee flows", 2015, p. 1, Annexes 4).

The accent of the final statement is clearly on the necessity of managing the migratory flow. It is clear by reading the final statement that free flow of migrants was not deemed acceptable, and therefore the states involved had to cooperate to "*slow down the flows*" ("Leaders' Meeting on refugee flows", 2015, p. 1).

The main points of interest in this statement are:

- The decision to constantly exchange information to facilitate the migrants' control;

- The necessity of managing the migration together, without individual decisions;

- The necessity of working on a solution including Turkey;

- The reinforcement or creation of Frontex operations in the Aegean Sea, Greek-Bulgarian, Greek-Macedonian, Greek-Albanian, and Serbian-Croatian border;

- The necessity to fight against human smugglers.

Frontex operations are reinforced on all the possible routes of the migration. At the end of October, the major route passed from Greece, fYRoM, Serbia, Croatia and Slovenia. The border with Turkey and Bulgaria was the obvious alternative to crossing the Aegean Sea. Bulgaria had already built a fence with Turkey when this big migratory wave was not yet started (Lyman, 2015), and Frontex agents participating in operation Poseidon were already patrolling that borderline. Still upstream, there is a focus on solving the migratory "problem" at its roots, that is in Turkey and Greece. Control of the sea by increasing the surveillance capacity of Poseidon is identified as one tool of management, but preventing people from leaving Turkey was also already seen as necessary (Turkey played a significant role in this migration, one that is sometimes not completely black and white: the impression is that they used the migrants as a leverage to obtain certain advantages, such as the liberalization of visas for its citizens. Licourt, 2016). Another crucial location in managing the flow is identified here in the border between fYRoM and Greece.

From managing the humanitarian crisis to managing the migrants

On the 19th of November, what was to become known as the "SIA rule" started to be applied by Slovenia, Croatia, Serbia and fYRoM. This rule simply stated that only migrants in provenance from Syria, Afghanistan and Iraq were allowed to register at the main border crossings and continue their journey. From now on, all other nationalities would have not been accepted on the Balkan Route. It is unclear who took the decision in the first place, and there is no official law being introduced that gives details on this

rule. It was however being applied *de facto* by fYRoM, Croatia and Slovenia, and in a different way by Serbia: they still allowed migrants to register at the border even if not part of the SIA group. The KIRS and UNHCR confirmed this version in my interview with them (Annexes 2, Annexes 3), stating that Serbian never denied entry to someone based on his nationality. They however did not issue the transit certificate to them, which therefore resulted in a denial of entry into Croatia. It was also still possible for migrants to register as asylum seekers in the police stations of the country.

The main consequence of this rule, apart from a fair reduction of the registered arrivals in fYRoM, Serbia, Croatia and Slovenia (Figure 2), was the accumulation of migrants at the Greek-Macedonian border, particularly in the location of Idomeni, where every day more and more people started to camp in the hope of being allowed to cross. Many manifestations for the opening of the border took place, with migrants sewing their lips and asking for a human treatment and open borders.

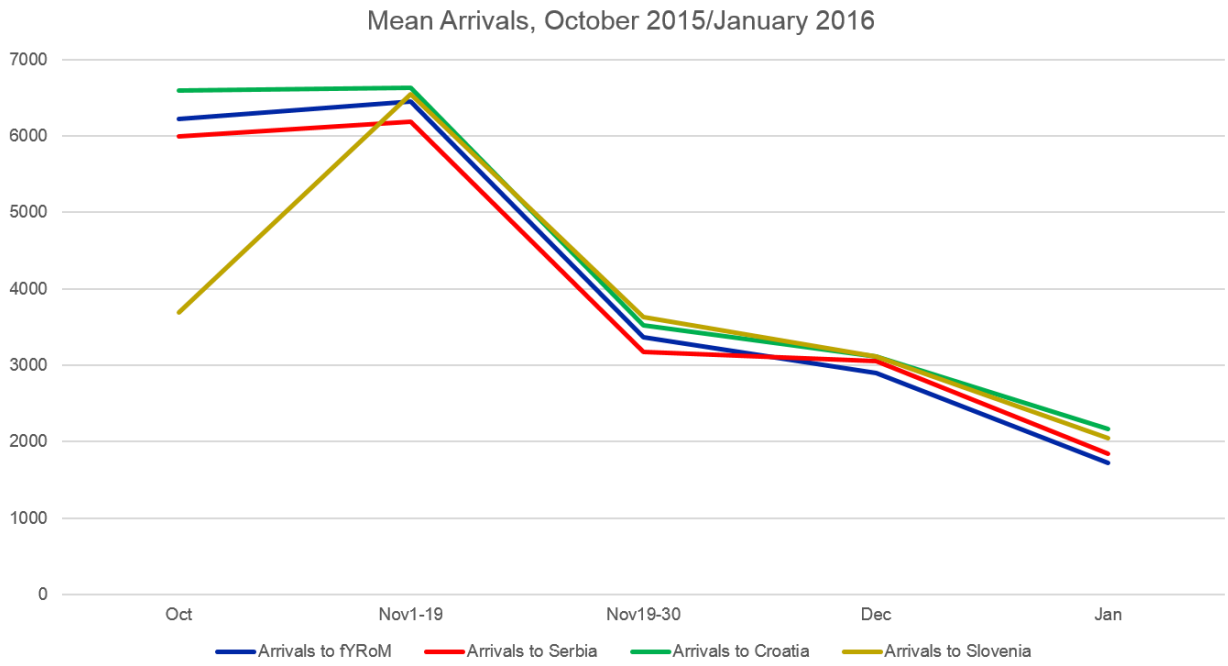


Figure 2: Mean daily arrivals, October 2015/January 2016. Source: UNHCR, 2016a.

Ten days after the introduction of the SIA rule, fYRoM – after reinforcing the presence of military and police at the Greek border – started the construction of a fence to prevent what it called "illegal" entries. This shows a clear will to keep out undesired migrants, and gives hints to the fact that free flow of people on the Balkan Route would have not come back as it was before. With the closure of the Hungarian-Serbian border, alternative routes were possible, but the situation in Greece and fYRoM was much different for a simple geographical reason: the border zone between Greece and Bulgaria has a mountainous topography, difficult to cross for migrants. This, coupled with the anti-migratory stance of Bulgarian authorities (which did not allow migrants to enter legally into the country), made fYRoM as the ideal and – for most migrants – only possible route. Other possibilities, such as crossing the sea to Italy or crossing directly from Turkey to Bulgaria were also not ideal, seen the dangers posed by the first option and the presence of a controlled fence on the above mentioned border.

The situation on the Balkan Route proceeded therefore with SIA individuals using it legally and other nationalities finding themselves stranded in Greece or using the services of human smugglers if they had the necessary economical means to pay them. The legal flow of SIA migrants – allowed to register at official border crossings – proceeded in a rather smooth way from fYRoM to Europe, using state organized transportation and therefore traveling at a fast pace. A second, slower flow of non-SIA migrants continued at a much slower pace, taking different routes and avoiding official registration. Two routes were therefore existing at that moment: the one of the SIA, following the fYRoM-Serbia-Croatia-Slovenia path, and the one of non-SIA, going from either fYRoM or Bulgaria (through green borders) to Serbia and Hungary.

The 18th of February, the heads of the police departments of Austria, Slovenia, Croatia, Serbia and fYRoM met in Zagreb to finalize the discussions on migration management started with a previous meeting in Skopje the 3rd of February. In the final statement, the intent to stop the migratory flow is clearly visible, as in the introduction they declare that "*[It] has to be reduced to the greatest possible extent*" (Kogler, Fank, Dominic, & Rebic, 2016, p. 1, Annexes 5).

To this declaration, a list of 15 points "*to improve cooperation in migration flow management*" (p. 1) follows. I will reproduce here some of the points I retain to be more significant:

"2. Each party will inform other parties on the route about all measures and restrictions to be introduced […]

3. For the purpose of standardisation of the migrant registration, the unified registration form has been adopted, which will be issued in the Republic of Macedonia as the country of first entry and correspondingly stamped by all police authorities of the countries on the route[...]

5. First entry will be authorised only to those persons who fulfil the conditions of entry laid down in the Schengen Borders Code and relevant national legislation (possession of a travel document, visa or residence permit, and other conditions if required). [...]

6. On humanitarian grounds, the entry of third country nationals may be authorised to those persons who do not fulfil the conditions referred to in point 5 […] but who are arriving from war-torn areas and are in need of international protection (for example from Syria, Iraq), provided that they can prove their nationality (they are in possession of identity documents or can prove their nationality by language proficiency, copies or scans of other identification documents), and are in possession of the registration form issued by Greek authorities. [...]

7. The parties to this Statement have established additional common criteria which are to be verified in the course of the registration in the following manner:

- the authenticity of statements and documents;

- the circumstances in which the person left the country of origin (for example fleeing the war is a valid reason for admission, while family reunification, studying, improving living conditions and personal disputes are not considered as valid reasons for applying for international protection);

- longer residence in a safe third country could not be considered as valid reason for international protection (for example Afghan national who resided for a longer time in Turkey or Iran). [...]

9. When allowing entry and transit, any other restrictions of destination countries will also be taken into account (for example current daily quotes).

10. […] The Heads of Police Services agreed that they will further support the competent authorities of the Republic of Macedonia in order to prevent the migration crisis. [...]" (Kogler, Fank, Dominic, & Rebic, 2016, pp. 1-2).

Given the circumstances on the Balkan Route at the moment of this statement, these are very interesting points. There is a clear focus on concentrating on fYRoM to manage the migration, as it represents a migratory bottleneck, where the flow of migrants can easily be controlled. This is in line with the construction of a second fence between fYRoM and Greece at the beginning of February ("Europe builds another wall", 2016). Moreover, many points cite the need for possession of documents to attest one's identity, but they are formulated in a vague manner. Shortly after the declaration, fYRoM border police started demanding an official ID to everyone that wanted to cross. Another rather shady point is the description of who will be allowed through the various borders. According to point 6, only those coming from war zones had to be allowed on the Balkan Route, but future events showed that *"for example Syria and Iraq"* (p. 2) became "only Syria and Iraq". Afghani were therefore excluded from the official track of the Balkan Route, meaning that their presence in the various Balkan countries was considered illegal if they were outside the asylum process, and they were not allowed anymore to cross the Greek-Macedonian and Serbian-Croatian borders. This signed the introduction of another restriction meant to further reduce the numbers of migrants, since Afghani represented an important share of the people traveling through the Balkans. Particularly important is the third point, describing the establishment of a common system of registration. This substitutes the previous transit passes of Serbia and fYRoM with a form accepted by the other Balkan states. The delivering of this form only at the entrance in fYRoM made the country as the only possible starting point of the corridor.

As for Serbia, after this declaration the Dimitrovgrad reception point at the Serbian-Bulgarian border stopped registering new arrivals. Migrants still entering Serbia in this location were diverted towards Preševo to go through the registration process.

Following the meeting of police heads in Zagreb, government officials of the countries touched by the migration (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, fYRoM, Montenegro, Serbia, Bulgaria as an observer, Croatia, Slovenia and Austria) met in Vienna on the 24th of February 2016 for the conference "Managing Migration Together". This cooperation meeting shows again the collaboration effort between Balkan countries to reduce the migratory flow on the Balkan Route, as well as the necessity of including the European Union as an important actor. Following the meeting, a twenty-one-point declaration was released. I will reproduce here the most important passages of this declaration:

"We, the Ministers of Foreign Affairs and the Ministers of Interior of Croatia, Slovenia and Austria (as host of the Conference) together with our colleagues from the Western Balkans 6 participating in the

Conference "Managing Migration Together" held in Vienna on 24 February 2016 in the presence of Bulgaria as an observer […]

RECOGNISING that although the situation regarding illegal migration and asylum differs widely, the current migration situation poses a considerable challenge to the entire region […]

AGREED on the following comprehensive approach: […]

2. Persons in need of international protection should receive protection as soon and as close to their countries of origin as possible. […]

4. The right to asylum does not include the right of applicants for international protection to travel onwards and choose a country of preference.

5. The migration flow along the Western Balkans route needs to be substantially reduced with a view to alleviating disproportionate burdens on the partners along the route. […]

8. Cooperation and mutual support at the borders in the region must be further intensified. This requires the establishment of common standards, in line with international and European law as well as national legislation, for the management of migration along the Western Balkans route, especially regarding registration (screening, document checks and fingerprinting), the conditions for refusal or permission of entry at the border – aiming at persons in clear need of international protection – and the further handling of migrants, including return or transition. We need to get back to a situation where all Members of Schengen area apply fully the Schengen Borders Code and refuse entry at external borders to third-country nationals who do not satisfy the entry conditions or who have not made an asylum application despite having had the opportunity to do so.

9. Persons without travel documents, with forged or falsified documents or migrants making wrongful statements about their nationality or identity will be refused entry at the border. […]

16. In order to reduce pressure on the region, cooperation with third countries will be intensified. A special focus at EU level should be put on implementing the EU-Turkey Joint Action Plan. At the same time, initiatives with other countries of transit or origin will also be supported. In order to help people in need of protection as close as possible to their country of origin, it is necessary to develop initiatives together with third countries close to conflict areas.

17. As migrant smuggling and trafficking in human beings might increase due to certain measures taken, efforts in these fields shall be increased and already existing or planned initiatives shall be put to best possible use. In this regard, the Joint Operation Office (JOO) in Vienna was mentioned. […]

21. Civil-military cooperation could also play an important role. The Ministers took note of the cooperation between the Austrian police and the Austrian Armed Forces in the field of border management" (Managing Migration Together, 2016, pp. 1-4, Annexes 5).

Following the exclusion of Afghani nationals from the official corridor of the Balkan Route and this second meeting of Balkan countries officials, the announced new restrictions started to be applied at the borders. Migrants in provenance from areas such as Baghdad, Aleppo and Damascus were denied entry due to

these cities being seen as safe areas, documents were declared as forged because of not matching translations from Arab to Latin characters, fleeing war was the only accepted reason to be allowed into the various borders and declaring another one resulted in a denial of entry, etc. (REACH, 2016a). This is a first, strong hint that the Balkan Route was soon going to be closed. Every day, police at the various borders seemed to invent new policies, with reports even indicating that some migrants were refused due to their documents being written with a black pen instead that a blue one (Managing Migration Together, 2016; REACH, 2016a).

These decisions are direct consequences of the two described meetings of Balkan countries officials: the "Managing Migration Together" conference in Vienna, and the meeting of police heads in Zagreb. They could be seen as a regional cooperation strategy aimed at reducing the migrants' flow on the Balkan Route. Critiques of these decisions came from the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein: "*In the wake of the adoption of these measures last week, the treatment of refugees and migrants moving through some of these countries already appears to have changed, with seriously negative implications for their human rights. […] this extraordinary agreement by police chiefs establishes a policy across five states that includes measures which seem to be incompatible with the human rights obligations of the countries concerned, all of which are bound by international human rights and refugee law. […] I am particularly troubled that the agreement appears to enable the collective expulsion of non-nationals, acts explicitly prohibited under international law […]*" (OHCHR, 2016). These measure effectively reduced migrants' mobility, creating once again accumulation of people at the Greek-Macedonian border, and forcing those who were refused entry into finding alternative routes. These routes were not following the official corridor, and forced migrants into invisibility, using smugglers to cross green borders. As a consequence, access to humanitarian help was also reduced, as it was not present on this alternative circuits.

From closure to immobility

On the 7th of March 2016, leaders of European Union and Turkey met to finalize the agreement on the return of migrants from Greece to Turkey. This meeting is a follow up of the discussions started on the 15th of October 2015 in Brussels, and continued on the 29th of November 2015. Various points were finally agreed, the deal was signed on the 18th of March and became effective the 20th of the same month.

I will report here parts of the EU-Turkey statement of the 18th of March, as well as the main points relevant for this research:

"In order to break the business model of the smugglers and to offer migrants an alternative to putting their lives at risk, the EU and Turkey today decided to end the irregular migration from Turkey to the EU. In order to achieve this goal, they agreed on the following additional action points:

1) All new irregular migrants crossing from Turkey into Greek islands as from 20 March 2016 will be returned to Turkey. […]

2) For every Syrian being returned to Turkey from Greek islands, another Syrian will be resettled from Turkey to the EU […] Priority will be given to migrants who have not previously entered or tried to enter the EU irregularly. […]

3) Turkey will take any necessary measures to prevent new sea or land routes for illegal migration opening from Turkey to the EU […]

5) The fulfilment of the visa liberalisation roadmap will be accelerated vis-à-vis all participating Member States with a view to lifting the visa requirements for Turkish citizens […]

6) The EU, in close cooperation with Turkey, will further speed up the disbursement of the initially allocated 3 billion euros under the Facility for Refugees in Turkey […]

9) The EU and its Member States will work with Turkey in any joint endeavour to improve humanitarian conditions inside Syria [...]" (European Council, 2016, Annexes 7)

It is interesting to note how the proposed alternatives to seek asylum are valid only for Syrian nationals, leaving all other nationalities without this possibility. Moreover, emphasis is given to the irregular character of this migration. The definition of who would have been considered as an illegal migrant at his arrival in Greece is however left without explanation. Emphasis is also given into keeping migrants in Turkey, ameliorating their conditions there, or in the countries of origin.

Soon after the decision on the agreement, fYRoM and the other Balkan countries announced the closure of their borders to migrants, dismantling the system of transport established a few months before. The end of the corridor going from the Balkans to Europe took place at midnight on the 8th of March 2016, and seems to be a direct consequence of the EU-Turkey Statement.

After the closure of the official corridor, the border between Greece and fYRoM was sealed permanently by Macedonian authorities for migrants willing to travel to Europe and not in possession of the necessary visas. The same principle was applied by Croatian authorities, which denied entry to migrants on the same basis. Serbian authorities however – despite removing the previously introduced system allowing migrants to stay in the country for 72 hours – kept giving the possibility to apply for asylum in the country to migrants reaching its borders. At the Serbian-Hungarian borders, migrants were allowed to enter Hungary but with very limited numbers: only twenty to thirty people per day, mostly families coming from Syria and Iraq. The reintroduction of normal border controls by the Balkan countries pushed migrants who had the possibility to pay human smugglers into crossing the various green borders to reach Europe.

Summary and conclusions

Not looking at the individual events but more broadly at the Balkan Route evolution, in the defined time frame, it is possible to divide it in different periods based on the border regime in place at that time. I identified four phases linked to the management of the Western Balkan Migration:

1 – June 2015/September 2015: humanitarian crisis. This first phase can be characterized by an absence of migration management (restrictions), relatively slow mobility of migrants, and harsh migration conditions. State organized transportation started to emerge in fYRoM, but migrants mostly had to travel using their own means. The humanitarian intervention was not yet completely developed, and migrants often had to find what they needed by themselves

2 – September 2015/November 2015: the corridor opens. In this second phase, state organized transportation got developed, signing the beginning of the "corridor" to bring migrants from Greece to

their preferred destination countries. A partially subsidized train was in place in fYRoM and Serbia, a free of charge one in Croatia and Slovenia. Restrictions imposed by Hungary caused a change of route, but not a reduction of the arrivals, that at the contrary reached the highest number in this period. The possibility for easier travel – given by the institution of special transports for migrants – the arrival of winter, and the fear of a soon to come closure of the route might have had an influence in this. We can consider this phase as one where the migration is only partially managed: if on one side there was still no categorization of migrants in groups allowed or not on the Route, on the other the creation of a corridor pushed mostly everyone on the same path, making registrations and controls easier for the various states.

3 – November 2015/March 2016: mixed flows. In this third phase, the emphasis was on managing the migration, and not anymore on helping the migrants and ameliorating their conditions. From a phase of humanitarian intervention, we enter in one of management. After the SIA rule, other minor restrictions and categorizations were applied to migrants to reduce their numbers and discourage their arrivals. Not anyone was allowed on the Balkan Route anymore, and those who were excluded from the official circuit found themselves forced into using alternatives, facing higher risks.

4 – March 2016/Ongoing[9]: closing the gate. In this fourth phase, the Balkan Route was declared closed. State organized transportation disappeared, emergency reception points were slowly closed and many humanitarian organizations ceased their operations. There were however still migrants traveling through the Balkans: these were forced into invisibility, trying to cross the various borders without being caught by state authorities. The reduction of the humanitarian effort meant for them more difficult living conditions and higher risks of abuses, as well as a much slower mobility. The management effort is now concentrated at controlling border lines, and not anymore on the migratory flux.

I will now look at the significance of these events in terms of Europe's changing border regime, i.e. how the progressive externalisation of migration control influenced migrant's il/legality and state sovereignty.

First, the progressive closure of the borders on the Balkan Route has caused many migrants to go from a status of legality to one of illegality. This is exaclty the meaning of "incremental closure": the introduction of sets of rules, that incrementally included previous categories of "legal" migrants into the one of "illegals". In other words, incremental closure means incremental exclusion of migrants from a status of legality. Therefore, illegality is a consequence of this closure, and not the cause of it. If we consider the international agreements protecting refugees, migrants have not been divided in categories based on valid arguments, but solely on a generalization of their perceived vulnerability, mainly based on their nationality[10]. An important point has however to be made: the SIA rule not being an official legislation – but simply a policy applied *de facto* at the border – talking about illegality is not completely correct. The reflection here should be made in terms of legitimacy (as for the SIA group), and illegitimacy (non-SIA). This created a division of the migratory flow, with some migrants being considerate as acceptable and legitimate asylum-seekers, and others not. This segmentation was operated by Balkan countries, in transit spaces where migrants did not want to stay: there is therefore an outsourcement of border control from

[9] - At the time of writing, January 2017.

[10] - Further restrictions introduced in February are even less justifiable, as clearly stated by Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein (OHCHR, 2016).

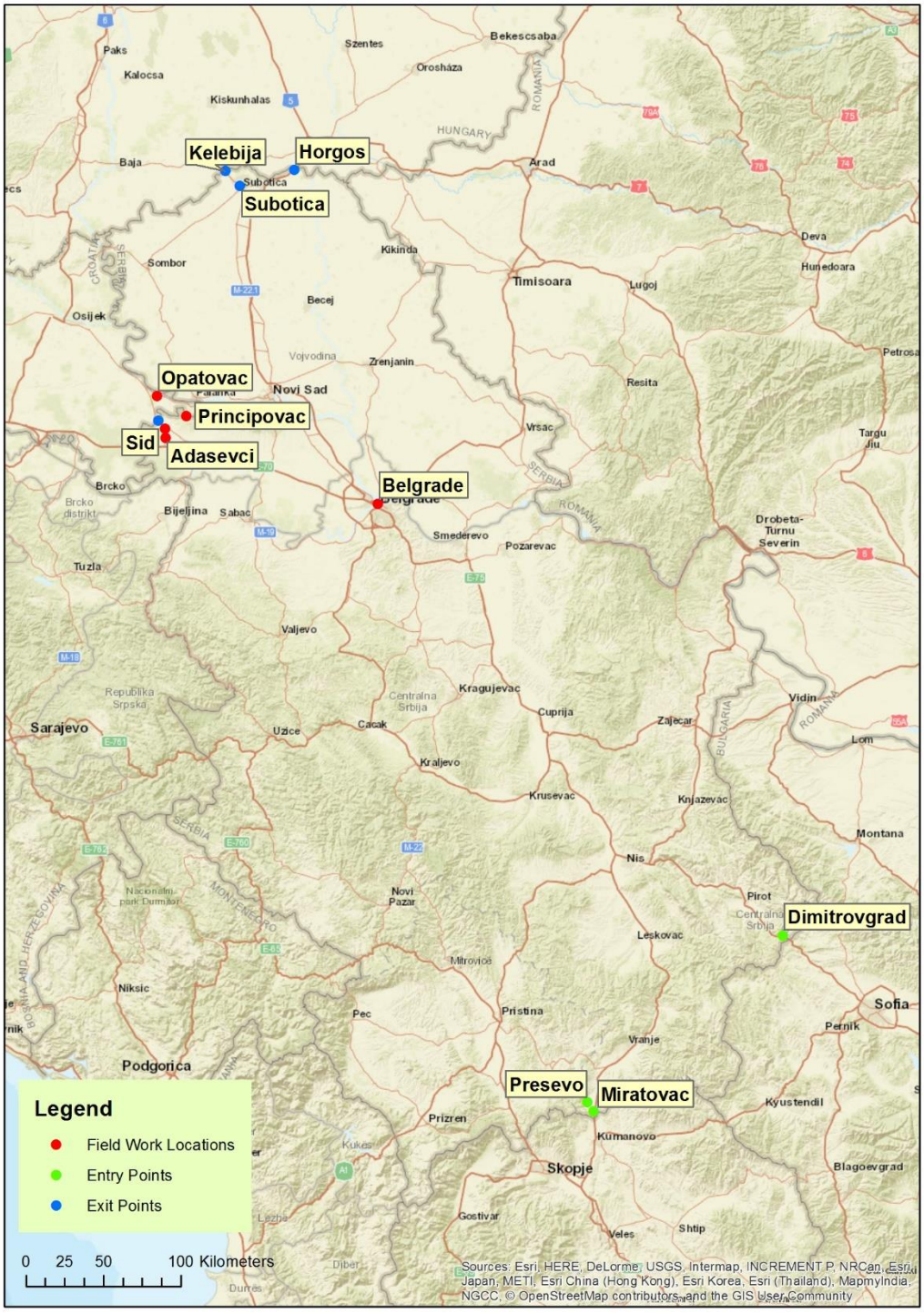
the part of destination countries (i. e.: the European Union). Moreover, the border regime is dictated by the will to control immigration: the mentality applied, shape categories of legitimacy or not-legitimacy, acceptability or non-acceptability of migrants. These become categories of il/legality when legislations are imposed. The influence of the European Union in creating categories of legitimacy in the border management of the Balkan countries is clear.

A second point concerns borders: they have been modified and shaped, they have moved: the border line of the European Union is now somehow extended to Turkish coasts, but finds its representation also in the border regime applied by Macedonian, Serbian and Croatian authorities. This extension can be read in terms of sovereignty: by accepting to enforce the border regime decided by the European Union, these states delivered part of their sovereignty of their space. The Hungarian decision to build a fence however, goes in another direction: the rules of its border regime being impossible to enforce due to migrants' pressure in Summer 2015, this decision – that illegalizes migrations *in toto* – re-instates state's sovereignty on Hungarian territory. Serbia, constitutes an ambiguous case in this regard: while controlling the flow of migrants recognized as legitimate by all states involved, they also re-legitimized and re-legalized most of those knocking at its door, affirming the sovereignty on their space. But, what if this is not the case? What happened can be read in other terms: the extension of European migration control is reflected on the enforcement of border management in fYRoM, Bulgaria, Greece, and Turkey. To some extent, Serbian border regime became an extension of the European asylum system by accommodating the "illegitimate", non-SIA migrants that managed to sneak through the net of control represented by restrictive migratory policies and militarization of the border line in Turkey, Bulgaria, and Macedonia. Two things seem to indicate this extension: the Serbian policy of application of the agreements on refugees stated by the Refugee Convention of 1951[11], as well as the decision (taken in agreement with other countries at the Western Balkan Summit of August 2015[12]) to increase the asylum capacity of the country. These two factors created a sort of humanitarian/asylum space in the middle of the Balkans. However, while Serbia received funds from the European Union in order to improve the reception's conditions of migrants, the permissive border regime of the country seems to be only the product of the decision making of the government, making the Serbian ambiguous and difficult to interpret.

All things considered, the borders move, are extended and stretched, but the territory of the states maintains its importance. It seems to me that there is a certain specialization of migration control and asylum that is created using the territory of sovereign states.

[11] - I. e. the possibility for every applicant to enter the asylum procedure. In other words: "open borders".
[12] - See my interviews with the KIRS.

CHAPTER TWO: ETHNOGRAPHY OF THE BALKAN ROUTE



To answer the research questions and to directly observe the situation, I spent various months in different locations in the Balkans. The choice of these locations was not always depending on my will, but based on the need for volunteers at a given moment and the presence of contacts. The main field work took place in Belgrade, capital of Serbia and one of the main hubs for migrants on the Balkan Route. The other visited locations are the temporary registration camp of Opatovac in Croatia (near the border with Serbia) and the small town of Šid, located in Serbia on the other side of the border compared to Opatovac.

In this part I will describe what I did during my fieldwork, my observations and thoughts and the countless conversations I had with migrants and people involved with them. There were many interesting things that happened during my field work, but a few of them stand out:

- The conditions of migrants ameliorated from my first visit in Croatia (October 2015) until my last one in Serbia (June 2016). While at the beginning it was a serious humanitarian crisis, at the end, while migrants still needed help, they seemed to be in a better shape;
- The Route was clearly dissected in two: the one of the SIAs, and the one of the others. The first was much faster than the second one and followed different trajectories. For non-SIAs, the Croatian border was not an option to cross in Europe, they often stopped in Belgrade for a few days before trying to pass at the Hungarian border. SIAs used the corridor fYRoM-Austria, with an exception for Afghanis, that I often observed in Belgrade, and reported their arrival in Serbia through Bulgaria;
- In contrast with what I saw in Croatia, the mobility of migrants was in Serbia much more free. The police were mainly concentrated on the corridor, registering migrants at the entry points of Dimitrovgrad and Preševo, and filtering out non-SIAs at the exit point in Croatia. In Belgrade, police presence to control migrants was not noticeable;
- With my experience in Belgrade and Adaševci, I observed differences in the profile of migrants: the presence of women, children, and elderly was noticeably higher in Adaševci (and therefore in the SIA group). In contrast, many non-SIAs in Belgrade were young men;
- Crossing through Bulgaria, as well as detention in its prisons, was always described as an incredibly bad experience by migrants. They often reported mistreatments by police and citizens, lack of food, and being at the mercy of weather conditions. In contrast, many migrants reported of linking Serbia and the way they were treated there.

First part – Accessing the field and view on the humanitarian crisis

The decision to go to Croatia to spend some time in the refugee camp of Opatovac came even before I clearly decided that I wanted to write my Master thesis about the migration on the Balkan Route. After months of reading newspapers' articles on the situation of migrants in the Balkans – observing the situation from afar with great interest – I took contact with Julianne Funk, my former professor of "Religious Conflict and Peacebuilding in the 21st Century" in the faculty of Political Science. She suggested to spend some time in the field without further organization and thought, according to the principles of grounded theory, and provided me with good contacts of people working with migrants in various locations. I chose Opatovac as my first location to visit for a couple of reasons: the possibility to find accommodation in the nearby city of Osijek (in the rooms of the Evangelical Theological Seminary (EVTOS) where a few people were volunteering in the camp), and the important role played by this camp as first

entry point into the country. I first arrived in Zagreb and tried to contact different organizations that I knew were present in Opatovac, but received no answers. Accessing the field as an independent volunteer seemed at the time a difficult task, but I decided to head towards Osijek and try again there.

The first day at EVTOS, I met with a PhD student at the seminary and volunteer in the camp since its opening (Annexes 1, "Volunteer in Opatovac camp"). He explained to me how the migrants were from many different nationalities, but most of them came from Syria, Afghanistan and Iraq. According to him, the different in wealth between Syrians and other nationalities created at times considerable tensions, with the first accusing the latter to steal. After describing the route that migrants generally used (Turkey-Greece-fYRoM-Serbia), he explained how often they had to wait a long time at the Croatian-Serbian border, and because of this (plus the rest of the journey), they often arrived at the camp very tired and in bad health. After the camp they were brought by bus to the Hungarian border, he explained. We subsequently discussed the possibility for me to volunteer, and he pointed out how it was difficult for independent volunteers to enter since the police did not want too many people looking around. As I found out later by myself, another point raised was the difficulty of being personal involved with people in such difficult conditions.

Following the discussion with him, I decided to present myself at the offices of a local organization of volunteers that had teams in the camp, Volonterski Centar Osijek (VCO). They gladly accepted me, and the day after, the 13th of October 2015, at 07.30am I was in the camp. Registration as a volunteer was not necessary for the first day, even if theoretically every person entering the camp was supposed to wear an identification card. During all my stay there, police enforcement of identity control for volunteers was rarely seen and easily avoidable. I anyway got my registration card on the second day, and had to sign a paper for VCO stating that I was not previously convicted for violent crimes. Even if entering the camp as a volunteer finally revealed itself an easy task once being present in place, registration of volunteers and NGOs workers changed at a later time in Croatian camps, with background checks from Europol being performed on every person demanding access.

The camp Opatovac

The camp of Opatovac was built in just a few days, after the 15th of September 2015 Hungary stopped accepting migrants at its border with Serbia. The goal of the camp was being a first reception point in Croatia, tasked with registering migrants and offer first help and humanitarian assistance. It had the capacity to host up to 5'000 people, and was heavily controlled by police forces with logistic support from the army (such as trucks for communications and electricity generation). Migrants were arriving in Opatovac from the nearby Serbian border, using buses organized by Croatian authorities. The two border points used to cross at that moment were located in Berkasovo-Bapska (respectively Serbian and Croatian side of the border) and in Tovarnik, both about 10 kilometres away from Opatovac.

At the beginning of the procedure to enter the camp, migrants had to queue at a first line of gates, where they waited for their turn to enter the registration tents. There, an identity check was performed, a photo and fingerprints were taken, their belongings controlled, and migrants had to fill a questionnaire over their origin and destination. In general, everyone was registered and sent into the camp. This knowledge of the registration procedure does not come from direct observation, as I was not allowed into the

registration tents, but was gathered through conversations with migrants, volunteers and workers. This process was relatively slow, and people had to wait in line sometimes for hours. Volunteers and NGOs distributed basic goods in these queues, mainly to children, families and people in obvious need. All the others had to wait to get inside the camp in order to receive food, clothes, and access other services. I have personally observed preferential treatment for vulnerable people: elderly, women with small children and sick people were often picked out from the queues and allowed inside before the others. In other moments, when the affluence was massive, this was not true anymore, especially for sick people. Once the registration process was carried out, migrants were allowed inside the camp. Generally, one blanket was distributed at the entrance (provided by UNHCR or other donors), but depending on their availability this wasn't always the case.

The camp was divided in four sectors, three main ones and an auxiliary. This allowed to fill one sector, provide for the basic needs for the people while filling up another one, empty the first sector, cleaning it and repeat. According to the authorities, no one was supposed to stay in the camp for more than eight hours, but the time of stay varied greatly, with groups leaving after as short as one hour, and others blocked there for over twelve. The main sectors where all equipped with a tent for food distribution and one for clothes. Food was provided only when the sector was full and was generally composed of a choice between canned sardines or chicken paste, bread and fruits. The clothes tents were open depending on the availability of volunteers, and mainly distributed donations coming from organizations or single citizens. Essential sanitary equipment was present, and while waiting to leave the camp people could stay in basic tents and try to rest.

Overall, conditions in the camp were pretty poor despite great effort from everyone there. The tents provided shelter against rain and wind, but that was basically it. Only a few of them initially had pallets on the floor, and with the rainy weather conditions of the moment they quickly became very muddy and sometimes half flooded, causing many migrants to just wait outside and refuse to enter. Moreover, despite the effort to collect all the trash, a lot of it was still around, contributing to the overall difficult conditions.

Croatian police were in charge of deciding who was leaving the camp and when. This was apparently discussed together with Hungarian authorities to provide easier transfer and the border, as the main route at the time was still going through Hungary (UNHCR, n. d.). Once the green light was given to empty one sector, migrants had to first line up (sometimes for a long time), they were counted by the police and then boarded into buses (provided by the government, free of charge) and directed to the Hungarian border. There, according to the police and other volunteers in place, the registration papers provided by Croatia was demanded to enter the country. Another system of transport was organized by Hungarian authorities to take the migrants and redirect them towards Austria and their final destinations.

Living conditions in the camp were pretty bad, and everyone knew that. From the first minute inside the camp it was very clear that humanitarian assistance was struggling under the massive amount of migrants arriving. The lack of personal hygiene – together with the waste created by so many people passing into the camp everyday – created a strong smell that tended to stick on clothes and was difficult to take away. The words "humanitarian crisis" had for me a much more real meaning.

The first morning, I helped reorganizing donations. They were coming from many different sources, and were often so mixed up that organizing them for easier distribution took a long time. Weather conditions were good and the number of migrants was easily manageable with the size of the camp. Later in the afternoon, I stayed in a tent to distribute clothes and everything proceeded smoothly.

The situation changed quickly in the days after: weather conditions deteriorated but the number of arrivals stayed about the same. A team leader from VOC explained to me that migrants were ordered to wait at the Serbian border, apparently to channel their entrance and pull some of the pressure of the camp. This version, besides being seen in the previously described conversation with the volunteer, with the was later confirmed in an interview I had with UNHCR Serbia in June 2016. During the interview, the difficulty caused by influx of migrants at the border crossing of Berkasovo-Bapska came up: normal traffic at the official crossing was blocked for a few days. Moreover, according to the interviewed Croatian authorities, in accord with the Serbian ones, decided to let people in according to the reception potential of the camp in Opatovac, while humanitarian organizations had to offer support at the border. Meanwhile, UNHCR was charged of identification of the most urgent cases (e. g. women with small children, sick people). These were allowed priority crossing of the border.

Even with the regulated number of migrants allowed in by Croatian authorities at the not too far border with Serbia, the bad weather rendered the situation in the camp more complicated. Temperatures also decreased, and many migrants were sick and in need of medical assistance. The third day, I was asked by a police officer to escort one young Afghani who had lost his family to the tent of the Red Cross, which was present also with their "Restoring Family Links" program. This was standard procedure: when someone lost a family member or asked to be seen by a doctor, a volunteer had to be there to escort them to the right tent, wait, and then bring them back to the same section of the camp to which they had been assigned. This gave me the occasion to talk with him while we waited (Annexes 1, "Afghani boy"). He explained to me how he had lost his family at the border with Serbia: he was allowed through before the others because of a bad infection at the leg that required urgent medical assistance, while his family had to wait. After he finished giving the details of his family to the Red Cross, he sat to wait in a nearby tent in place for these cases. I later found him, reunited with his family, but his case was not an isolated event. Many other – while crossing the border between Serbia and Croatia – lost contact with the people they were traveling with. I witnessed a similar situation in my last day in the camp, where me and another volunteer were given the photos of a mother and her children in order to find them in the camp and reunite them with the father. They were separated at the border when preferential passage was given to the wife and children. These two examples give an idea of how chaotic the situation was at the nearby border. More knowledge of the situation at the Serbian-Croatian border and a confirmation of this situation came later in January 2016, during my fieldwork in Adaševci. A team leader of the Czech Team – the small organization I was volunteering with – was one of the firsts to offer help at that border. He compared the situation to October in 2015, when things were more "chaotic": (Annexes 1, "Czech Team coordinator 1")

"When they opened the new registration camp in Slavonski Brod [c.f. further] things changed. Now they can take the train, they can wait here in the meantime … everything is more organized. But back in October

it was chaos. You where there, you remember. The rain, wind. Most of the people did not even had shoes. They were desperate".

During my last night in Opatovac, rumours started to spread about migrants coming on foot towards the camp. *"They opened the gates, they do not wait for the buses anymore and people come by foot to the camp! Wait a few hours and you will see, it is going to be a tough night, my friend"*, a doctor working for the Red Cross told me. And that is exactly what happened. The camp was completely full, and soon the police started to tell everyone, in every sector, that they had to get ready to leave. One or two hours after, the camp was empty. We went outside on the street to check the situation and soon we could see large numbers of people walking towards the camp, with the police blocking the road to traffic, probably to prevent accidents. Large queues formed at the entrance and at the registrations tents, and we were called to distribute blankets at the gates. A large group of women and children was sent forward, and I was asked – along with a few other volunteers - to take them to the sector assigned to them. Once there, some refused to enter the tents due to the very poor hygienic conditions inside and the lack of light. They were lucky to be the first there, and we tried to convince them to stay inside, with discrete success. Back at the gates, one man was standing slightly beside the big crowd, looking very calm. His hands were blue and he was completely wet. I went to talk with him and give him a cover, as he obviously needed one. He was in serious distress, completely confused and seemed like he did not understand what was going on. He kept insisting he needed shoes, and only that. Many of the others were not in a better situation, there was not much we could do. The situation continued all evening, and was basically the same when we left at the end of our shift soon after midnight. Around 8'000 migrants arrived at Opatovac camp that night.

Overall, the camp was well structured, with many volunteers, NGOs and state organizations present to offer help and register people, but the conditions of migrants were bad because of the lack of adequate resources to help everyone, and made much worst due to the limiting of entry numbers at the border. Food distribution was poorly organized, the hygiene situation dire, clothes distribution too slow, resources from Red Cross to reunite family members were insufficient, the number of doctors as well, etc. Despite this – or maybe exactly because of this – I observed an incredible amount of humanity among the workers: migrants, volunteers, workers of NGOs and even the police. Everyone was going over their limits to help. Many volunteers stayed for more than one shift in a row (each shift being eight or even twelve hours, depending on the organization), migrants who could speak good English voluntarily helped with translations, and sometimes even policemen went against direct orders in order to help someone. For instance, I have observed a police officer going against the orders of his superior to reunite a mother and child with the father, who was put in another sector: he opened a gate and let the father out, with his superior screaming at him from a few meters away. However, at times there was also considerable tension. Migrants were accusing each other of stealing, of having jumped the line or for other reasons. One of them was even stabbed one night and had to be brought to the hospital. In these occasions police were intervening with a certain brutality, entering the concerned sector and forcing people inside the tents. Due to the cold and the lack of heated tents, people were at times burning whatever they could find (mostly rubbish), generating a black and dense smoke that made breathing difficult and forced the police to intervene to extinguish them.

This was the situation in the camp, a real humanitarian crisis, and everyone was aware of that. It is definitely one of the aspects that touched me the most and gave me the motivation to continue in what I was doing. All the story that happened there are fixed in my mind, like they happened yesterday. Even now, months after, when writing and thinking about Opatovac, it is difficult to control emotions and feelings about it. Dealing with human tragedies has proven to be a not so easy task throughout my entire fieldwork. Being in constant contact with people who have suffered a lot and are still living the trauma is a constant challenge, and somehow it still is now, at the moment of writing these lines.

Opatovac: main findings

As previously mentioned in numerous occasions, beside the working system of the camp, a very important aspect of the migratory situation at that time is the high number of migrants following the Balkan Route, and the direct consequences of this on their physical and psychical conditions. State transportation was present inside Croatia, but not in Serbia. It was the beginning of what we could refer to as a "humanitarian corridor", with interventions by the state in order to restrain the incoming flux of migrants into one, precise and predetermined route. The registration process was a crucial reason for the camp to exist, reflecting the need of control by Croatian authorities, linked to European pressure to ensure registration and fingerprinting of every migrant into EURODAC. However, this process increased waiting times, with serious negative consequences for the health of migrants. We could also see the symbiosis between state management of migration and humanitarian assistance to the migrants. The first needs the second one to exist (Agier, 2013). Shortly after my visit, Croatian authorities announced the construction of a new, larger camp, to be located in Slavonski Brod, not too fat form the Serbian border and on the railway lines. This new camp later revealed itself to be able to make up for the deficiencies of Opatovac, offering more assistance for migrants, a faster registration process and an increased transportation capacity, particularly due to the presence of rail lines. The reduced number of arrivals and the exclusion of certain categories of migrants from the official corridor are also important factors that contributed to the improvement of the conditions for certain migrants (SIAs), but not others. While there has been an improvement for SIAs, the introduction of this categorization also reduced the humanitarian assistance to non-SIAs, deteriorating therefore their conditions. The different access to assistance is due to the fact that many organizations operated mostly on the route of the official corridor.

Second part – Multiple mobilities and a hint of Serbian "*laissez-faire*"

After coming back from Opatovac, I spent a few months in Zürich in order to prepare my second fieldwork and define more precisely my objectives and working methods. I finally went back to the Balkans the 22nd of December, heading this time to Belgrade. The choice of Belgrade was made for a few reasons: again – as for Opatovac – I had contacts on site, and I knew the city had been a major hub for migrants and was therefore a good base where to continue my research on the field. I was at the time intentioned to see as many possible locations on the Balkan Route in order to have a comprehensive overview of the situation and different management practices. This revealed itself to be quite difficult: the time was limited, and the quickly changing conditions on the route made almost impossible organizing precise locations and dates of the fieldwork.

At the time of my arrival in Serbia, the country had two official ports of entry where migrants could be registered and receive Serbian asylum papers: one located in Preševo, in the south at ca. 10km from the

border with fYRoM, and the other in Dimitrovgrad, much smaller than the previous one, and situated close to the border with Bulgaria. Close to Preševo, another temporary camp was open in Miratovac, even closer to the Macedonian border, but the registration process was not taking place there. It served mainly the purpose of regulating the arrivals in Preševo, perform pre-checks and offer assistance. The registration process comported an identity and health check, fingerprinting and a questionnaire over their destination and intention to seek asylum in the country. From Preševo, migrants had the possibility to board a train towards Šid, a bus or a taxi. These means of transport were not mandatory: migrants could choose to travel elsewhere with other means, reflecting a different situation compared to the previously seen operational modes in Croatia.

The main exit point from the country was situated at the border with Croatia, more precisely close to the small town of Šid, where a shuttle train was in service from the train station to the newly opened Croatian registration camp of Slavonski Brod. To help regulate the arrivals in Šid, a One Stop Centre was opened by the Serbian Commissariat for Refugees in Adaševci, about 13 kilometres from the town. While additional exit points were previously located in Horgoš and Kelebija – at the northern border with Hungary – these were not functioning at that time. Migrants were not accepted by Hungarian authorities, and were therefore forced to cross the border outside official points, breaching the newly built fence and avoiding being spotted by Hungarian border police and military. We can therefore consider the entire Serbian-Hungarian border as an exit point.

To further understand the following description of the events in Serbia, it is important to connect this period of fieldwork with the general border regime in place at that time. The SIA rule had been introduced about a month before, and the first eviction of migrants from Idomeni camp had happened just two weeks previous to my arrival. A first categorization of migrants in terms of legality and illegality had therefore already been established, and non-SIA were *de facto* not allowed into fYRoM, the first country encountered on the route to apply this rule, as well as into Croatia.

Before describing the events that happened during my stay in Belgrade, I want to point out the most important facts that I was able to. I will report them here on a list, and provide a more detailed explanation in the chapter.

1 – There seemed to be different routes taken by migrants to arrive there, as well as for the continuation of their journey after Belgrade.

2 – In a similar way to point (1), the pace of these variated trajectories was different. Those using state transportation along the fYRoM-Serbia-Croatia route were traveling faster that those crossing through Bulgaria. Moreover, SIA migrants had shorter waiting and traveling times.

3 – Compared to Opatovac, the nationalities seen in Belgrade were different. Here, Syrians were under-represented, with most of the migrants being from Afghanistan and Pakistan, with other nationalities – in particular form Iran and North Africa – being seen often. In other words, SIA migrants tented to be a minority in Belgrade. Of the SIA, only Afghani were a constant and noticeable presence.

3 – Women, children and families were rarely seen. Most of the migrants were young men.

4 – Migrants were free to move in the city. Police presence was minimal to the point that it was barely noticeable.

5 – Non-SIA migrants were allowed into Serbia on the basis of their asylum system. While fYRoM upstream and Croatia downstream completely blocked the entrance of this migrants' category, Serbia never denied entry to anyone, except in a few isolated cases (Belgrade Centre for Human Rights, 2016). At the same time, it was clear for everyone that a very small minority of those applying for asylum had the intention of waiting the completion of the process, and left Serbia way before that. This is confirmed also by my interviews with the KIRS and UNHCR.

Migrants in Belgrade: parks and Miksalište

From my first day, I was struck by the overall presence of migrants in the city. They were mostly seen around the area of the bus and train station, both situated in a very central location. Apart from the will to stay close to transports in order to be able to travel when possible (with smugglers or regular public transports), this localization was facilitated by the presence of 2 small parks in the area, Bristol and Luke Cenivica (this second one became known as "Afghani park", due to the many Afghanis gathering in that area), and a concentration of humanitarian organizations operating there. The two parks became a sort of camping, starting from summer 2015 until the arrival of the winter. During winter they were mostly used during the day by various NGOs to provide their services (food and goods distribution, medical assistance, informing about the situation at the borders and in Serbia, etc.), but due to the cold they were mostly empty at night. In Bristol Park, distribution of goods was taking place from a small, temporary wooden barrack.

In general, the area of Savamala was the major hub for all the actors involved in this migration. From the beginning, it was clear that Belgrade was a major stop for migrants on their way to their next destination. The number of people in the city were however not at the same level as during the summer and fall, when there was so many migrants staying in the parks that, according to the words of a volunteer I met, "*the once green grass of them completely disappeared due to migrants camping*". Not only the number of migrants was much lower, but also the capacity to help migrants of the various humanitarian organizations present were not even close as what I have seen in Opatovac. In Belgrade, nothing was official and strictly controlled by state institutions. In addition to the operation in the parks, a small room close to the train station, called Asylum Info Centre, offered pamphlets with information about the modality of asylum in Serbia. Moreover, workers and volunteers accompanied migrants to register with the police and offered them access to Internet and computers. The most important centre capable of offering humanitarian help in terms of goods and food, was located hundred meters after Bristol Park and managed by Refugee Aid Miksalište. It was simply referred to as "Miksalište" by everyone. Furthermore, migrants that were registered and entered the asylum procedure could stay in the asylum centre of Krnjača, located just north of Belgrade, on the other side of the Danube.

To resume, the situation in Belgrade from a first sight did not appear anymore as a full scale humanitarian crisis. While distribution of goods might have sometimes been chaotic, there was a sense of fluidity in the mobility of migrants. Groups were coming to take what they needed at the various centres and then leave, and repeat. Most of the migrants were in visibly better health conditions than the one I previously

observed. This is probably due to the decreased numbers of arrivals and full deployment of the humanitarian intervention.

My second day in Belgrade I visited Miksalište to observe what it was and find out if there was the possibility to volunteer there. The approach to become a volunteer was very simple, it was enough to enter the camp, present yourself to a coordinator and declaring your will to volunteer. There was great need for people to help, and I was easily accepted. Working hours were divided in two shifts: from 9.30am to 13pm, and from 12.30pm to 16pm. In winter time, I generally spent the entire day there, working both shifts, as most of the volunteers did. The main tasks consisted in distributing shoes and socks, clothes, hygiene items, tea, coffee and food. Moreover, doctors were present to offer medical assistance, a safe space for families and children, toilets, a partially heated tent and a laundry (this was not made available for migrants and was mainly used to wash donated clothes). Miksalište functioned thanks to a mix of workers from various NGOs and volunteers coming from all over the world. This centre offered a great opportunity to chat with migrants, as people tended to stay until the closure, and moments free from the assigned tasks were relatively frequent. Moreover, since many migrants were present every day for long periods, it also offered the possibility to get to know them better and gain trust and confidence in each other.

Most of the days volunteering in Miksalište were a simple routine. The camp opened at 9am, and at that time there was already a small number of migrants waiting outside, generally 20-30 people. At the opening, a big part of them went to ask for clothes and shoes, this second item being the most demanded. While some had very old and ruined shoes, others had relatively new ones, and we were therefore not allowed to give them others due to limited resources. When receiving shoes, people were asked to leave their old ones behind. This was done in order to avoid them putting on these shoes again and coming back to have others. The same was true for winter jackets. The fact that they asked more than one pair was to then re-sell them to the markets in Belgrade to earn some money, and being shoes and jackets the most valuable items, they were also the most desired. It was often obvious who really needed these items for personal use and who wanted them just to sell them, the first category being very grateful for everything received, the second one insisting to receive something, sometimes in a very aggressive way, easily accepting also items that were not of the right size. This generated at times considerable tensions inside Miksalište, with aggressive migrants being asked to leave, and even causing the closure of the camp for a few days later in February. This particular situation occurred because of a very bellicose group from Morocco, who threatened volunteers and workers that refused to give them what they asked.

Most of the action happened in the first hour of opening of the centre: a big part of the migrants arrived early and were present every day for some time, coming to see if it was distributed something new they did not have. After this initial distribution, some of them left the camp to go somewhere else, while others stayed around, waiting in a tent, drinking tea or coffee. During the rest of the day, we could generally see small groups of people coming from time to time, some that had just arrived in Belgrade, gathered by volunteers at the train and bus station and brought there, others that were habitué of the camp. In the moments in between these arrivals, there was not much more to do but to sit down with them and talk. Language was often a barrier to communication, most of them speaking a broken English or not even that. Even with limited knowledge of English it was generally possible to exchange information. A lot of the

conversations followed a similar development: I asked them where they were coming from, which route did they take, how long they travelled and where they were going now; they asked me where I was from and where I though was best for them to go to ask for asylum. Most of them were very open and shared their experiences without hesitation.

The camp closed at 16pm, we cleaned up and went home. The locations where migrants used to stay for the night were very different. As said previously, the parks in the area had previously been a sort of camping place for them, but with cold temperatures very few were seen sleeping there at that time. Otherwise, that area of the city had a high concentration of hostels. The transit pass or the asylum request allowed migrants to legally sleep there for three days. There were rumours (then confirmed to me by a few migrants and volunteers) that only one hostel was allowed to host people lacking these documents, but probably more than just that one followed this practice. The situation of the accommodation evolved during my fieldwork, and many new hostels appeared in the area, targeting migrants in particular. Some of these did not last long and were forced to close by the police (a "closure notice" could be seen, stuck on the door), while others were allowed to continue their service without problems. This may suggest - along with the previous observation on the only hostel allowed to accept migrants without papers - that police corruption was present to a certain degree. I quickly talked about the situation of hostels in Savamala later in June, in my interview with the KIRS:

"Some are illegal hostel, so they accept people without papers […] I think the police is doing something to close them. But a lot of new hostel were opened during the crisis. It was like... [laughs]...a new job opportunity."

For those that had entered the asylum procedure, private accommodation in hostels had to be demanded to the police, otherwise they technically had to stay in the assigned asylum centre (there was however not much control over it). In Belgrade, this was located in the previously mentioned Krnjača. To reach it, migrants had to use regular public transports and had to be there every night before 10pm. Other accommodation strategies were also observed: one particular group from Morocco was squatting an abandoned building not far from Miksalište.

Migrants in Belgrade – Stories and observations

Belgrade as a registration point

The first day in Belgrade I visited the Asylum Info Centre, located near the train station. One worker there gave me an overview of the possibility of registration for migrants in the city (Annexes 1, "Asylum Info Centre volunteer"). He explained how many migrants arrived in Belgrade without passing by the official registration points at the borders. They therefore helped them by going with them to the police to obtain either the paper stating their intention to seek asylum or the transit pass. The presence of a Serbian observer was deemed by him important, since the police in some cases refused to register migrants when they went alone. His report sheds some light on the functioning modalities of Serbian policies towards migrants: the possibility of seeking asylum was granted to everyone, no matter the nationality.

Non-SIAs: stealth crossing at the Hungarian border and smuggling networks

One particular group was seen in Miksalište every day for about a week. They used to sleep in a nearby hostel and come every day to take food in Miksalište. There was six of them, all from Pakistan, and two could speak good English. They arrived in Serbia using the Bulgarian route, and were waiting for a good opportunity to continue their journey towards Hungary. More than a good opportunity, they waited to find a contact with a someone able to bring them to a suitable place at the border where they could try to cross it (briefly, a smuggler). One day, they announced to us that the same night they were going. They stayed until the closure of the camp in order to say goodbye to everyone, and their departure seemed like the beginning of a very important and dangerous mission. They thanked us for all the help, took photos with volunteers and workers, registered videos and so on. We told them we hoped not to see them again in Belgrade, which would have meant a success in their border crossing. I never saw them again. This is just one example of the modality of functioning of Belgrade for many non-SIA migrants: their mobility stopped in the city for a few days in order to get organized, and then continued on unofficial routes. I observed other groups coming to the centre for a few days and then disappear. Belgrade offered the opportunity for non-SIA migrants to get in contact with human smugglers and continue their journey. This situation was well known by Serbian authorities, as it was later confirmed to me by the KIRS:

"We had the problem that a lot of people did not want to come to the centre but they want to stay in park near the train station, bus station, because a lot of smugglers are over there. […] Sometimes there are numbers...telephone numbers, being on the boards in some facilities. Of course, when the numbers on the boards are seen they are being tossed away by the employees, but in general…often you can find the numbers even at the board...at this Miksalište or this info centre [...]".

In the next days I frequently encountered other migrants that reported the same story. Others however, encountered problems with this functioning of the route. They lacked the money necessary to buy the services of human smugglers, and found themselves stuck in Belgrade. One of these – a Pakistani man that I saw coming to Miksalište since a few days and often looked very sad and depressed – enquired with me about repatriation options, stating his will to go back to Turkey, country where he previously stayed and where he had a source of income (Annexes 1, "Pakistani man 1"). This another good example of how the smuggling network developed for migrants who were not accepted on the official corridor. Smugglers are not for free, and often demanded high prices for their services. If you could not pay, you were left alone. I never discovered what finally happened to him, since I left for Šid a few days later and have not met him again afterwards. His best bet was probably to wait for the decision about his asylum request, and being repatriated in case of negative outcome. While the situation partially changed later in Spring, at that time a reverse flow was not present on the route.

Multiple mobilities, "Serbia Good!", and "Bulgaria Bad!"

While the last described conversation was quite particular, in general they followed the same topics: country of origin, itinerary followed before arriving in Serbia, travel time. I was surprised by hearing some things over and over again. A conversation with a young Afghani I met in Miksalište is particularly representative (Annexes 1, "Afghani man 1"). He explained to me how – after traveling for almost two months – the last part of his journey crossed through Bulgaria. He had to walk through the woods, with

very few food, at the mercy of the cold winter weather, and having to hide in order not to be caught. But then he arrived in Serbia, and "*Serbia good!*". This was a recurrent statement.

In contrast, the conditions in other, surrounding countries were often described as much worse, particularly in Bulgaria: if "*Serbia good*", "*Bulgaria bad*". Always. All the migrants I talked to reported their traveling in Bulgaria as being somewhere close to hell on earth. They had to walk for a long time in the woods, avoiding police patrols and formations of voluntary citizens organized to chase migrants in the forests. Humanitarian assistance was not present in any place on the way, and so on. Bulgaria did not allow any migrant legally inside the country, not even if they stated their intention to seek asylum. The difficult conditions of crossing the country are direct consequences of this border regime.

Apart from these points, another factor that emerged from many conversations was the different temporality of the migration. Very often the travel time reported by migrants were different: Afghanis tended to have been traveling for more than a month, the same for Pakistanis. This differs greatly with what Syrians told me in my later visit in Adaševci, where in one case a group reported having needed only six days to get there from Aleppo (c. f. further). Waiting time were also different: I observed many non-SIAs coming in Miksalište many days in a row, while SIAs were generally seen for no more than a day or two. The low presence of Syrians and Iraqis in the city is also a confirmation of this, their route following the state-led corridor and crossing the country border to border, with close to none moments of immobility. The high presence of Afghanis in the city, despite being in the same category of Syrians and Iraqis in terms of legality, seems however a bit in contrast with this explanation. While it is true that in winter – during this first moment of my research in Belgrade – the official corridor on the Balkan Route was accessible also to Afghani nationals, also between SIA and non-SIA different migratory strategies seemed to emerge. Most of those seen in Belgrade were coming crossing into Serbia from Bulgaria, while almost everyone I met in Šid was using the Macedonian "corridor". This might be due to the use of different strategies already previous to their arrival in the Balkans, as a man explained to me later in Spring. (Annexes 1, "Afghani man 2") He described the modalities of travel for Afghanis: a deposit had to be payed in Afghanistan, covering the cost of the smugglers until Europe. Depending on the modalities and rate of success of the chosen smuggling network, this was a higher or lower amount. This deposit was then unlocked once the destination country was reached. The presence of this kind of "all-inclusive" packages[13], Afghanistan to Europe might explain the high presence of Afghanis in Belgrade, sticking to the route planned by their smugglers. Why they did not use the state transportation system on the corridor is something I never completely understood and I will refrain to report my conjectures about it.

Third part – On the corridor

After taking contact with a team of volunteers, on the 11th of January I left Belgrade and went to Šid, a small town at the border between Serbia and Croatia. I will in this section describe the functioning modalities of this exit point to Croatia. The centre established in Sid served to control the paperwork of migrants and board them on the train towards Croatia, while Adaševci was a stop located on the highway with functions of humanitarian assistance and easing the pressure in Sid in case of strong affluence.

[13] - As a funny anecdote, a migrant once reported to another volunteer that the smugglers claimed to have paid all the humanitarian NGOs, and this was why they received everything for free.

Šid is located on the main railway connecting the two countries, it is close to the road border crossings of Berkasovo-Bapska and Šid-Tovarnik already seen in the description of the fieldwork in Opatovac temporary transit camp (which at my arrival in Šid had already been substituted by the one in Slavonski Brod). The town had been a major transit centre for migrants since the beginning of the development of the route going through Croatia, therefore the situation at that time was already organized and under control. A first temporary reception centre was located in Adaševci, on the main highway, 13 kilometres from the town. An old Motel, close to a petrol station had been reconverted by the KIRS to temporarily host migrants, allowing the various NGOs to offer their services while checking migrants' documents before bringing them to Croatia. From Adaševci, buses were bringing migrants to the train station in Šid, were they continued their travel with a special train towards the registration camp of Slavonski Brod, a first obligatory step into the Croatian part of the Balkan Route. Šid was therefore another major hub for NGOs and authorities in the area. A camp was present just beside the train station, mainly composed by a registration tent and five others were people could rest while waiting to be transferred to Croatia … or pushed back to Belgrade. Both Croatian and Serbian police were present in Šid to effectuate the control of migrants' papers before they could board the train to Croatia (Belgrade Centre for Human Rights, 2016). This is confirmed in my interview with the KIRS.

A third centre was later opened in Principovac with the idea of hosting up to 300 migrants for a longer time in case of closure of the border. This camp in Principovac was composed of one tent from MSF beside an ancient hospital (still in good conditions), a few meters from the border with Croatia.

By the first moment stepping out of the train I could spot a few migrants waiting at the bus station (situated just in front). Policemen entered the same train and gathered other migrants that took a regular transportation towards Croatia, and not the special train coming from Preševo. These were taken immediately to the camp, leaving me no chance to talk with them. I therefore headed towards the group at the bus station and chatted a moment with them:

"We are from Pakistan. We want to go to Croatia but they do not let us go. The police say we have to go back to Belgrade, to the asylum centre, so we are waiting for the bus."

This short conversation shows that a first screening of migrants was operated already by the Serbian authorities, but a few push backs happened also in Slavonski Brod, with people being brought back to Serbia (Banich, Gerbig, & Homberger, 2016). This was probably due to the presence of translators working with Croatian authorities and charged to determine the true origin of people that arose doubts. The presence of fake or stolen documents between migrants was a known fact, also confirmed directly to me by a few migrants.

In Šid, I volunteered with a small organization, the "Czech Team". It was spontaneously created since the beginning of the migration towards Croatia, and had gained at that point a good reputation between other NGOs and state authorities. Their operational area was mainly Adaševci, distributing goods such as clothes, shoes and hygiene products. They were present 24h/24, working in three shifts of eight hours.

Migrants arrived in Adaševci by bus, most of them coming from Preševo, and only a few from Dimitrovgrad. In general – during the period of volunteering – in an eight hours shift we expected to see

ten to fifteen buses (but this has not always been the case). When the buses arrived, workers from APC or NRC (Asylum Protection Centre and Norwegian Refugee Council) were the first to enter the buses, with migrants not being allowed to exit. They were charged with the task of giving first information to the migrants about their location, what they had to expect for the next few hours, and the modalities of their transfer to Croatia. After APC was done, it was our turn (Czech Team) to enter the buses and distribute hygiene products. From that moment, migrants were allowed to exit the buses and had an almost complete freedom of movement. Authorities were represented just by a few employees of the KIRS, there was no police controlling the area[14].

Normally, migrants were staying in Adaševci for about 8 hours, depending on the availability of the train to Slavonski Brod and the amount of people present. During this time, they had the possibility to wait inside the Motel in two small waiting rooms (which were generally overcrowded) or in a small tent managed by Remar, and use the shop of the petrol station to buy whatever they wanted[15]. Drinking water was provided by an old tanker truck parked outside the Motel (water could freeze during the night, and not much was done about it), food was distributed in packages by the Red Cross, and hygiene facilities were composed of around 20 portable toilets. Moreover, Remar offered small snacks, soup and hot tea in their small heated tent, and doctors from MSF were present 24h/24. One room was a dedicated safe area for children, managed by Save The Children.

This was Adaševci, a simple stopover place to provide humanitarian services, control the paperwork of migrants and manage the numbers before their transfer to Croatia, at least on a normal day. Behind the Motel, hidden from most eyes, MSF had built 4 tents with beds and heaters, each one capable to host up to 150 people. These were unused for almost all the time I was there, except for the last night. I wondered a lot on the purposes of building these tents to then just leave them empty, and it was only later, when I saw the situation in Principovac, that everything got clearer.

Concerning my research, Adaševci offered a great opportunity to be in direct contact with the migrants and spend time with them. Since the initial distribution did not take long I had therefore plenty of time to talk with the people and better understand their situation. In many occasions, I had the opportunity to discuss for a long time with many different migrants.

A first thing that struck me in Adaševci was the high number of women and kids, along with their nationality: most of them were from Syria and Iraq, and a smaller part from Afghanistan. After having spent some time in Belgrade, I was not used to see many of them anymore, migrants in Belgrade being mostly young men from Afghanistan and Pakistan. Reports from the Reach Initiative shows very clearly the profile of the population in Adaševci: from 15th to the 28th March 2016, 83% of the migrants were arriving from Syria, and the remaining 17% from Iraq (REACH, 2016a). The report show statistics two months after my stay in Šid, and one week after the closing of the borders. It has therefore to be considered with caution, but it fits my observations in January.

But besides these official channels, something else was going on in Sid as well, I noticed. One day, I observed the presence of Afghanis in the buses coming from Dimitrovgrad (which were general smaller,

[14] - Police presence was also however not the same at all times. (Moving Europe, 2015).
[15] - The use of the petrol station was not always allowed to migrants (Moving Europe, 2015)

carrying only 20 people) as well as in the train on my way to Šid, suggesting their reliance on different migration networks: Afghanis were often seen in Belgrade, and they would have therefore travelled straight to Šid without stopping in Adaševci, unless they came straight from Dimitrovgrad. This is further confirmed by another report from REACH Initiative, showing that between the 1st and the 24th of January, in Šid the profile of migrants was composed of 34% of Syrians, 28% of Afghanis and 38% of Iraqis (REACH, 2016b).

A journey into vulnerability and illegality

Despite the limitations imposed by the authorities, on the 22nd of January in Adaševci I had the occasion to meet a group of three people in provenance from Pakistan. This was the only occasion I met someone there who was non-SIA (Annexes 1, "Pakistani man 2"). He explained how he left Pakistan four months before due to terrorist attacks and the lack of jobs. After a difficult journey through Iran, Turkey and Greece, he tried to enter fYRoM but was pushed back. He therefore decided to cross through Bulgaria, was caught by the police and arrested. There, he met his actual travel companions. He reported various mistreatments by the police, and explained that he stayed in prison for two months, without knowing when he was going to be released. Entrance in Serbia was then rather easy, and despite the fact that he knew the border was open only for SIA migrants, someone in Belgrade convinced him that on these particular days everyone was allowed to pass. He payed twenty euros to a driver that brought them to Adaševci.

From his account, two information about the conditions of non-SIA migrants in Serbia emerge: people did not hesitate to give false information to the migrants in order to find gain from them economically, and that the latter's desperation pushed them to try every possible way to continue their journey, even when there was almost no chance it could work. They were not surprised when I told them there was no way they would let them into Croatia legally, and proceeded to tell me another story. Apparently, another group of Pakistani was promised safe passage of the Serbian-Romanian border by a smuggler. After paying a fee and being brought there, the Romanian police discovered them and fired some shots at them, killing two.

I was never able to find confirmation for this story, besides hearing it again by another group of Pakistani in Belgrade, as well as from another volunteer (always in Belgrade). Without looking at the consequences for the migrants and questioning whether or not two people were really killed by the Romanian police, the mere fact that migrants were brought to the border for money using a false excuse, is a very plausible possibility. This is also reflected in the presence of these three Pakistanis in Šid.

Besides these fragmenting routes between SIA and non-SIA migrants, I noticed another consequence of the decision to start filtering flows. One day in Šid, I noticed a group of young boys sitting in the waiting area, browsing their phones and eating dates. Two of them spoke perfect English, the other three understood and where probably too shy to speak. They were obviously very interested in talking with me, a young European guy, about their age. It was often like this, with both sides very interested in the stories of the other. This group seemed quite wealthy, with new shiny smartphones, good winter clothes and packs of food.

Their story had a particular interest to me, because they not only described (as in most of the conversations) the route they took to arrive or the different controls at the borders, but they talked about their quotidian and how they were perceived by other groups of migrants (Annexes 1, "Syrian boys"). They were originally from Aleppo. They described a city completely destroyed, where different groups fought each other. Being of military age meant for them if one of these groups captured them, they had to fight at their sides. When the situation became unsustainable, they left and crossed into Turkey. They had absolutely no problems in finding their way to Greece and further on, to fYRoM and Serbia. They claimed having needed only six days from Syria to Adaševci. The interesting point is that they explained to me how they had to sleep in shifts, with one always awake in order to prevent the thefts of their belongings, and in particular of the paperwork received by Greek authorities. Apparently, groups of non-SIA often tried to steal these documents from Syrians, in order to use them to cross the borders using the corridor. In particular, they trusted no one from the north of Africa and avoided them at all time. They also reported that they were told at many occasions to keep the documents of every country they crossed, because they were necessary to be allowed into the next one.

Then, one of them insisted to show me the photos of the destruction in their city. Photos after photos of ruins and machine gun crippled houses were flowing, until he swapped on a photo of a group of people, all with guns and posing for a battle photo. It took him maybe two or three seconds to realize, but it was way enough for me to see it. He quickly hid his phone, and suddenly there was silence. They looked like they were caught with their hands in the cookie jar. I did not know how to react. I ended up asking "*So you had to fight, in the end?*". The response was a quick nod, their expression looking sad, maybe worried. The conversation stopped.

Being from Syria, their journey was described as being relatively without obstacles. However, having this privilege resulted in aggressions and stigmatization by other migrants' groups. A similar thought was described to me in a short conversation I had with a young Afghani I met a few days later, at my return to Belgrade:

"You are very good to be here and help us. I thank you for this, but why do you help everyone? We are going away from war, but look at all of them. Pakistan, Pakistan, Pakistan, Pakistan… all from Pakistan! What are they doing here? We have a serious reason, they just want to make money, and because of them life is much more difficult for us. Why do you give them food and clothes and so on? If it was for me I would let them starve".

Going back to the young Syrians in Adaševci, their mistrust in people not part of the SIA category becomes apparent in two of their affirmations: they slept taking shifts in order to avoid having their documents stolen, and they refused any connection with people from north Africa. This attitude might be justified by their apparent wealth (e.g. new phones, good clothes, a lot of food) and young age, but other stories (such as the one – just reported – of the Afghani boy) suggest that there were actual frictions between groups of migrants, more precisely between those allowed to pass legally and those who could not. This seemed to be true not only between SIA and not-SIA migrants, but also inside SIAs: Afghanis were at times discriminated by Syrians and Iraqis. I personally saw this in a few occasions, but I remember one in particular: a new bus had just arrived in Adaševci, and after the initial distribution I stayed to give out a few information about the location. When I told them they had to be prepared to stay for a few hours,

some of them decided to take out something from their bags. I did not understand why exactly, but an Iraqi man started to shout at an Afghani man looking for his bag:

"Stupid pig farmer, do you speak English? No? You are so stupid, why are you even here? You are all pigs, too stupid even to learn another language." Then, talking with me: *"I am from Kurdistan (Iraqi Kurdistan, Ed.), we have war there. And these pig farmers from Afghanistan have no problems. They are parasites. Do not talk with him, he is too stupid, he does not even speak English. They are all like this."*

The Afghani man was still there, standing and smiling at me, seemingly not at all worried by the Iraqi man shouting at him. He really did nothing wrong, he just could not understand English. I then explained him by hand gestures that he had to stay there for a few hours and brought him to Remar's tent. This was a very particular situation, but I observed fights between different group of migrants also in other occasions. However, as reported by Santer & Wriedt (in press), solidarity between SIAs and non-SIAs also existed, with people of the first group merging with the latter to hide them from the screenings operated by interpreters.

While in Šid, I did not have the possibility to have a look at the papers issued to the migrants, as they were in the hands of the bus drivers. This is how the system seemed to work: when the buses arrived, the drivers were already in possession of migrants' transit papers (at that moment, that was the 72-hours transit pass). It was then up to the drivers to perform a check of these documents, counting the number of people. I saw at many occasions the drivers sitting together and going through the pile of documents. Once the buses were leaving, there was no count of the people entering into each one: migrants were simply boarding them. This was probably unnecessary since the mere fact of having received the permit in Preševo meant that a control had been effectuated by the police there. If someone without the right documents (or some falsified ones) happened to be in the bus, the problem would have simply been delegated to the police in Šid and eventually in Slavonski Brod. I never understood how they were able to redistribute these papers afterwards.

I can therefore say that Adaševci did not represent a location intended to filter migrants and apply restrictions, it was a humanitarian stop in the first place (dictated also by the long time taken by the buses to arrive there: about 10 hours). However, it also had an important role in managing the numbers at the borders. In case of delays with the shuttle train to Slavonski Brod, people could be kept there for a longer time.

Signs of a possible closure of the route

One day, I was asked by the coordinator of the Czech Team if I wanted to go help MSF to build some tents in Principovac. What I observed there, as well as the conversation with the local coordinator of MSF, revealed itself to be very intriguing. Behind an old hospital, MSF was building one winter tent, similar to those previously described in Adaševci. For various reasons, this appeared to be a solution to host migrants for a longer time. First, food, covers, and other goods were stored in the hospital, and second, the location (apart from being exactly on the border between Serbia and Croatia) was not equipped with any major border transit facilities, as it would be expected when there is the need to register thousands of people per day. An official border crossing was located at ca. 100 meters from the house, but it was a simple barrier with a few officers of the border police. The goal was clearly not to divert the migration in

that direction. The coordinator of MSF confirmed this idea, stating that the tent and the hospital were supposed to host migrants in case the border had to be closed without notice. The same can be said for the tents in Adaševci. This happened the 14th of January, almost two months before the official closure of the Balkan Route.

On the night of the 21st of January 2016, I had the occasion to enter in the buses while a worker for NRC was giving the initial briefing to migrants. She was speaking in English, with the translating help of one girl from Syria. She was insisting upon the fact that when asked by the Croatian authorities (at the registration camp of Slavonski Brod) about where they had the intention to seek asylum, they had to answer Germany or Austria and nothing else. Indicating any other country would have resulted in the denial to enter the country. These new rule was applied by Macedonian authorities, as well as by the Croatian ones, but not in Serbia.

News of this new rule spread quickly all over the Balkans, along with discussions about the meaning of it. Everyone could state that they wanted to seek asylum in Germany, and then do otherwise. This spread confusion among migrants and humanitarian workers, and seemed a completely useless point to apply. However, in the days after that announcement, the number of migrants in Adaševci diminished considerably. My last night there, the 22nd of January, only three buses arrived. The borders were closed for at least one day, with both Serbia and Croatia not letting anyone in. The reason of this closure is not to be only attributed to this new rule, but also to the announcement of Austria of capping the number of migrants allowed into the country every day.

Fourth part – The corridor is closed, reduced mobility and troubles at the Hungarian border

On the 26th of March 2016, I spent one more day in Šid. I arrived just before the Czech Team ceased its activities there. They planned to move to the Idomeni camp, where – since the closure of the border – migrants had started to accumulate again (as in November after the introduction of the SIA rule). Talking with a coordinator, she depicted a situation far different than the one I had seen before (Annexes 1, "Czech Team coordinator 2"). Since the border with Croatia was officially closed, the tents installed in Šid, Adaševci and Principovac were now used to host migrants for longer times. There were no new arrivals, and some migrants had already left to try to cross into Hungary. The border with Croatia was heavily patrolled, leaving close to no chance of a successful enter into the country.

The use of these tents as long term asylum arrangements confirmed what the coordinator of MSF told me two months before. I wonder if the accommodation places added by these tents are counted in the effort to increase asylum capacity in Serbia. Even if not, the important point here is the transformation of the migrants' hosting facilities of Šid, Adaševci and Principovac: from being used to manage the migration, they were transformed in asylum centres.

In Belgrade, in contrast, the situation looked very similar as in winter. All the services described previously were still there. The functioning of Miksalište was also basically unchanged. For differences, there was a distribution of warm food in the morning and at noon and the presence of showers for migrants. The number of migrants visiting the centre was still relatively high, around 3-400 people per day were counted.

Having been already assigned at the entrance to count the people entering, I can say that these numbers are probably inflated: it was very difficult to recognize those that entered more than once, especially due to the fact that more than one person was taking this task during the day (the new one not knowing who had already previously entered). However, at least 200 migrants could be seen every day.

The route chosen by migrants was also very similar, too. When asking them about it, most of them reported Bulgaria as the country crossed to enter Serbia, and only a few told me they came in through fYRoM. In a similar way, Syrians and Iraqi were again a minority. A big share of the migrants in Belgrade were still coming from Afghanistan and Pakistan. It became clear with time that the waiting period in Belgrade became longer. In the first weeks of April, I observed many of the same people coming to Miksalište every day. The situation in Belgrade stayed relatively static for three weeks, until the 20th of April, four days before the anticipated parliamentary elections. That day, the police and KIRS officers started to evict the migrants from the two parks where they used to stay, promising the possibility to stay in the asylum centre in Krnjača without having to register and enter the asylum procedure. A shuttle bus was also organized between the centre and the city, leaving in the morning towards Belgrade and coming back in the evening. This new policy towards migrants in the city is also well described by the KIRS in my interview with them. They reported that none was forced to go to the centre (any many were reticent to use this opportunity) but everything was preferable than having them in the city centre wandering around. After an initial hesitation, with migrants reporting they feared being tricked into registering, this service started to be used more frequently.

To quickly resume, the Serbian context in March-April saw a limited number of new arrivals every day who still had the possibility to claim asylum and entering the country, a consistent number of migrants staying for a few weeks into Serbian reception centres, longer waiting time in the country, and the Hungarian border as the only plausible exit point to continue onwards. In this respect, the Hungarian border played a considerable role and it is therefore important to describe its functioning.

As a result of all these changes (the closure of the Croatian border, and reduced possibilities to get across it illegally), Hungary became again the preferred next destination for migrants after Serbia. The 25th of April I participated in a small cooperation workshop, aimed at discussing the actual situation of migrants and future possibilities for increased cooperation between organizations working in the sector. The context at the Hungarian border was thoroughly discussed.

Since the closure of the Balkan Route, the two transit zones previously established at the Serbian-Hungarian border (Horgoš and Kelebija) were once again operative. These are both located close to the Serbian town of Subotica, headquarter of the main humanitarian operations in the area. In these transit zone, migrants had the possibility to ask asylum in Hungary and enter the country. If these feels like a re-opening of the border described in these terms, the situation was quite different in reality. Only about 30 to 40 people were allowed into Hungary every day, with priority being given to families and migrants in provenance of Iraq and Syria that could prove their nationality. Moreover, to be allowed in, migrants had to explain the reasons why Serbia was not a suitable country of asylum for them.

These restrictions to entry – as well as the low daily quota of migrants being accepted – created a chaotic situation in these two transit zones. Another element intervened also in this sense, that is the recently

declared zone under state of emergency in Hungary. These zone is a strip of land on Hungarian soil along the Serbian frontier, declared as neutral territory by the Hungarian government. This allowed for and easier expulsion of migrants if caught in it trying to reach Hungary. A similar practice is described my Mountz & Hiemstra (2014) in the case of Australia. Migrants caught in these area where reportedly brought into the previously mentioned transit zones, and left there between Serbia and Hungary. At the date of the meeting, 150 to 200 migrants where stuck between the countries, with Serbian authorities at times refusing their entry with the basis of migrants having already registered and missing the papers, while Hungarian government had handed them eviction papers due to their illegal trespassing of the border barrier. Only a few recognized organizations (UNHCR, Red Cross) where allowed into this transit zone to offer help, composed of only food and water. This is probably due to the tentative of authorities to keep a low profile on this difficult situation.

Then, things started to change rather quickly. Serbian authorities changed their policies towards migrants in the city, trying to push them to register and enter the asylum centres, while at the same time being increasingly restrictive with humanitarian associations. For migrants, crossing the Serbian/Hungarian border resulted more and more often in being caught and pushed back. Therefore, their waiting time in Belgrade incremented as well.

The situation changed also for Miksalište. The centre was located in an area that was soon going to be heavily modified by the urban project of renovation of the riverside of Belgrade: Belgrade Waterfront. Despite their contract to use the space was giving them the possibility to stay until June, on the 26th of April police officers presented themselves at the centre with an eviction notice, stating that they had 48 hours to leave, since the demolition works where starting. In this short amount of time, we had to move everything in a storage room in another location, and Miksalište was forced to cease its activities. Two days after, the demolition of the centre took place. In a similar way, two nearby houses were also destroyed. These were in recent times used by migrants as accommodation, thanks to the cleaning and organizational work of a No-Border collective.

Despite these demolitions being justified in the light of Belgrade Waterfront project, there are doubts that the decision to accelerate its time were also the consequence of new political decisions aiming at increasing the control over migrants and reduce the humanitarian help that sustained them, removing therefore and important support and discouraging new arrivals. This feeling is reinforced by the previously seen new rules in the nearby parks and in the asylum centre of Krnjača, as well as the recent success of Aleksandar Vučić – known for its pro-European stance – in the recent parliamentary elections. There is however no official confirmation of this intent.

With Miksalište closed, migrants lost an important support in Belgrade, but despite this, their numbers in the city stayed constant and the activities of other organizations were reinforced in the parks during the day.

Refugee Aid Miksalište found quite soon a new emplacement with the help of the City of Belgrade, which was open at the end of May, only about a month after the initial closure. The new centre was located very close to the old one, still in a very central location, not far from the bus and train station. It provided the same services as before. In the first two weeks of June I volunteered again with them, often counting the

people at the entrance and inquiring about their nationalities. Substantially, nothing was changed: between 2-300 migrants were visiting Miksalište every day, with Afghanistan and Pakistan being the two most represented nations. Their migration strategy was still focused on continuing their journey towards Hungary, with the stop in Belgrade being used as a way to rest and find the right contact (smuggler), as an interview with an Afghani men confirmed (Annexes 1, "Afghani men 3"). He explained to me how, after his arrival in Greece he received a paper that allowed him to stay for thirty days in the country. He then crossed into Serbia passing through fYRoM. He encountered no difficulties at the border, he declared his intention to seek asylum and was allowed in. He had no intention to stay in Serbia, and was simply trying to find a way to continue his journey. A worker for Save The Children reported a similar situation in the case of a young Afghani boy that was often seen in Miksalište (Annexes 1, "Worker for Save The Children"). He was a minor travelling alone. At the entrance in Serbia he had been registered as an adult. At the time he was also waiting for the good occasion to leave Belgrade and cross into Hungary.

Overall, it became clear that crossing the overly controlled Serbian-Hungarian border became increasingly difficult with time, and in the two weeks I spent there in June I saw this situation happening more than a few times. Migrants that had left a few days before re-appeared in Miksalište, telling us how they did not manage to cross and were caught and pushed back into Serbia by Hungarian authorities. In other cases, as the one of the Afghani man, ex-translator for the coalition forces, I did not see them coming back. It is impossible to know if it was because of a successful crossing, or because they got caught and detained by Hungarian authorities in their detention camps or in the transit zones with Serbia. Moreover, the case of this last described young Afghani raises another theme and tactic of migration management, the one of registering minors as adults.

Soon after, on the 15th of June, I left Belgrade and headed back to Zürich to complete my research. At the moment where I left, the situation was relatively unchanged compared to my second arrival at the end of March. With the borders of the Balkan states closed to migrants and the disappearance of the state-organized corridor, the Balkan Route had become static, and migrants' mobility was greatly reduced. Further development of the Serbian situation confirmed this closure. Migrants are reportedly passing long time in Belgrade and successful crossing into Hungary has become almost impossible. This leaves many stranded in Belgrade, living in extremely difficult conditions. In this situation, MSF accuses the Serbian government of restricting the delivering of humanitarian assistance in order to force migrants into the official asylum camps (Médecins Sans Frontières, 2017). In a recent telephonic conversation I had with an employee of a local humanitarian organization working with migrants, she confirmed the accusations of MSF. She reported as well of people deported to Bulgaria after entering an asylum centre, as well as push-backs at the Macedonian border. Bringing back the events of May-June 2016 (closure of Miksalište, possibility of entering the camp of Krnjača without registration, and evictions of migrants from the parks), the sings of a lower tolerance and policy change of the Serbian government towards migrants were already present.

CONCLUSIONS

The events I previously described, shed light on the enormous complexity of the situation that unfolded during the incisive migration flows across the Balkan Route in 2015-2016. Looking into the development of this corridor – that is, its consecutive opening and closure – I have tried to understand the way Europe's border regime transformed through its outsourcement among a variety of scales, and how the observed incremental changes impacted on both the mobility and the legal status of migrants on the move. My analysis of the Balkan Route elucidates the process of externalization of migration control, highlighting the mobility of states and borders. My ethnographic analysis of the Serbian case subsequently enables a deeper understanding of this changing border in a transit country, which at once applied European asylum policies, but also asserted a somehow different set of bordering techniques.

Scales, migration management, and mobility

The Balkan Route has evolved in 2015-16: from a basically unused door to Europe, to a humanitarian corridor, to then returning close to its initial status of immobility. To understand this process, it is important to point out once again that the flux of migrants using this "door to Europe" was a mixed migration, composed of people leaving their countries for different reasons. Being a mixed migration, the role and rules of the asylum system in the destination countries become crucial. Particularly, one factor is the key: the absence of legal ways to find asylum in Europe from abroad. The necessity to travel by land to the destination of asylum, explains the reasons for the opening of the humanitarian corridor. Since for many it is not possible to reach Europe by other means (i. e. with an airplane) because of migratory regulations already externalised (referred to as techniques of "outward flexibilisation", such as the necessity of a visa for certain nationalities: Cuttitta, 2009, 2015), and seen the vast amount of asylum-seekers that built up in Turkey and nearby countries due to the political instability of the region, travelling along the Balkan Route has appeared as a possibility to find asylum in Europe. The high number of migrants arriving in Greece, created the necessary pressure to enable exceptions in the border regimes of the transit countries on the route. This opening attracted many migrants who were not necessarily in need for asylum, showing therefore the nexus between asylum and migration flows (Stokholm, 2016). The problem therefore, lies deeply inside the space and the institutions of the European Union, and not necessarily at its borders. To quote again Kasparek (2016a, p. 2): "*the European refugee crisis is the crisis of the European border regime*". And in this light, it is also the crisis of the European asylum system. Since the creation of the Schengen Area, the focus of border management has been shifted to the protection of the external borders of the European Union. This is seen in the incremental use of technology and presence of agents patrolling the "physical" border line (or international waters), which are direct representations of the increased European efforts to implement repressive measures of migration management. Many of these measures can be found in the events I studied in-depth during my research: the construction of a fence between Turkey and Bulgaria, the creation of hot-spots to intercept migrants in Greece, the increased potential of Frontex's "Operation Poseidon", the Hungarian border barrier, the Macedonian border fence, and the heavy patrolling of the Croatian border with Serbia. Following the argument of Cuttitta (2015), these instruments aim at reducing the porosity of the border by increasing the control over it (fences and patrols), or by moving it outwards ("Operation Poseidon") and inwards (hotspots, detention centres). Another fact allows us to see the mobility of the European borders: the re-

emergence of the externalisation and delegation of migration control and asylum to foreign sovereign authorities (Casas-Cortes et al., 2015; Kasparek, 2016b; Mountz & Kempin, 2014; Stokholm, 2016). What happened in fYRoM is an example: the presence of Frontex's interpreters and border guards is a sign of the delivering of border control to a state that is at the door of European Union's space, in a perfect geographical position to allow the filtering and eventual halt of migrants. But the most blatant example of the externalisation of border management from the European Union, can be identified in the discussions and finalization of the EU-Turkey Joint Action Plan. The content and objectives of this agreement are crystal clear: Turkey agreed to take care of the migrants and reduce the porosity of its border by increasing the control over it. Moreover, Turkey received funds to improve its asylum conditions. This agreement highlights how the efforts of the European Union to reduce the porosity of its external borders do not simply stop at end of the sovereign space of its member states. Migration and border management are delivered to another sovereign entity: Turkey. This is one, first, crucial aspect that the study of the development of the Balkan Route enabled to observe. The influence of the European scale of border control has been fundamental to the final closure of the Route.

However, migration policies at European scale are not the only factor to consider in order to understand what happened. When restricting the viewpoint on the Balkans, we find that the opening and incremental closure of the route has also been shaped by practices of migration management agreed together at this regional scale, as well as by individual decisions of single states. Starting from the opening, the introduction of transit passes for migrants by fYRoM is crucial: it was the spark that paved the way to the beginning of the humanitarian corridor bringing migrants to Europe. It quickly generated the necessity of collaboration between Balkan countries to manage the flux. In a sort of domino effect, Serbia followed with a similar policy, instituting their own transit pass. This decision strengthened the corridor, establishing a shared system of management in transit countries: the necessity for migrants to present the registration paper of the previous country at every border proves it. After the closure of the Serbian-Hungarian border, Croatia and Slovenia finalised the corridor by establishing a system of transportation for migrants, border to border, from one state to the next. One point is crucial here: state's individual decisions on border regime have had an influence at a larger scale. After the finalisation of the corridor, a second phase consisted in managing the flow. This was done in concert with all the countries on the corridor. The establishment and enforcement of the SIA rule, and the various coordination meetings at higher or lower level of governmental institutions are a clear confirmation of the involvement of a regional scale of migration management. Moreover, even if it is not explicit, this categorisation between legitimate and illegitimate migrants (SIA rule), was also accepted by destination countries, factor that represents again the delivering of European border management to states external to the space of the European Union. Later on, the exclusion of Afghani nationals from the Route, as well as the introduction of a common registration standard from fYRoM to Austria, and the new series of regulatory norms implemented, are also symptoms of states' will to collaborate to reduce the flow. Every state did its part, and the Balkan Route was brought from an initial chaotic situation, to one where it was channelled through a single route but was not yet regulated, to a third phase of successive restrictions and a last one of closure. All these steps were necessary to the final end of closing the door to Europe.

Summing up, scales of migration governance have had a crucial impact on the opening and closure of the Balkan Route. The European strategies of externalisation of border control, together with regional and

national decisions of Balkan states have allowed the end of this trajectory. This has been done in an incremental fashion that shifted from channelling the flow, to restrict it by categorizing migrants in legitimate and illegitimate groups.

Legality, illegality and the Serbian case

I will now concentrate on the consequences of the described techniques of migration management introduced on the Balkan Route. To do this, I will look specifically at the Serbian scenario. By doing so, I also intend to further analyse the observed peculiarities of Serbian policies and border regime, in order to understand if there has been a concrete contrast in comparison with nearby countries.

Substantially, the main categorisations and organisational policies aimed at channelling and filtering the flux of migrants have been four: the introduction of a system of public transport for migrants along with transit passes (fYRoM, Serbia) and exceptions in the Schengen Borders Code (Croatia, Slovenia), the SIA rule, the exclusion of Afghani nationals, and the final closure of the route (or: the re-exclusion of every migrant through the end of the exceptionalism).

The first kind of policies was implemented at different times and various ways depending on the country. In fYRoM, a train was established that brought migrants from the Greek border to the Serbian one. This was done along with the introduction of the transit pass that legalized migrants' entry and stay in the country. The same has been done in Serbia. Entering in these two countries – before the introduction of the SIA rule – was therefore legally possible for everyone. Both in fYRoM and Serbia, the established system of public transport was not mandatory, and migrants were free to travel using their own means. While most chose to travel as fast as possible, this system allowed others to rest for a day or two in a hotel or another accommodation. The system in place in Croatia and Slovenia was much more restrictive: migrants that did not declare their intention to seek asylum in the country were forced on a single trajectory going from border to border. Serbia and fYRoM applied therefore very similar policies, substantially more open than the ones of the next transit countries.

With the introduction of the SIA rule, the situation changed. In fYRoM, non-SIA migrants could not enter the country legally. This means that an eventual capture by authorities would have resulted in a direct expulsion from the country. In Serbia however, reaching the border or a police station and declaring the intention to seek asylum generally resulted in the permission to enter the asylum procedure. Migrants in Serbia had therefore the possibility to see legalized their presence in the country. This difference of treatment generated a double migratory track: the one of the SIA group, and the one of all other nationalities. The re-legalization obtained by migrants in Serbia allowed them an easier access to humanitarian assistance, which was missing when travelling along hidden routes in Bulgaria or fYRoM. This is a crucial factor of the Serbian system, which – I argue – increased the quality of migrants' conditions by legalizing their status. Moreover, the impression is that the enforcement of the SIA rule was mostly done by Serbian authorities at the exit points. An example of this is the screening operated by Serbian authorities on trains directed towards Croatia. This shows however, that – besides having a permissive border regime – Serbia also participated in the categorization of migrants, and enforced a screening that was then benefited by the next countries on the route. Later on, the exclusion of Afghanis, and the final closure of the route, did not really change the previously observed facts in the case of Serbia. As I pointed

out, migrants of all nationalities were still allowed to enter the country legally on the base of the asylum laws, but found themselves blocked at the exit points from the country. When the Balkan Route was declared closed, Serbia quickly dismantled the system of special trains going from Preševo to Šid, and transformed the character of its "urgent reception" centres in camps thought to host migrants for the time of their asylum process. The later concession to use some of these facilities without the need for registration is an interesting point that can be read in distinct ways: from one side, as a further example of the Serbian "*laissez-faire*" concerning migrants, which aimed at improving their conditions; from another, as the beginning of a tentative of control of the migrants stuck in the country after the closure of the route and the increased militarization and control of the border with Hungary. All in all, Serbia had a permissive border regime and allowed migrants to use their asylum system in agreement with international regulations. It was the only country in the region acting this way. There is no doubt that this has had positive consequences on migrants' health: as many migrants said to me, *"Serbia Good!"*. It is how much of this stance originated from a real will to help migrants – and how much was just part of a shared strategy of migration management – that is in doubt. Restrictive policies as those seen in Bulgaria, if applied in Serbia as well would have probably caused the death of many migrants, and vast indignation in the world. At stake there is the reputation of the European Union, and its "moral" values of respect of human dignity, human rights, and so on. As I pointed out at the end of the first chapter, the Serbian position is probably destined to remain ambiguous, but delivering the responsibility to Serbia of receiving all the desperate people that managed to pass through the various warships in the Aegean Sea, detention centres in Greece, abuses in Bulgaria, and many other difficulties, seems a viable strategy to avoid excessive criticism. Of course "*Serbia Good!"*, if the rest is hell. Serbia is just the purgatory, a space of non-existence before the paradise, where the mobility of migrants has been almost definitively stopped. Those that made it there after April, discovered that successfully crossing the next border was incredibly difficult. I am not sure anymore that Serbia "managed not to manage". It seems to me now that Serbian authorities managed more than others, just in a different way: they managed the SIA category by channelling it, and keeping it homogeneous; and managed the non-SIAs by registering them, providing humanitarian assistance, and asylum. Shortly, this somehow seems another expression of the European strategy of migration management. Is this bad? Yes, and no. Yes, because if it is the case, it shows how European exclusionary practices have stretched in this country as well, just under another, benevolent, form. No, because migrants have found positive consequences in this form of management.

In the end, I am personally convinced that Serbian government, civil society, and citizens affronted this migration in the right way, and came out of it holding their heads high. In the light of the fact that the country is one of the poorest of Europe, their attitude, official discourses, and mobilization for the cause of migrants, has been quite touching. The Serbian example, shows that there can be good in a more liberal border and asylum regime. But to which extent? Serbia is a transit country, it does not have to deal with "integration" and other themes that further complicate the discourses on migrations.

To conclude, by the mean of analysing the Balkan Route, this research brings another example of how modern borders are extremely mobile, and can be quite easily adapted to reach a certain objective. Enforcement of border regimes can be moved inside and outside the actual line that defines the border on a map. Sometimes, multiple borders overlap. Therefore, space is fragmented along a multitude of interconnected scales of border management. Moreover, this research brings insights on the consequences of shaping people's legality and illegality through border regimes. Furthermore, through a reflection on how these categories are created, the weakness of the current asylum legislations is exposed.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Aas, K. F., & Gundhus, H. O. I. (2015). Policing Humanitarian Borderlands: Frontex, Human Rights and the Precariousness of Life. *The British Journal of Criminology*, *55*(1), 1–18.

ACAPS. (2016). The Balkan Migrant Crisis. An Introduction. Retrieved from http://www.alnap.org/pool/files/the-balkan-migrant-crisis.pdf

Agier, M. (2006). Protéger les sans-État ou contrôler les indésirables : où en est le HCR ? Politique africaine, 103(3), 101.

Agier, M. (2013). Espaces et temps du gouvernement humanitaire. *Pouvoirs*, (1), 113-123.

Amnesty International. (2014). The Human cost of Fortress Europe. Human rights violations against migrants and refugees at Europe's borders. London. Retrieved from https://www.amnesty.ch/de/themen/asyl-und-migration/festung-europa/dok/2015/die-kampagne-sos-europa/bericht-the-human-cost-of-fortress-Europe

Amnesty International. (2015). Europe's Borderland. Violations Against Refugees and Migrants in Macedonia, Serbia and Hungary. London. Retrieved from https://www.amnesty.org/download/Documents/EUR7015792015ENGLISH.PDF

Banich, S., Gerbig, L. & Homberger, A. (2016). Report on Push-backs and Police violence at the Serbo-Croatian border. *Moving Europe*. Retrieved from http://moving-europe.org/report-on-push-backs-and-police-violence-at-the-serbo-croatian-border-2/

Belgrade Centre for Human Rights. (n. d.-a). The safe country concepts. Serbia. Retrieved from http://www.asylumineurope.org/reports/country/serbia/safe-country-concepts

Belgrade Centre for Human Rights. (n. d.-b). Treatment of Specific Nationalities. Serbia. Retrieved from http://www.asylumineurope.org/reports/country/serbia/treatment-specific-nationalities

Belgrade Centre for Human Rights. (2016). Right to Asylum in Serbia, periodic report April-June 2016. Retrieved from http://www.bgcentar.org.rs

Bicanski, M. (2015, June 03). Migrants in Greece: The struggle for a better life. *Al Jazeera.* Retrieved from http://www.aljazeera.com

Bojadžijev, M., & Mezzadra, S. (2015). "Refugee crisis" or crisis of European migration policies? Retrieved November 11, 2016, from http://www.focaalblog.com/2015/11/12/manuela-bojadzijev-and-sandro-mezzadra-refugee-crisis-or-crisis-of-european-migration-policies/

Bordermonitoring Bulgaria. (2016). Breaking News: Serbia starts deportations to Bulgaria. Retrieved from http://bulgaria.bordermonitoring.eu/2016/02/23/serbia-starts-deportations-to-bulgaria/

Casas-Cortes, M., Cobarrubias, S., Genova, N. D., Garelli, G., Grappi, G., Heller, C., … Tazzioli, M. (2015). New Keywords: Migration and Borders. *Cultural Studies*, *29*(1), 55–87.

Cheresheva, M. (2016, April 08). Bulgaria Awards Vigilante Migrant-Hunters. *Balkan Insight*. Retrieved from http://www.balkaninsight.com

Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees. (1951). Retrieved from http://www.unhcr.org/3b66c2aa10

Council Directive 2004/83/EC of 29 April 2004 on minimum standards for the qualification and status of third country nationals or stateless persons as refugees or as persons who otherwise need international protection and the content of the protection granted. (2004). *Official Journal of the European Union*, L 304/12. Retrieved from http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=CELEX:32004L0083:en:HTML

Crawley, H., Duvell, F., Sigona, N., McMahon, S., Jones, K. (2016, March). Unpacking a rapidly changing scenario: migration flows, routes and trajectories across the Mediterranean. Retrieved from http://www.medmig.info/research-brief-01-unpacking-a- rapidly-changing-scenario/

Cuttitta, P. (2009). The Mediterranean Grenzsaum. Migration controls and borders in the Strait of Sicily, presented at the conference Borderscapes II, Trapani, 2009.

Cuttitta, P. (2015). Territorial and Non-territorial: The Mobile Borders of Migration Controls. In A.-L. A. Szary & F. Giraut (Eds.), *Borderities and the Politics of Contemporary Mobile Borders* (pp. 241–255). Palgrave Macmillan UK.

Daley, S. (2015, August 4). On Island of Lesbos, a Microcosm of Greece's Other Crisis: Migrants. *The New York Times.* Retrieved from http://www.nytimes.com

De Genova, N. (2002). Migrant "Illegality" and Deportability in Everyday Life. *Annual Review of Anthropology*, *31*, 419–447.

De Genova, N. (2013). Spectacles of migrant "illegality": the scene of exclusion, the obscene of inclusion. *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, *36*(7), 1180–1198.

Death by Rescue. (n. d.). Retrieved from https://deathbyrescue.org/

Dernbach, A. (2015). Menschenrechtler sehen EU-Datenbank kritisch*. Der Tagesspiegel*. Retrieved from http://www.tagesspiegel.de/politik/eurodac-menschenrechtler-sehen-eu-datenbank-kritisch/12050674.html

Dunai, M. (2015, June 17). Hungary to fence off border with Serbia to stop migrants. *Reuters*. Retrieved from http://www.reuters.com/article/us-hungary-immigration-idUSKBN0OX17I20150618

Dunai, M., & Vasovic, A. (2015, October 16). Hungary shuts off migrant route from Croatia. *Reuters*. Retrieved from http://www.reuters.com/article/us-europe-migrants-hungary-croatia-idUSKCN0SA1P620151016

Europe builds another wall: Macedonia erects second barrier of razor wire to stem the human tide from Greece. (2016, February 8). *Dailymail.* Retrieved from http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-3437717/A-second-wall-razor-wire-stem-human-tide-Macedonia-builds-fence-border-Greece-send-message-migrants-attempts-cross-illegally.html

European Commission. (2015). *Refugee Crisis: European Commission takes decisive action* [Press Release]. Retrieved from http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_IP-15-5596_en.htm

European Commission. (2016a). Managing The Refugee Crisis. Italy: Progress Report. Retrieved from https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/sites/homeaffairs/files/what-we-do/policies/european-agenda-migration/background-information/docs/managing_the_refugee_crisis_-_italy_state_of_play_report_20160210_en.pdf

European Commission. (2016b). Member States' notifications of the temporary reintroduction of border control at internal border pursuant to Article 25et seq. of the Schengen Borders Code. Retrieved October 10, 2016 from http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/home-affairs/what-we-do/policies/borders-and-visas/schengen/reintroduction-border-control/docs/ms_notifications_-_reintroduction_of_border_control_en.pdf

European Council. (2016). *EU-Turkey Statement, 18 March 2016* [Press Release]. Retrieved from http://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2016/03/18-eu-turkey-statement/

European Union. (2016). EU Operations in the Mediterranean Sea. Retrieved from https://eeas.europa.eu/sites/eeas/files/5_euoperationsinmed_2pg.pdf

Frontex. (n. d.). Mission and Tasks. Retrieved from http://frontex.europa.eu/about-frontex/mission-and-tasks/

Frontex. (2015). Frontex and Greece agree on operational plan for Poseidon Rapid Intervention. Retrieved from http://frontex.europa.eu/news/frontex-and-greece-agree-on-operational-plan-for-poseidon-rapid-intervention-yiSxga

Frontex. (2016). Western Balkans Annual Risk Analysis 2016. Warsaw: Risk Analysis Unit. Retrieved from: http://frontex.europa.eu/assets/Publications/Risk_Analysis/WB_ARA_2016.pdf

Harding, L. (2015, August 28). Hungarian police arrest driver of lorry that had 71 dead migrants inside. *The Guardian*. Retrieved from https://www.theguardian.com

Holehouse, M. (2015, August 25). Germany drops EU rules to allow in Syrian refugees. *The Telegraph*. Retrieved from http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/europe/germany/11821822/Germany-drops-EU-rules-to-allow-in-Syrian-refugees.html

Hungary begins border crackdown as fence completed. (2015, October 15). *Deutsche Welle*. Retrieved from http://dw.com/p/1GWVT

Huysmans, J. (2000). The European Union and the Securitization of Migration. *JCMS: Journal of Common Market Studies*, *38*(5), 751–777.

International Organization for Migration (IOM). (n. d.-a). Fundamentals of Migration Management in The Republic of Serbia. Belgrade. Retrieved from http://www.kirs.gov.rs/docs/migracije/Fundamentals_of_Migration_Management_in_the_Republic_of_Serbia.pdf

International Organization for Migrations (IOM). (n. d.-b). IOM Definition of “Migrant”. Retrieved from http://www.iom.int/who-is-a-migrant

International Organization for Migrations (IOM). (2011). Key Migration Terms. Retrieved from http://www.iom.int/key-migration-terms

International Organization for Migration (IOM). (2016). Mediterranean Sea, Recorded deaths in the Mediterranean by month, 2014 – 2016. *Missing Migrants Project*. Retrieved from https://missingmigrants.iom.int/mediterranean

Kasparek, B. (2016a). Complementing Schengen: The Dublin System and the European Border and Migration Regime. In H. Bauder & C. Matheis (Eds.), *Migration Policy and Practice* (pp. 59–78). Palgrave Macmillan US.

Kasparek, B. (2016b). Routes, Corridors, and Spaces of Exception: Governing Migration and Europe. Retrieved from http://nearfuturesonline.org/routes-corridors-and-spaces-of-exception-governing-migration-and-europe/

Kilibarda, P., & Kovačević, N. (2016). Country Report: Serbia. *European Council for Refugees and Exiles (ECRE)*. Retrieved from http://www.asylumineurope.org/sites/default/files/report-download/aida_sr.pdf

King, L., & Johnson, G. (2015, September 3). Death of Syrian toddler throws global spotlight onto refugees crisis. *Los Angeles Times*. Retrieved from http://www.latimes.com

KIRS. (2016). Overview of the activities undertaken during the increased influx of migrants. Retrieved from http://www.kirs.gov.rs/articles/navigate.php?type1=3&lang=ENG&id=2330&date=0

Kogler, K., Fank, M., Dominic, V., & Rebic, V. (2016). Joint Statement of Heads of Police Services from the Meeting Held in Zagreb, Croatia, on 18th of February 2016. Zagreb.

Krajewski, A. (2015, November 14). Poland says cannot take migrants under EU quotas without guarantees after Paris attacks. *Reuters*. Retrieved from http://uk.reuters.com

Leaders' Meeting on refugee flows along the Western Balkans Route. (2015). Leaders’ Statement. Brussels. Retrieved from http://ec.europa.eu/news/2015/docs/leader_statement_final.pdf

Licourt, J. (2016). Turquie : Erdogan menace l'Europe de laisser passer les migrants. *Le Figaro.* Retrieved from http://www.lefigaro.fr/international/2016/11/25/01003-20161125ARTFIG00141-turquie-erdogan-menace-l-europe-de-laisser-passer-les-migrants.php

Lyman, R. (2015, April 5). Bulgaria Puts Up a New Wall, but This One Keeps People Out. *The New York Times*. Retrieved from https://www.nytimes.com/2015/04/06/world/europe/bulgaria-puts-up-a-new-wall-but-this-one-keeps-people-out.html?_r=0

Managing Migration Together. (2016, February 24). Declaration. Vienna. Retrieved from https://www.bmeia.gv.at/fileadmin/user_upload/Zentrale/Aussendungen/2016/Westbalkankonferenz_Draft_Declaration_Letztfassung.pdf

Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF). (2017). Migration: Thousands trapped in freezing temperatures in Greece and the Balkans. Retrieved from http://www.msf.org/en/article/migration-thousands-trapped-freezing-temperatures-greece-and-balkans

Mezzadra, S., & Nielson, B. (2013). *Border as Method, or, the Multiplication of Labor*. Duke University Press.

Ministero della Difesa. (n. d.). Mare Nostrum Operation. Retrieved from http://www.marina.difesa.it/EN/operations/Pagine/MareNostrum.aspx

Moving Europe. (2015). Some reflections on Šid and Adaševci. Retrieved from http://moving-europe.org/some-reflections-on-sid-and-adasevci/

Mountz, A. (2011). Specters at the Port of Entry: Understanding State Mobilities through an Ontology of Exclusion. *Mobilities*, *6*(3), 317–334.

Mountz, A., & Hiemstra, N. (2014). Chaos and crisis: Dissecting the spatiotemporal logics of contemporary migrations and state practices. *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, *104*(2), 382-390.

Mountz, A., & Kempin, R. (2014). The Spatial Logics of Migration Governance Along the Southern Frontier of the European Union. In M. Walton-Roberts & J. Hennebry (Eds.), *Territoriality and Migration in the E.U. Neighbourhood* (pp. 85–95). Springer Netherlands.

Navai, R. (2015). Tracking down Macedonia's migrant kidnap gang. *Channel 4*. Retrieved September 06, 2016, from https://www.channel4.com/news/tracking-down-macedonias-migrant-kidnap-gang

OHCHR. (2016, February 25). Europe/migration: Five-country police agreement exacerbates crisis and puts vulnerable migrants at risk. Retrieved from http://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=17091&LangID=E

REACH. (2016a). REACH Situation Overview: rapid assessment of the humanitarian impact of new border policies in the Western Balkans, 4 March 2016. Retrieved from http://www.reachresourcecentre.info/system/files/resource-documents/rapid_situation_overview_march_final.pdf

REACH. (2016b). Weekly Situation Overview: European Migration Crisis, Western Balkans, 1 - 24 January 2016. Retrieved from http://reliefweb.int/report/serbia/weekly-situation-overview-european-migration-crisis-western-balkans-1-24-january-2016

Santer, K., & Wriedt, V. (in press). (De)Constructing borders: Contestations in and around the Balkan corridor in 2015/2016. *Movements. Journal for Critical Migration and Border Regime Studies, 3*(1).

Scheel, S. (2013). Autonomy of Migration Despite Its Securitisation? Facing the Terms and Conditions of Biometric Rebordering. *ResearchGate*, *41*(3), 575–600.

Serbia: Law of 2007 on Asylum. (2007). Retrieved from http://www.refworld.org/docid/47b46e2f9.html

Serbia: Law on Refugees. (2002). *RS Official Gazette, nos. 18/92, 45/2002*. Retrieved from http://www.minoritycentre.org/sites/default/files/law-refugees-serbia.pdf

Stokholm, Tim. (2016). The Mediterranean Migrant Crisis: A Critical Challenge to Global Nation-States.

Than, K. & Vasovic, A. (2015, July 1). After Hungary's fence plan, Serbia says to step up migrant controls. *Reuters*. Retrieved from http://www.reuters.com/article/us-europe-migrants-serbia-idUSKCN0PB56820150701

Tsianos, V., & Karakayali, S. (2010). Transnational Migration and the Emergence of the European Border Regime: An Ethnographic Analysis. *European Journal of Social Theory*, *13*(3), 373–387.

UN General Assembly. (1948). Universal declaration of human rights. Paris. Retrieved from http://www.un.org/en/universal-declaration-human-rights/

UNHCR. (n. d.). Refugees/Migrants Response – Mediterranean – Daily Arrivals. Retrieved from http://data.unhcr.org/mediterranean/country.php?id=502

UNHCR. (2007). Refugee Protection and Mixed Migration: A 10-Point Plan of Action. Retrieved from http://www.unhcr.org/protection/migration/4742a30b4/refugee-protection-mixed-migration-10-point-plan-action.html

UNCHR (2016a). Refugees/Migrants Emergency Response - Mediterranean. Retrieved from http://data.unhcr.org/mediterranean/country.php?id=83

UNHCR. (2016b). Syria Regional Refugee Response – Regional Overview. Retrieved September 05, 2016, from http://data.unhcr.org/syrianrefugees/regional.php

UNHCR. (2016c). UNHCR viewpoint: 'Refugee' or 'migrant' – Which is right?. Retrieved from http://www.unhcr.org/uk/news/latest/2016/7/55df0e556/unhcr-viewpoint-refugee-migrant-right.html

Vučić, A. (2015). O*dluka o izdavanju potvrde o ulasku na teritoriju republike srbije za migrante koji dolaze iz zemalja u kojima su njihovi životi u opasnosti*. Belgrade: RS Official Gazette.

ANNEXES

1. Migrants' and volunteers' Interviews

Volunteer in Opatovac camp, Opatovac, 10th of October, 2015

"The people that arrive in Opatovac come mostly from Syria, Afghanistan and Iraq, but some of them are from other countries … North of Africa, Pakistan, Somali. They generally arrive in Turkey, cross with a boat to Greece, then go to Macedonia and Serbia, until they arrive here. Sometimes they go through Bulgaria, but I heard that the situation is very difficult for them there. Or they go to Albania, but I do not know much about that either. They have to walk for long periods, and sometimes also wait at the various borders. It is not far away from the camp (the border, Ed.), maybe 10 kilometers. When they arrive here they are tired, dirty, hungry. The situation is very difficult sometimes. This is the first camp in Croatia, here they have to register, otherwise they do not let them enter in the camp and they cannot continue. In Hungary they cannot enter without the documents they receive here. From the camp they are brought by bus to the Hungarian border, where they have to get out. They check their papers and there are other buses at the other side waiting for them. I think they bring them directly to Austria.

If you want to enter the camp you have to do it with some organization, if you go there by yourself the police will send you away. They do not want too many people looking around, even journalists are allowed in only sometimes. But you can come with us, I will have to talk with the coordinator. It is easier if you are ready to do the night shifts, there is really a lot of need for people in the night. During the day it is easy, but if during that time you are sometimes ten people working…to distribute food for instance … at night you are two! And I can tell you, that is a stressful moment. You also have to be psychologically strong. You will see people in very, very bad conditions, and it is not easy. The other day this young girl came with us to help … half an hour into the camp and she was crying and we had to send her away. It is very difficult for them … but it is difficult also for us exactly because it is difficult for them.

In the camp we do what we can with the time we have, and then they go. Croatia is too poor to keep them here, they can go to Germany, they are a bigger country and with more money. Many of these people are not very educated, in particular Afghanis and Pakistanis. They expect to find an el-Dorado in Germany, they do not realize that even if the government will give them money, it is not going to be a lot. They convert in their local money and think this is a lot, but they do not know that the prices are higher there. Many of them stayed for a long time in refugee camps in Turkey, and when the exodus happened they profited and went with it. I do not know, maybe they will send them back. Legally if they do not obtain asylum they will be sent to their own country, but in practice? There are so many, and repatriation is an expensive thing. We will see.

Integration then, this will be a problem. We saw it in Europe in other occasions. They are like the others, they will never integrate, I do not see why it should be different this time. In the camp now we see people of different nationalities fighting. Syrians often complain that Afghanis steal. I sort of understand, many Syrians are wealthy and the others have nothing. But I think it will be the same once they arrive in Germany. They will keep stealing. They will have no money, probably they will not find a job, and the easiest thing will be to steal, sell drugs and so on. Criminality. They think they can have easy money like that. Look at the color of people in the parks selling drugs in all European cities. The European Union have to be very attentive on this, otherwise they will shoot themselves in the foot".

Afghani boy, Opatovac, 14th of October, 2015

"I come from Afghanistan, I am here with my entire family. I lost them at the border, I was on a bus different from them. My father is sick, he needs medicines every day. I am sick too, look at my leg, and now I also have fever … I cannot travel alone. Arriving here was not easy, conditions are always bad, people try to profit from us. Here it is good compared to other places before, like in Turkey. But we waited a long

time at the border. There was no cover and it was raining, we stayed for two days there. I injured my knee falling and it got infected, so some people there took me out of the crowd and put me on a bus first. I saw a doctor here, but now I lost my family because of this. They did not let them come with me".

Czech Team coordinator 1, Sid, 11th of January 2016

"The situation at the time was one of the most difficult, nothing compared to what we see now (January 11, Ed.). Now everything is calm and easy in comparison. At that moment there were a very large number of people coming, up to 10'000 per day, and never less than a few thousands. It initially took a long time for people to cross the border, and many stayed there also for two or three days. We distributed water and some food, but sometimes we had not enough. We were the first and only there, in Berkasovo, offering help. Then other organizations came and the situation became a bit better. When they opened the new registration camp in Slavonski Brod [c.f. further] things changed. Now they can take the train, they can wait here in the meantime … everything is more organized. But back in October it was chaos. You where there, you remember. The rain, wind. Most of the people did not even had shoes. They were desperate".

Asylum Info Centre volunteer, Belgrade, 23rd of December 2015

"Here they can come, we give them all the information they need about the asylum system. Some of those that arrive are not registered with police […] they probably entered in the country with smugglers and they arrived directly in Belgrade. Or they have expired papers. We help them and go together with them to the police station for registration, so they can obtain the papers to continue to Croatia. Or if they cannot they can ask for asylum. We go with them so the police cannot refuse them, we know that sometimes they go alone and get treated badly and told to go away. The law says that everyone can ask for asylum in Serbia, so why they do that? But there are so many that the police are now open also at night, registering people and so on, and maybe sometimes the police are tired of it. Then it is another question if they get accepted or not, but you can always ask. This is what take most of our time: they come, we have to ask what documents they have, some are expired, some have none, bring them to police, try to make everything ok. It is hard and we are not many. Sometimes we ask other organizations, they help us. It is just important that someone that knows how the system works and speaks Serbian is there, so they cannot refuse them."

Pakistani man 1, Belgrade, 5th of January 2016

"I am from Pakistan. I came here with this friend of mine. I had no job in Pakistan, so I went to Turkey. I stayed there for six months. I had a job there, working in a factory to make clothes. It was not the best pay, but I had a job, I could send some money home … no problem. When everyone started to go I thought that was a good idea, why not going to Germany, you can make more money there. But now I am here, I have no money to pay for a smuggler to continue. I tried to pass to Croatia but they sent me back. Two times. So now I can only go to Hungary but I do not know how and I have no money to pay for it. But what I really want is to go back to Turkey, but they told me they would not let me pass in Macedonia, and I do not even have money to pay for the train to go there. You think I can go without tickets? They let me go back if I ask and explain I will go back to Turkey? I regret leaving Turkey. Here I survive, have food and a place to sleep, I applied to for asylum here. But there is nothing I can do here now, no job, nothing, I do not like this situation".

Afghani man 1, Belgrade, 8th of January 2016

"I come from Afghanistan. I came here from Iran, Turkey, Greece, Bulgaria and now Serbia. It is two months that I am traveling, but I spent most of them in Turkey. Here Serbia good! The rest is not, really. In Turkey they force you to go on these boats once you paid, so full of people, you hope you arrive. You should see, a small plastic boat … with hundreds in it! Then Greece. Maybe there it is ok, no big problem,

but Bulgaria is very bad. We walked for I do not know how much. In the woods, you have to hide, people are chasing you, it is cold, no food, no nothing, sleeping outside. Bulgaria very bad, very bad. But Serbia good [says with a very big smile]. They let us in, police just take your name and fingerprints, no problem, go. And you give us food and shoes and coffee. I do not have to hide here … Mmh, maybe the people look at me strange, but no problem. Serbia good!".

Afghani man 2, Belgrade, 3rd of June 2016

"How do we come here form Afghanistan? That is a good question. You pay, and then they bring you here. How much you pay depends on the smuggler. There are a lot of them! Some are good, famous, they bring you to Europe with the airplane or something, on an easy way. There you pay a lot! Others are cheaper, like me..[laughs] I am joking, of course . The cheapest, the less chances you have to arrive with success. But generally you do not pay less than 5'000 Euros. When you pay, you give this money to someone that keeps it safe, you do not give it to the smuggler. Then when you are arrived where you wanted to, you call and tell them, so they can unblock the money. Otherwise if you give them the money directly you will never arrive where you want, trust me".

Pakistani man 2, Sid, 22nd of January 2016

"I left from Pakistan 4 month ago, my friends 5. We met in a prison in Bulgaria. In Pakistan there is no job, sometimes there are terrorist attacks, bombs, and our government is the worst. We come from close to the border with Afghanistan, not too far from Islamabad. I did not like the situation, there is no future, you know? So I left. Going to Iran was a nightmare. One night a group of robbers stopped us, they stole everything we had, and they shot one guy that did not wanted to give them what his belongings. We managed to arrive in Turkey, where we stayed some time. Then to Greece with the boat. It is expensive, and really not a good experience. There are so many people on one boat, but they force you to go in. You cannot change idea, they would beat you, or even shot you. In Greece they stop you and put you into camps for registration, but once this is done you can go out. I tried to enter Macedonia but they would not let me in, so I went to Bulgaria. The police found me, they put me in jail. There it was really bad. They can do whatever they want to you. They beat you, take everything you have. I hate them. And no one tells you when you will be free. I stayed two months there, my friend was already there when I arrived, he stayed more. Then they let us go and we managed to arrive in Serbia. You also have to register but they let you in, no problem. In Belgrade they told us that the border with Croatia was going to be open from the 22nd of January for three days. Those of Info Park told us. We know that it is only for Syrian, Afghanis and Iraqi, but in these days it is open for everyone. We payed 20 Euros and a bus brought us here from Belgrade. We try what we can but we know that people always lie to us, but what can we do? A group of friends from Pakistan came back to Belgrade the other day. The smugglers brought them to the border with Romania and told them that it was now open and they could go. When the police found them they shot at them and killed two. This is very bad, we want to go to Europe, now we are here, we will continue, we cannot go back. I could not look at my family if I go back, or my friends. My family gave me the money to go".

Syrian boys, Sid, 13th of January 2016

"We come from Aleppo, in Syria. When the protests started we were worried, but we believed that it would have been possible to take down Bashar al-Assad. He is not good. He is the cause of all this mess. He was killing his own population; how can a leader of a country do that? Then the situation started to be really bad. Until then we could still study, we were all students, but when fights started it was not possible anymore. It was a very dangerous situation, and chaotic. Everything is destroyed and everyone is fighting each other. The problem for us is that we are young and in good shape, so if a fighting group finds you, then you have to fight for them. If your friends get caught by another group, you have to fight your friends, you understand? We stayed until we could, but at some point we decided to leave, there is nothing left

there. We first crossed the border to Turkey, from there we went where we knew there were smugglers to take us to Greece. It is not difficult to find them, really, they find you. We have money, and with social medias it is not difficult to find out where you have to go and what you have to do. It was very easy. In Greece you have to register, they take your fingerprints, ask your documents and so on, but then they let you go and you are free to move. From Greece to Macedonia, and now we are here, in Serbia. It took us 6 days from Aleppo till here. We had some problems with other migrants sometimes. We are from Syria and everything is easy for us, but there are many that cannot pass easily as we did, they do not let them, and so they hate us. The big problem is that our documents are very important, without these we cannot travel. They tell you: you always need to keep the documents of the previous country to go to the next one. Luckily we are a group. When we want to sleep, one always stays awake to control that no one steals. People try to steal our documents to use them for themselves. In particular people from Morocco, they really are bad. We can recognize them easily by their accent … and their look really. Sometimes this was very stressful, especially in Greece, but now it is ok because everyone that is here can pass, so we feel more relaxed. We are now going to Germany, but if we could we would have never left Syria. We love our country; we will go back when the war is over".

Czech Team coordinator 2, Sid, 26th of March, 2016

"Now that the border is closed the situation is more calm and much easier for everyone, even boring sometimes. We changed a bit the system of shifts, we do not cover the nights anymore, it is not necessary, they [the migrants, Ed.] sleep and there is no one new arriving. But even during the day, in the 8 hours you spend there you have the time to get bored. We are still working in Adaševci, but now also in Principovac. In Adaševci there are no more buses coming, because anyway the border with Croatia is closed. The migrants stay in the tents behind the hotel, with basically nothing to do. Some are here since the closure, but others have already left. The same is in Principovac, they stay in the hospital or in the tent outside, but they have nowhere to go really. The border with Croatia is just a few meters away, but police take good care of it and they cannot cross it. Besides, they maybe do not even know that every time they look behind the building they actually look at Croatia, and not Serbia. Migrants are also bored, what do you do there all day? There is nothing, you cannot even go out somewhere, the city is far. There is a bus that goes to Šid in the morning and comes back in the afternoon, but it is not much, and also in Šid there is nothing to do. Some of them left, and they are all going to the Hungarian border, there they have more chances to cross. Here they really have no chance. You can see someone walking in the fields from very far away, and the police knows so they look for people. Really they do not even try anymore. We stopped our activities because there is no more need. Other organizations can easily cover what we used to do...Red Cross...the Commissariat".

Afghani men 3, Belgrade, 10th of June 2016

"I used to work as a translator for the British Army in Afghanistan. It was a good job, very good money for there. Then the situation started to become worst every day. There were bombs exploding, people being kidnapped for ransom and all kind of atrocities. It was not safe anymore. In Greece they gave me this paper that allows me to stay for 30 days. Then I went through Macedonia and now Serbia. At the Serbian border they gave me another document, look at it. It was really easy to enter Serbia; they do not ask you many questions. They say I have to ask asylum here, but I do not want to. I thank Serbia, but I will go. During the night I can stay in this center just outside the city. The conditions are pretty bad, there are many people, and the food is bad. Everyone can go in and out as they want, but at night they do not let you in anymore. We can also move freely, there is a bus coming to the city and that brings us back in the evening. In the next days I will try to go to Hungary, I do not know how exactly, but something will come up for sure".

Worker for Save The Children, Belgrade, 09th of June 2016

"He is a minor, he is only 15 years old. He is staying in Krnjača and traveling alone. And he is registered as an adult. It happens quite often, they are kids, but border guards do not believe them and register them as 18 years old. Or maybe they do it on purpose...a non-accompanied minor means that you have to contact the social services…or UNHCR, I do not know, but you have to do something. If you are an adult, it is easier. Tomorrow he is going to Hungary to try to cross...who knows if he will make it".

2. Interview with two employees of the Serbian Commissariat for Refugees, Belgrade, 08th of June 2016

Following is a transcript of my interview with the KIRS. Since the interview was done to two employees simultaneously, I will simply refer to them as (1) and (2) to differentiate when is one or the other talking.

(1) First, we are not mandated to comment on any happenings at the borders, the ministry of the interior is the one concerned with that. The only mandate that we have is the accommodation and protection of the refugees.

Ok, but still (the KIRS) is present at the borders. Can you anyway explain me what you have seen and what is going on there? For instance, can you tell me anything about the registration process, and the entrance *and exit procedures for refugees put in place during this big wave of migration?*

While this so called "Western Balkan Route" was functioning, we had in place a very strict and, I would say, very successful regime of registration. Every single migrant entering the Republic of Serbia was identified. There was a registration centre in the town of Preševo – at the border with Macedonia – where the registration was carried out by people from the Ministry of Interior (MoI). Many state institutions were there in the field: Ministry of Interior, Commissariat for Refugees. They took care of migrants, providing food, health care, everything that was needed. Also the Ministry of health, Red Cross were there. Many institutions in synergy to be able to provide all necessary for the migrants. The registration was carried out by the MoI and in a very successful way, I would say. Maybe even better, compared to the other countries on the Route. […] There is nothing so interesting or extraordinary about the registration process: they were taking, as much as I know, fingerprints, there was a health check, issuing those temporary documents, …

I know there was another registration point, located in Dimitrovgrad at the border with Bulgaria. Was the system in place there different?

More or less the same, but we need to have in mind that the influx from that side, from the border with Bulgaria, is significantly smaller. We cannot compare these two things, and during this Western Balkans Route, [since] the route was functioning […] there was no need for the people to enter the Republic of Serbia via Bulgaria. But now it is functioning more or less, and there is a registration point at the very border with Bulgaria. There are some facilities to accommodate people for some small period of time.

Concerning who was allowed to come in... At the beginning every nationality was accepted, and at some point this "SIA rule" was instituted…

From the moment they started to follow this procedure, this […] distinction, it was more or less obvious to everybody that this Route was about to be closed. I cannot comment this on behalf of my institution, I can say it as my private opinion: […] the first time of this Route functioning, almost every nationality was eligible to enter the country and to continue this journey to Croatia, then Slovenia, Austria. With the time passing, the measures were more and more restrictive, so at one moment it was allowed only for Syrians more or less, I cannot remember anymore. But at the very end of this situation, sometimes before March and the closure of the route... I do not know who was allowed to enter, Syrians?

Yes, at some point only Syrians and Iraqi were accepted. There was an additional rule stating that only those seeking asylum in Austria and Germany could come through, …

[At this points he calls a colleague of his. He tells me that he is used to talk with the media and his discourses are a bit pre-constructed, therefore I was probably interested in talking with the colleague]

I was asking who was allowed into the country. Especially at some point there were some changes in border policies, with introduction of restriction on who was allowed to enter the country legally. Can you give me more information about this?

(2) As you know, when the crisis started in June last year, we had a large number of people who were transiting through the Republic of Serbia. All those people were issued a certificate stating that they expressed intention to seek asylum in Serbia. That was regulated by the law, and that was only legal ground for them to enter into the Republic of Serbia. It was obvious that they did not want to really seek asylum, so in November (or December?) the Ministry of Interior started the new procedure: they started to issue documents, like "migrants' certificates". The validity of the migrant certificate was 72 hours, and with that certificate they could enter into the Republic of Serbia and go further to Croatia. At that moment, we made a distinction between asylum seekers and migrants transiting through Serbia. Before that all migrants received the certificate of expressing intention of seeking asylum, but in reality they did not enter into the asylum procedure. But that was the only legal ground for them to enter. When Croatia and Slovenia decided to allow only Syrians, Iraqi and Afghani to enter into their countries, we decided to follow that policy, but people from other countries had the opportunity to seek asylum. They could not at that time get the migrant certificate, but at any moment they could ask for asylum. We did not ban to some nationality to enter into Serbia. At any moment, anyone could seek asylum, but in that case they could not go further to Croatia and Slovenia. […]

Would you say that the blocking of other nationalities except SIA was done by other countries and not by Serbia?

(2) They have a choice. If they want to stay in Serbia they can seek asylum, but people from other countries, also from Syria, Iraq and Afghanistan they do not want to stay in Serbia. But you cannot say that they were not allowed to enter in Serbia.

At some point we saw many people entering through Dimitrovgrad which were from Pakistan. They were crossing through Bulgaria illegally, walking through the woods, etc. Once arriving in Dimitrovgrad, they were also issued this paper allowing them to transit through the country?

(2) No, they were issued […] the certificate to express intention to seek asylum, not the migrant certificate. This in 2016, after this decision of other countries. […] At any moment everyone could seek asylum in Serbia, but the thing is that many did not want to stay until the end of the procedure. That does not mean that they will receive protection, or subsidiary protection or refugee status. It depends if there is a legal ground for that, but they could enter into procedure at any time.

Do you think Serbia profited of the screening of previous countries on the Balkan Route to have a reduced arrival of people, and so you were also allowed to have a more facilitating border and asylum policy?

(1) Can you repeat the question? I am not sure about the real question here.

Ok. Looking at the geographical and political position of Serbia, so a middle country in the Balkans and not being constrained by EU regulations, do you think that because of that Serbia was "allowed" to more easily issue permits to cross the country or to seek asylum? What is the role of the screening process down the migration line, operated by other countries such as Macedonia or Bulgaria?

(1) I would rephrase that question. In general, it is not the issue...we are here, but the most important fact is that nobody wants to stay here, so it is not the issue if we are here or Macedonia is down there. Nobody wants to stay in Macedonia nor in Serbia or Croatia. Everybody wants to go to Austria or Germany. That's the question.

But, at the same time there is a big difference between the border policies of Macedonia and Serbia. They build a wall on their frontier with Greece to stop this migrants, while Serbia did not do that.

(1) It is very important for us to follow all the rules set up by the European Union, and especially the rules that are proclaimed by Germany in general. [This] because of the EU accession negotiations. We were strictly following the rules coming from Germany, and this was in line with all decisions. Keep the borders open, provide people with the possibility to go through Serbia, to facilitate their travel towards Croatia.

(2) You are asking, if Serbia was at Macedonia's place, would Serbia put up a wall, or close the border to migrants?

Yes...but not exactly.

(1) The goal was to put up any fence. From the very beginning. No fences.

So, the fact that migrants do not want to stay in Serbia is also a reason to be more relaxed…

(1) It could be of course. But from the very first moment of this crisis and before, it was quite obvious that in reality no one wants to stay here. Somehow they misused our asylum system. They claim asylum and start the procedure, but in reality everybody knows that they are just waiting for the first suitable moment to leave the country and to continue their journey. […]

When people were going out from Serbia (to Croatia or Hungary when the border was still open), was there some kind of control also of the people going out?

(2) Yes, at exit points and at entrance points. (1) There were police forces of both countries in the same place. Serbian and Croatian police. In Sid for instance, on the exit points. (2) They were going to Croatia by train, so at the train station both police from Serbia and Croatia were controlling their papers. Those two countries cooperated at that point.

At some point, to enter Macedonia migrants needed the papers from Greek authorities, to enter Serbia they needed those of Macedonians, to enter Croatia those of Serbians and so on. Were these official agreements between the countries?

(2) Between Serbia and Croatia it is an official agreement. It was signed by the Ministry of Interior of both countries. Regarding Macedonia, I am not sure. (1) The police forces of those countries had regular meetings. Coordination was constant. (2) In order to control the flow, you must be sure that those persons pass through Greece, Macedonia, Croatia, etc. IOM was doing a lot in that case, helping Macedonian and Serbian governments to track the route and number of people who were passing.

Is there a sort of collaboration in the sense of exchange of data about the migrants? Do the countries of Balkans or EU have access to the database of every country?

(2) Regarding fingerprints, photos, … I am not sure, […] but we are not in the Dublin system. […] But, I think if someone from Germany asks from some data officially, the Ministry of Interior will give them to them. But I am not sure. But our fingerprints are not in [EURODAC], if they left fingerprints in Serbia someone in Germany will not know that officially. That is the reasons why they were not afraid to be registered here in Serbia: because they know that someone in Germany will not know if they were seeking

asylum here. And that they cannot be returned to Serbia on that base. For that reason, we have a great number of people who were passing and who were registered compared to Macedonia. I think that more that 90% of people were registered.

Even today are people registered? The borders are officially closed, so a lot of people arrive in Serbia illegally.

(2) Yes, but now they are afraid that if police stop them and they do not have papers, it will be troubles for them. It is in their interest to take that paper to […] express intention to seek asylum and to enter into procedure. It is obvious that they will misuse that asylum procedure in Serbia, but you must use some legal ground. Some document. Of course there is probably a lot of people who do not have any document and pass through Serbia. A lot of [journalists] are asking these days if smuggling has raised after the borders of the Balkans route were closed. We think that […] more people are using smugglers these days, comparing to 2015. Last year, when the Route was open [migrants] were visible so they did not have the need to use smugglers. They had buses, they had trains, ... They used public transportation. But nowadays, they try to be less visible so they are using smugglers.

Is it because they want to be less visible or because they are not technically allowed to travel on public transports if they do not have papers?

(2) They want to be less visible. They are afraid that they will have to stay in Serbia because they cannot go to Hungary or Croatia. […]

Would you say that the policy has not really changed in Serbia at the moment? That people are still entering the country, being registered, …

(2) Now we do not have any more migrants' certificates, we have only have that certificate to express intention to seek asylum. We returned again on the […] period before the crisis. […] But you must again enter into asylum procedure from the first moment. We have something like 3'500 persons […] who expressed intention to seek asylum in 2016.

Do you know how many of these then actually stay in Serbia until the end of the asylum process?

(2) I think…16 or 17. […] I think 9 of them received refugee status, 8 subsidiary protection. […] But less than 20.

People now use the asylum centre just for a short period of time and then…

(1) What is the average period of staying at the moment? (2) Few days.

What do they need to do to enter in asylum centre?

(2) They need to have that certificate to express intention to seek asylum. (1) But not even this at the moment. (2) We have this centre here in Belgrade [Krnjača, Ed.] that people without documents can enter, but in that case they cannot use also resources available in the centre. For example, asylum seekers have three meals per day, accommodation, etc. […] But those persons without papers they are in urgent reception. They have 1 meal per day, which is provided by Red Cross, accommodation and that is all. And they are waiting for policemen to release them some kind of document. This in order to prevent them to be at the train station, bus station and so on.

(1) Everything is better than to have them outside of the centres. (2) We had the problem that a lot of people did not want to come to the centre. They want to stay in the parks near the train station or bus station, because a lot of smugglers are over there. (1) To help them, to provide them with the possibility

to go to the centre, we even introduced a bus line from the park [Afghani park, Ed.]. It goes twice per day, at 3pm and 7pm, from the centre directly to the city centre. We do everything we can just to have them in the centre, to have them in the system, not in the streets and in the parks. (2) According to the Serbian law, they are not obliged to be accommodated in the asylum centre, they can be accommodated in the private sector if they have the possibility to pay a rent. They are free to stay in the park, you cannot prohibit them to stay in the park. […]

I had the impression that there was a change of policy after the elections. For instance, talking about parks, the police started to chase away people, not allow them to sleep in parks. Maybe to stay yes, but not to sleep, have tents, ...

[…] (1) This is not regular police, but the police in charge of protecting public order and hygiene. But, would you allow migrants to sleep in the parks in your home city? […] I think we are mild, and we are respecting their rights sometimes even more than necessary. (2) Even some Serbian citizen is not allowed to sleep in the park. And the majority of them are using services of hostels. There are a lot of new hostels nearby the park, so they are using their resources.

And the paper to intent to seek asylum is enough to be allowed to stay in a hostel?

(2) Some are illegal hostels: they accept people without papers. The police are doing something to close them. But a lot of new hostel were opened during the crisis. It was like… a new job opportunity! […]

Why do you think that people do not want to seek asylum in Serbia?

[…] (2) Very high unemployment rate, low standards of living. (1) Yes, and low wages as well. […]

Do you think pressure from European countries, or change in policies from other countries up the migration road, made Serbia to change its policies as well?

(2) Serbian officials stated “Serbia will act as other countries along the route”. We followed the […] decisions of those countries, especially the countries of final destination. In that sense, I think that the most important thing is what Germany, as country of final destination, decided. […]

Was there an official statement?

(2) Yes. We are a candidate country, so we need to adjust to the decisions that European Union is making.

Ok, and did the European Union actually gave funds to Serbia?

(2) For the crisis, yes. They received... I know how much the Commissariat received. We received 1.5 million Euros in order to employ new staff and some [other projects]. (1) To cover the expenses of electricity, water supply, … […]

Serbia agreed after the Western Balkan Summit, of creating ca. 6'000 places for asylum. How is this going?

(2) Now we have 5 permanent asylum centres, and during this crisis we opened 13 reception and transit centres. It was envisaged by the response plan in case of increasing influx of migrants – that was adopted by the government in September – that Serbia could accommodate up to 3'000 persons. After the Western Balkan Summit, we agreed to double this. […] We increased the capacity of our asylum centres from 800 to 1'200 now, and we also had probably 3'000 places in those reception centres, so hopefully I think we will probably have 5'000 or 5'500 beds. That is almost 6'000. But our capacity is only 10% full. […]

Maybe you know. These smugglers are sometimes migrants themselves, or…

(1) Yes. Sometimes there are telephone numbers on the boards in some facilities. Of course, when the numbers on the boards are seen they are being tossed away by the employees, but often you can find the numbers even at the board of this Miksalište, or this info centre, asylum centre.

I never noticed that. Interesting. But then, are there also Serbian smugglers?

(1) Serbian… I do not know, to be honest. This is something which you should ask to the police. […]

3. Interview with a worker at the public information unit of UNHCR Serbia, Belgrade, 14th of June 2016

Can you tell me something about you, what you do at the UNHCR, …?

I work at the public information unit at the UNCHR. […] The Republic of Serbia passed the first Asylum law ever in 2008 (it was implemented in March). Thereby the UNCHR passed the mandate to take care for refugees to the Republic of Serbia. […] From 1996 when we came into Belgrade (or then Yugoslavia), up to 2008, it was UNHCR that was doing the refugee status determination and working in the reception program, integration program, assistance programs, … In 2008, the Republic of Serbia assumed these responsibilities. At that time there was only one reception center for asylum seekers in Serbia. […] We built it with the help of the European Union funds and handed it over to the government.

In 2008, the law was very good. It was the developed with the assistance and consultation of UNHCR, but we had only 77 asylum seekers in 2008 in Serbia (for the whole year). I'm speaking of third country nationals. This number started to grow slowly, in 2009, 2010, and so on, only to reach more than 560'000 last year. Third country nationals with this crisis in Syria and the Middle East, … there has been a few even before 20th-15th June. There has been a small flaw: we have seen people passing through Serbia, entering through Macedonia and then going slowly towards the Hungarian border. Then, in early June the Red Cross and police asked assistance, since the number was gone up to 100-120 people a day. They asked water, medical assistance, … These people were coming totally exhausted. They were walking through Greece, they were walking through Macedonia, and then they came here. It was scorching hot already in May last year. People had many medical problems: their legs, wounds, ... They had also problems with the smugglers on route.

At that time, the demographic picture of the refugees and migrants was different from what we see now or what we have seen also towards the end of 2015. There were a lot of men. There were families as well but there were many man, which is kind of normal in the situation were you have these latent wars and conflicts. It is usually the men who leave first, trying to reach the destination and then get the families there.

Anyway, the 5th of June we got this call from Preševo, and we started immediately assisting. We sent provisions, food and water, ... Since we had already established contacts with in the reception center with the Serbian Commissariat for Refugees, we immediately reinvigorated these networks. We made contracts with the local healthcare centers so that the people could be assisted and the doctors would come to the site of Preševo.

The situation of Preševo, a small town as you know, was that they only had two computers in the Police station, were two policemen were working to register people for three hours a day. People were waiting there basically for days. They were in the streets in Preševo, you could see them all around. The situation was really bad.

The government reacted quite quickly, I would say. They first established a working group on this migration, they put the minister of Labor and Social Affairs as the head of this group, and then they

identified this old tobacco factory, a quite big compound with two or three barracks, to be used as a registration center.

They asked the UNHCR to help. We helped establishing the registration points, we bought computers for them and technical equipment, whatever they needed. Fingerprints machines came later, but at the moment we bought workstations. The police deployed more people from all over the country, and they started registering. As the flow increased, they started registering 24 hours a day, decongesting this big queue. In June and July, we had people waiting for 2 days under the sun. We built tents to provide shade, did identification of vulnerable cases, pulling them out of the queue and getting them to register first. The idea was for Preševo […] to be a temporary center, meaning that people could register, get a security check, they were expressing intention to seek asylum and get a permit to stay for 72 hours in Serbia until they filed an official claim for asylum. Once they were registered they could get assistance from the Red Cross. […] Then, many other donors came, of course, and the NGOs, international and national, volunteers, ... Once they were registered, they would get assistance. […] In this center people would stay for two or three days, and then proceeded to Hungary, mostly. There were two possibilities for them to proceed, one was with buses that were first privately organized, and they charged 25 Euros per person for the ride from Preševo to the Hungarian border (for a small time because the Hungarian border closed on the 15th of September). And there was a train. The train is a normal train which runs from Macedonia to Serbia. The ticket for the train was 15 Euros. […] Before this great arrival of people, we had a route going from Preševo, to Belgrade, to Hungary. [Back] then you would see […] many people in parks all day. They were waiting to get their money, to rest, and so on. They did not want to file for asylum, most of them, so in the meantime there is an asylum reception center near Belgrade (Krnjača), which was offered to them, but they were not very willing to use it, they wanted to proceed as fast as possible. […] We started organizing assistance again. […] Then Miksalište was opened, on the 20th of August I think. […] Many people came, the civil society, ordinary citizens, doctors, phone companies to help with the chargers, you name it.

However, once Hungary erected a fence on the 15th of September, for the first two days, people amassed at the border and did not want to move. They tough Hungary was going to open the border. […] Almost no one wanted to seek asylum in Serbia, everybody wanted to go to Germany. The second country of choice was Sweden, but […] 90% of them, if you asked them, they said they were going to Germany. […]

When the route changed (that was when Croatia opened), then there was an official border crossing, which was operational for two or three days. Everything else had stopped, the traffic had stopped at the official border crossing. And then there was an unofficial border crossing at Berkasovo-Bapska. This was basically a field, and there is a ramp. There are corn fields and a border crossing.

Berkasovo-Bapska for the informal border crossing, amidst the fields. Basically a corridor was made for these refugees to cross, because they wanted to cross very much. There was literally a corridor, where humanitarian agencies were. […] The Croatian side was letting people through, not as they were coming, but as much as they could accommodate in Opatovac. They established very quickly this reception center – registration center. This was kind of… I would say a very good cooperation between the two countries. […] They reacted immediately: they agreed that as the refugees were coming, they would allow as much as possible in, as they could accommodate and register, and they would let them through. The Serbian side was to help in the meantime, and we would again do the identification of the most urgent cases.

So, how long it took between the closing of the Hungarian border and the opening of Berkasovo?

About one week at the most. In the meantime, they were crossing through different points, through Croatia. But it was this informal passing of Berkasovo-Bapska which became THE border crossing. We were present 24/7, we were present in Preševo, everywhere 24/7. […]

What we saw by the end of August already, but really in September-October, [is that] the figures went up from 120 in June, up to 10'000. As you have heard we have had days with 10'000, but never less than 2'500 per day. […] The demographic changed: there were increasingly many women, with small children, with babies, many medical cases, many elderlies. […] Everybody was helping: the police were very nice… they were… how could I say… they were going far beyond their duty. They were acting very humanly, carrying the refugees, playing with kids and so on, so it was kind of really humane and nice. Nice… I mean, how can be nice in such a situation. […] People who were coming were increasingly out of money. The state… the buses still continued to exist, but the state organized this train that was running in the morning and in the evening from Macedonia. The first time we had these 10'000 people over a weekend, it was Macedonia who decided to transport them from the Greek border to the Serbian border. Just take them there, without any announcement to the Serbian authorities. […] Serbia reacted, and asked to Macedonia to at least keep information points, to tell how many people are coming, to advice, so that Serbia could be prepared, and all of us who were working with them. That cooperation started. […] The cooperation was very good between our offices, and then increasingly between the states.

To go back… […] The state organized the train, they organized for groups to be transported to Sid, to the Croatian border. In this area, towards the border with Croatia, as the situation changed, there were two refugee points, like Adaševci: just a point to help refugees to rest. […] A train was organized from Croatia, first they run three-four times a day, depending on the numbers, then it slowly went down to two, and then went down to one, until the beginning of March basically, when the route closed.

The people who would come on train, they would go to Sid. They were offered again assistance in food, water, medical assistance, asylum system advising, information about what is happening along the route, everything they needed. Adaševci the same. In Adaševci the people would come by bus, it was converted into a refugee point with the help of everyone, so many volunteers and so many donors. […] These people would stop with the bus in Adaševci, and wait for the train to come, and they continued the route. Croatia, was registering them in Opatovac and taking them to the Slovenian border, then to Austria and further. The movement of people is very quick. From Preševo, it they were on a bus, in ten hours they would have been in Croatia. If everything was going smoothly, of course. There were times were they could not, but I would say that the pace of movement increased.

There were a few who asked for asylum in Serbia. […] The figures gradually increased, […] but last year the Republic of Serbia granted fourteen refugee statuses, and granted sixteen subsidiary protections. […] The state, […] decided to amend the law on asylum of 2008 to adapt it to the situation of this increased inflow. People got papers for 72 hours, but were staying in Serbia for different reasons, especially after the border closed on 8th of March. […] After 72 hours, [they became] illegal in the country. The state was tolerating that, knowing that there was no other way, and that the law did not specify such a situation. […]

<u>There are many things going on, especially if we consider the border, the registration, who was allowed to come in or not. Serbia is a very interesting case, if we compare it to other countries. Some had more restrictive rules introduced, for instance a big one was the SIA rule...</u>

Yes, that was the change in November, after the Paris attacks. What has helped a lot in Serbia, is first that the people themselves have this experience with refugees. They were very open to helping, they were very sympathetic. The second thing that helped, is that there were no incidents. […] It was because the

authorities, very strongly at the beginning, the Prime Minister and the ministries, kept repeating that they would not tolerate any incidents with the people who are fleeing war, with the people who were crossing thousands of miles in search of security. They would not get to Serbia to get harmed here. They were very adamant about it, they launched a big campaign, […] talking to the people on TV, everywhere. […] Just to keep the people aware. And [stressing] the need to help us as much as possible.

This helped a lot. Also, the Prime Minister said he would keep the border open, they would not close the border to refugees. Then, slowly the situation evolved and Serbia would behave as all the other countries upstream. We were advocating for open borders all the while, for registration of course, and security check and everything, but still keeping borders open to refugees, according to the convention on refugees. Pretty much Serbia was doing that, sometimes closing their eyes to irregular flows, and so on. Now, since the border closed, […] we were estimating that about 2'000 refugees [were] stuck in Serbia, in the centers and on route. Then, this number fell down to 900, and then went up to 1'400. According to estimates, there are some 1'800-1'900 migrants in the country. Again, the route is through Hungary. Hungary is letting in some 20 to 30 […] or 50 people a day. We see people gathering in Kelebija, at the border with Hungary. Many of them are regular, people who registered with the authorities, but also we are seeing an increasing number people who irregularly move. Irregular means they use smugglers. This is what UNHCR has been also saying since March last year: that anytime a country, any country in the world, closes their borders to the refugees, to the people who are fleeing persecutions, war, destruction in their countries, in their home towns… anytime a country closes the borders, this people will find a way to go, because they crossed so many kilometers, so many terrible situations, often with kids... one border will not stop them, they will find a way. Smugglers get very well organized. This means the money makes the world go round. […] The money that they spend on smugglers would be of better use in the country of destination; to integrate. Of course, integration in any country is a very complex issue, but still: if they have some money to put up forward, and they have some, almost 75% of the people who transited, [it is better]. […] There are economic migrants, but […] many of them are refugees according to the convention. So, how can you close the borders? That being said, Germany took so many of them last year. Sweden took many. It is appreciated. They are overstretched, but you see, the people are still crossing.

Switzerland also took some, but compared to the numbers of arrivals it is almost a joke…

Yes, this is another issue. European Union was built on solidarity, the unity of European people, on this principles of burden sharing and everything. We would welcome very much to see that solidarity in action. I am not saying that there is no solidarity. But also that the European Union, the states, all of them, should unite over this issue of helping refugees. It cannot be that one European member state can take 1 million refugees and another state says they do not want to take more than 100. But we had countries that would not take refugees. And that cannot be. They are part of the European family, and they were accepted into the European family, so part of this is share the burden. As you have probably heard, this year we already started this campaign at the global level. We have written a petition, UNHCR, globally. We launched the campaign “We Stand With Refugees”, where we are calling on the public all over the world to sign the petition. We are focusing on Europe, because we are in Europe. The people, the ordinary people have helped and are willing to help, so we can in a way influence the governments to change their policies, to change their rhetoric. We have seen a very strong anti-refugees rhetoric. We want to change that; we want to help if we can or advocate for changes. The petition is open to signature since the 7th of June and it will be open until the 15th of September. […] We also hope to appeal to the politicians, because in the end… or in the beginning, everything is a political situation, with a political solution. If the political solution would be reached to stop the war in Syria, to stop the war everywhere it is raging, Iraq, Afghanistan, then there would be no refugees, right? Or at least, less refugees. Or the refugees would choose to go home, because, from the experience that UNHCR has, when the people flee, they usually think that they are

going to be out of home for a couple of days. And then it is two years. At first it is “I am running away from home, I am going to be back in a week”. There is a very strong disbelief with refugees.

On the matter of public opinion and the general politic of what is going on today… this… crisis?...

It is a refugee crisis, yes.

If we look at religion, the public opinion in Europe is actually worried about Islam, but not only in Europe. In the US, with the popularity of Trump and his discourses, there is a general scare of Islam. At least in a certain part of the people.

What UNCHR has also being saying for quite some time now… Europe has… over 400 million inhabitants? I am not sure about the figures. And we are talking about a million refugees to host, who sought security in Europe. This is not even one percent of the population of Europe. How can that change the demographic of Europe? On the other hand, we have seen terrorists’ attacks over the past year, with so many people dying. It is a very tough challenge. Also Europe, the population of Europe, those who have been victims, the greatest number of victims have been the refugees, genuine refugees. If you take a baby of 4 months, and you travel across the sea in a dingy... you cannot be a terrorist. How can you be a terrorist if you are risking you baby to be drown, yourself to be drown? They are desperate.

I guess, it is difficult for some people to really realize the situation, especially if they do not see it directly. There is also pressure somewhere to describe all refugees as economic migrants.

Yes, that is why UNHCR has been globally speaking about the difference between refugees and economic migrants. Everyone has the right to access the refugee status determination procedure. To seek asylum. If they go through the procedure, and the authorities of the state, of any state, find out that they are not genuine refugees, then other laws apply to them. Every country has different law for migrants. Then they can return home voluntarily, they can apply to other regulations depending on their state, but they have to have the access to some procedure, and only then you can determine if someone is a refugee or not. You cannot say… if someone is for instance from Pakistan, that he is not a refugee, but an economic migrant. Because that person, from Pakistan, might… I do not know… he is maybe a homosexual, he might be fleeing a persecution in his country because of his sexual orientation, or political opinion. The convention, in the first article of the refugee convention of '51, expose out all the forms persecution to grant refugee status. It is not only the war: it is also all the other forms of persecution.

Absolutely. Or religion. I remember a Pakistani guy we had at Miksalište. He was part of a minority of Islam, I do not remember the name exactly [Ahmadiyya], a particular movement of Islam, born in India, where they advocate for “Love for all, hatred for none”. And it is not well seen by other currents of Islam.

In Serbia, they have been more open than others. Giving these papers to intent to seek asylum, basically letting everyone on even when the SIA rule was applied by other countries (and technically by Serbia). We still had many Pakistani, or people from other countries, Bangladesh… They could enter the procedure. Until they went through the procedure, Serbian authorities could not say whether they were migrants or not, but they provided access to asylum.

Yes, Serbia was so open for this compared to other countries who were building walls for instance. That is due to the fact that many… most of these people do not want to stay in Serbia?

That is true. I must say that this is also one of the factors. This is my personal opinion. One of the factors why the public was so well disposed, why there were absolutely no anti-refugee rhetoric, is because it was obvious that this people do not saw Serbia as their destination country. And any refugee we talked to, and the journalists… you name it... everyone is saying that they thank Serbia, but that they do not want

to stay. There was no fear among the population, as you have it in Europe. Because they are transiting, so Serbia is a transit country, just like Macedonia, just like Croatia, like Hungary! This is also one the factor that contributed to this benevolent stand.

Why would you say, if Macedonia is also a transit country… why would they then decide to build this wall with Greece?

Actually, when they closed the borders, on the rest of the Balkan Route, Austria told Slovenia that they were slowly decreasing the numbers, then they said they would stop, they would close. Then Slovenia informed Croatia, Croatia informed Serbia, and then Serbia informed Macedonia. Everyone was afraid to have thousands of refugees stuck in their country, and that they would not be able to provide for them. Macedonia is even poorer than Serbia.

So, you think that Serbia profited of not being on the "first line"?

I would say, yes. Serbia is… geographically this time… it was in a much better position than Greece and Macedonia. Than Greece especially. Because it was in middle of the Route.

Another county, so another route, was going through Bulgaria…

There are 3 causes of person coming, and there have been such a number of persons throughout this whole crisis, that were coming through Bulgaria. Not big numbers, but still people who were coming through.

Entering from Bulgaria... talking with refugees, they generally had horror stories about it. Detention, being robbed by the population, by the police…

We heard those stories too, yes.

This might be a reason that deters a lot of the people to go through Bulgaria…

It might be. Not only that but crossing, if you look at the geography, from Greece to Bulgaria is much more difficult to cross. There are mountains and so on, it is very difficult. There are easier routes.

A precise question: did Serbia ever operated push-backs at the borders? Or detention?

There was no detention. The people had all the while freedom of movement. This is something they were afraid of. When we were advising them and the authorities to both the reception centers, they were afraid that they would be detained. There was a lot of tension. At no point there was detention of anyone in the country. As for the push-backs, we have heard about it. Incidents, I would I say. […] We intervened with the authorities. As far as we know, the authorities told us these were only isolated incidents. But we do not monitor the border, it is not out mandate, we are there to help the people. […]

About deportations, forced or voluntary?

[…] Maybe 50, all together since March, who opted to voluntarily repatriate in their countries of origin.

What do you think it might be the possible future? Either on the Balkan Route or for refugees in Greece, Turkey, …

You have, according to the reports, about 54'000 refugees in Greece. Since the EU-Turkey deal came into effect. UNHCR has had comments about that. We have expressed it clearly: […] we had reservations, about the return of people to Turkey, and this whole thing. UNCHR has offered to the authorities of Greece assistance in doing the refugee status determination procedure to facilitate and to expedite this

procedure for so many people. No country can do 50'000 people very quickly by itself. We have been helping on the island. We have helped from the first moment of the EU-Turkey deal on Lesbos and other islands. Then came the detention centers, that is when we pulled out for a while. I think it was in March, end of March. In the meantime, these centers ceased to be detention centers, and UNHCR came back. […] What is going to happen we don't know. I mean, who can clearly know?

If I say that the borders will never be open again, also because of the increased use of detention in Greece?

I cannot comment on Greece really. I do no not know. I know the situation only on the numbers of arrival, but the route now has changed. Now it goes from Libya to Italy. You see, 211'000 people crossing to Italy. 79% of them in these first 6 months, 79% of them coming from the ten refugees producing countries. And an incredible number of deaths, thousands of deaths. I cannot remember the exact figure, and no one will ever know this. I think 4'000 in the first 6 months. We will see what is going to happen.

4. Leaders' Meeting on refugee flows along the Western Balkans Route

Leaders' Meeting on refugee flows along the Western Balkans Route

Leaders' Statement

At the invitation of the President of the European Commission, the Heads of State or Government of Albania, Austria, Bulgaria, Croatia, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Romania, Serbia and Slovenia, in the presence of the President of the European Parliament, the President of the European Council, the current and incoming Presidencies of the Council of the EU as well as the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), agreed the following statement:

"The unprecedented flow of refugees and migrants along the Eastern Mediterranean-Western Balkans route is a challenge that will not be solved through national actions alone. Only a determined, collective cross-border approach in a European spirit, based on solidarity, responsibility, and pragmatic cooperation between national, regional and local authorities can succeed. Unilateral action may trigger a chain reaction. Countries affected should therefore talk to each other. Neighbours should work together along the route, as well as upstream with countries such as Turkey, as host to the largest number of refugees. This is the only way to restore stability to the management of migration in the region, ease the pressure on the over-stretched capacity of the countries most affected, and to slow down the flows.

All countries have responsibilities and obligations under international law, in particular the Geneva Convention, and EU Member States have to fully respect EU law. Refugees need to be treated in a humane manner along the length of the Western Balkans route to avoid a humanitarian tragedy in Europe. Migrants who are not in need of international protection should be swiftly returned to their countries of origin.

We welcome the readiness of the European Commission, the UNHCR, Frontex and the European Asylum Support Office (EASO), in accordance with their respective mandates, to support us in the swift implementation of the following operational measures as of Monday:

Permanent exchange of information and effective cooperation

1/ We will nominate contact points reporting directly to us to facilitate the exchange of information and coordination; we will nominate these contact points within 24 hours to allow daily exchanges and coordination to begin immediately to achieve the gradual, controlled and orderly movement of persons along the Western Balkans route;

2/ We will work with the European Commission to make use of all tools available at European and international level, including financial assistance, based on joint needs assessments to be launched within 24 hours; immediate efforts should be focused on the provision of temporary shelter and support for all arrivals as well as on organising swift and effective returns of migrants not in need of international protection.

Limiting Secondary Movements

3/ Under the current circumstances, we will discourage the movement of refugees or migrants to the border of another country of the region. A policy of waving through refugees without informing a neighbouring country is not acceptable. This should apply to all countries along the route.

Supporting refugees and providing shelter and rest

4/ We commit to increasing the capacity of our countries to provide temporary shelter, rest, food, health, water and sanitation to all in need. Where these fall short, we commit to make our needs clear to the European Commission and, where appropriate, to trigger the EU Civil Protection Mechanism. Sufficient temporary accommodation should then be ensured along the Western Balkans route. We commit to immediately exchange information about our capacity to provide shelter to ensure its optimal shared and coordinated use, where requested;

5/ We welcome Greece's intention to increase reception capacity to 30.000 places by the end of the year and commit to supporting Greece and UNHCR to provide rent subsidies and host family programmes for at least 20.000 more. Financial support for Greece and the UNHCR is expected. This is an important precondition to make the emergency relocation system work;

6/ We will work with the UNHCR who has committed to support our efforts in improving our capacities. An additional capacity of 50.000 would allow for a better and more predictable management of the flow. We request that the UNHCR support be strengthened immediately in particular as regards reception capacity and the provision of humanitarian support. We will work with EASO on an exchange of information in this regard;

7/ We will engage in immediate operational contacts with International Financial Institutions such as the European Investment Bank, the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development and the Development Bank of the Council of Europe which are ready to support financially efforts to provide shelter of the countries willing to make use of these resources. We commit to engaging with these International Financial Institutions to act in a coordinated manner. We welcome the readiness of the European Commission to call a coordination meeting with these International Financial Institutions within a week.

Managing the migration flows together

8/ We will ensure a full capacity to register arrivals, with maximum use of biometric data, notably fingerprints; this is vital in particular at the point of first entry into the EU. Registration does not replace the obligation for EU Member States of mandatory registration in line with the common European asylum system rules;

9/ We will immediately exchange information via the contact points on the size and movement of flows through our countries, in particular the number of refugees and migrants belonging to vulnerable groups, and where requested on all arriving refugees and migrants on our territories;

10/ We will work with EU agencies in particular Frontex and EASO to swiftly put in place this exchange of information; these EU agencies are invited to provide technical assistance in this endeavour and to advise on the information to be exchanged and on the frequency of exchanges;

11/ We commit to step up our national and coordinated efforts to swiftly return migrants not in need of international protection in full respect of their dignity and human rights. This is vital in particular at the point of first entry into the EU. Frontex and EASO are invited to provide technical assistance;

12/ We will work with the European Commission and Frontex to step up practical cooperation on readmission with third countries; cooperation will be intensified with Afghanistan, Bangladesh and Pakistan, in particular in the area of returns. We call for full implementation of the existing readmission agreements. We invite the European Commission to

start working on readmission agreements with relevant countries with which such agreements are not yet in place.

Border Management

13/ We commit to immediately increase our efforts to manage and regain control of our borders and increase the coordination of our actions relating to border management. This will include our strong support to the following measures to be decided and agreed in the relevant institutions and in accordance with the relevant procedures:

- Working closely with Turkey to finalise and implement the EU-Turkey Action Plan;
- Making full use of the potential of the EU-Turkey readmission agreement and the visa liberalisation roadmap;
- Upscaling the Poseidon Sea Joint Operation in Greece, in particular Frontex's presence in the Aegean Sea, and strengthening significantly Frontex support to Greece in registering and fingerprinting activities;
- Reinforcing Frontex support at the border between Bulgaria and Turkey;
- Immediate bilateral border-related confidence-building measures, in particular the strengthening of border cooperation, between Greece and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia;
- Greece, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Albania will strengthen the management of the external land border. Frontex should assist Greece in the registration of refugees and migrants who have not yet been registered in the country;
- Increased UNHCR engagement at the border between Greece and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia;
- Working together with Frontex to monitor border crossings and support registration at Croatian-Serbian border crossing points;
- Strengthening the Frontex Western Balkans Risk Analysis Network with intensified reporting from all participants;
- The deployment in Slovenia within a week of 400 police officers and essential equipment through bilateral support;

Where appropriate, countries will make use of the Rapid Border Intervention Team (RABIT) mechanism, which should be duly equipped;

14/ We reconfirm the principle that a country may refuse entry to third country nationals who, when presenting themselves at border crossing points, do not confirm a wish to apply for international protection (in line with international and EU refugee law, subject to a prior *non-refoulement* and proportionality check).

Tackling smuggling and trafficking

15/ We commit to enhance police and judicial cooperation and to step up actions against migrant smuggling and trafficking of human beings. We call on Europol, Frontex and Interpol to support Western Balkans route-wide operations to combat people smuggling.

Information on the rights and obligations of refugees and migrants

16/ In order to discourage perilous journeys and recourse to smugglers, we commit to make use of all available communication tools to inform refugees and migrants about existing rules, as well as about their rights and obligations, notably on the consequences of a refusal to be registered, fingerprinted and of a refusal to seek protection where they are. We call on the UNHCR to support national authorities in this regard.

Monitoring

17/ We invite the European Commission to monitor the implementation of these commitments on a weekly basis, in coordination with the national contact points."

5. Joint Statement of Heads of Police Services from the Meeting held in Zagreb

JOINT STATEMENT

OF HEADS OF POLICE SERVICES FROM THE MEETING HELD IN ZAGREB, CROATIA, on 18th February 2016

At the meeting held in Zagreb, on 18th February 2016, and as a follow-up to the meeting held in Skopje, on 3rd February 2016, the Heads of Police Services of the Republic of Austria, the Republic of Slovenia, the Republic of Croatia, the Republic of Serbia and the Republic of Macedonia agreed that the migration flow along the Western Balkans route has to be reduced to the greatest possible extent.

Taking into account the facts regarding new criteria and restrictions introduced by particular states on the route, they agreed on urgent adoption of new measures, fully taking into account the assumed international obligations and agreements regarding the protection of refugees.

Considering the possible ways to improve cooperation in migration flow management, they agreed as follows:

1. All EU and Frontex agency activities at the external border of the European Union in Southeast Europe, particularly those on Greek-Turkish and Macedonian-Greek borders shall be supported.

2. Each party will inform other parties on the route about all measures and restrictions to be introduced, as soon as possible, and, if possible five days prior to their implementation.

3. For the purpose of standardisation of the migrant registration, the unified registration form has been adopted, which will be issued in the Republic of Macedonia as the country of first entry and correspondingly stamped by all police authorities of the countries on the route.

   The unified registration form referred to in point 3 is enclosed to this Statement.

4. The controlled transfer of migrants shall be carried out in accordance with bilateral agreements and arrangements of the parties, and by taking into account this Statement (including the unified registration form and the list of migrants with their statement on destination country).

5. First entry will be authorised only to those persons who fulfil the conditions of entry laid down in the Schengen Borders Code and relevant national legislation

(possession of a travel document, visa or residence permit, and other conditions if required).

The said conditions shall also apply to persons arriving from safe countries of origin as defined by the parties to this Statement.

6. On humanitarian grounds, the entry of third country nationals may be authorised to those persons who do not fulfil the conditions referred to in point 5 of this Statement but who are arriving from war-torn areas and are in need of international protection (for example from Syria, Iraq), provided that they can prove their nationality (they are in possession of identity documents or can prove their nationality by language proficiency, copies or scans of other identification documents), and are in possession of the registration form issued by Greek authorities.

7. The parties to this Statement have established additional common criteria which are to be verified in the course of the registration in the following manner:

   - the authenticity of statements and documents;
   - the circumstances in which the person left the country of origin (for example fleeing the war is a valid reason for admission, while family reunification, studying, improving of living conditions, avoiding recruitment and military obligation and personal disputes are not considered as valid reasons for applying for international protection);
   - longer residence in a safe third country could not be considered as valid reason for international protection (for example Afghan national who resided for a longer time in Turkey or Iran).

   If a person gives false information (for example, as a reason for escape states the avoidance of war but is not arriving from the country affected by armed conflict) or refuses to cooperate during the registration procedure, he/she will be refused entry.

8. The agreed common measures referred to in points 6 and 7 do not affect the obligations of a particular state in respect of carrying out of border checks and border surveillance.

9. When allowing entry and transit, any other restrictions of destination countries will also be taken into account (for example current daily quotes).

10. The deployment of foreign police officers along the Macedonian-Greek border already yields positive results and conveys a strong message that the countries concerned are resolute in jointly coping with the migration crisis.

    The Heads of Police Services agreed that they will further provide necessary support to the competent authorities of the Republic of Macedonia in order to prevent the migration crisis.

For this purpose they will provide assistance according to the needs expressed by the Macedonian side in the following tasks:

- state border surveillance,
- border checks and increased and harmonised migrant profiling measures, and
- registration of migrants on a registration form.

11. The deployment of police officers shall be governed by bilateral arrangements.

12. Police authorities will exchange all urgent information concerning the implementation of this Statement and migration crisis, directly through competent services, the list of which forms an integral part of this Statement.

    All parties shall immediately inform each other of any change.

13. This form of cooperation is open for accession by any other interested party.

14. All interested parties will be informed about the content of this Statement.

15. This Statement shall come into effect upon signature by the signatory parties.

Done at Zagreb, 18th February 2016.

Konrad Kogler
General Director for Public Safety
the Republic of Austria

Marjan Fank
Director General
the Republic of Slovenia

Vlado Dominić
Director General
the Republic of Croatia

Vladimir Rebić
acting Police Director
the Republic of Serbia

Goranche Savovski
Director, Bureau for Public Security
the Republic of Macedonia

6. Managing Migration Together Conference

BM.I REPUBLIC OF AUSTRIA
FEDERAL MINISTRY OF THE INTERIOR

EUROPE
INTEGRATION
FOREIGN AFFAIRS
FEDERAL MINISTRY
REPUBLIC OF AUSTRIA

Managing Migration Together

24 February 2016, Vienna

Declaration

We, the Ministers of Foreign Affairs and the Ministers of Interior of Croatia, Slovenia and Austria (as host of the Conference) together with our colleagues from the Western Balkans 6 participating in the Conference "Managing Migration Together" held in Vienna on 24 February 2016 in the presence of Bulgaria as an observer

CONCERNED by the continued and sustained flows of refugees and migrants along the Western Balkans route

RECOGNISING that although the situation regarding illegal migration and asylum differs widely, the current migration situation poses a considerable challenge to the entire region

ACKNOWLEDGING that migration routes may change quickly and the pressure on the region as a whole is still very high

EMPHASISING the important role of the Western Balkans with regard to security and stability in Europe

RECOGNISING that the Western Balkans constitutes an important area of transit for migrants and asylum seekers on their way to the European Union and at the same time is also confronted with increasing numbers of asylum applications

TAKING INTO CONSIDERATION the EU perspective of the Western Balkans, which is strongly supported as well as their willingness to share responsibilities in this context as candidate and potential candidate countries

AWARE of the risks of crime, violent extremism and terrorism, which may spread as a consequence of irregular migration

RECALLING the Vienna Declaration "Tackling Jihadism Together" of 20 March 2015 as well as the Joint Statement on Terrorism adopted by the SEECP Ministers of Foreign Affairs in Tirana on 24 May 2015

REFERRING to the Ministerial Declarations of the Salzburg Forum Conferences in St. Pölten on 4/5 May 2015 and in Sofia on 18/19 November 2015, in the framework of which the "Alliance on Current Challenges in the Area of Migration" was established

REACTING to the current challenges in the field of migration, PREVENTING people from taking the risks of irregular migration and SHAPING a positive environment which gives people a perspective in their respective countries of origin

AGREED on the following comprehensive approach:

1. Efficient management of the migration and refugee crisis requires a coordinated and comprehensive approach addressing all aspects in order to find sustainable and fundamental rights-compliant solutions, and not only temporary results. This includes increased efforts of all relevant EU actors and partners.

2. Persons in need of international protection should receive protection as soon and as close to their countries of origin as possible. There is a need to better share responsibility in Europe as a whole in order to avoid disproportionate pressure on singular partners.

3. It is not possible to process unlimited numbers of migrants and applicants for asylum, due to limited resources and reception capacities, potential consequences for internal security and social cohesion as well as challenges with regard to integration.

4. The right to asylum does not include the right of applicants for international protection to travel onwards and choose a country of preference.

5. The migration flow along the Western Balkans route needs to be substantially reduced with a view to alleviating disproportionate burdens on the partners along the route.

6. Migrants and applicants for asylum must follow the rules of national and EU legislation and should be aware of the consequences in case of non-compliance. The principle of "non-compliance – no rights" should be communicated and applied.

7. Closely coordinated measures in line with international and European law especially the Schengen Border Code should be taken, in particular concerning border management, capacity building and mutual support with regard to asylum, return and readmission, the fight against illegal migration, communication activities as well as cooperation with third countries.

8. Cooperation and mutual support at the borders in the region must be further intensified. This requires the establishment of common standards, in line with international and European law as well as national legislation, for the management of migration along the Western Balkans route, especially regarding registration (screening, document checks and fingerprinting), the conditions for refusal or permission of entry at the border – aiming at persons in clear need of international protection – and the further handling of migrants, including return or transition. We need to get back to a situation where all Members of Schengen area apply fully the Schengen Borders Code and refuse entry at external borders to third-country nationals who do not satisfy the entry conditions or who have not made an asylum application despite having had the opportunity to do so.

9. Persons without travel documents, with forged or falsified documents or migrants making wrongful statements about their nationality or identity will be refused entry at the border. The same applies to persons who do not cooperate in the registration procedure or who have attempted to unlawfully cross the border. This will contribute to a better control of the borders and prevent the route from being misused by migrants who are not in need of international protection.

10. In order to support effective border protection the deployment of police officers to borders of particularly affected regions, e.g. through joint patrols, common action and monitoring at authorized border crossing points, must be speeded up.

11. Illegal migration via the Western Balkans route is a challenge for the reception and asylum systems of all partners concerned. Fair and efficient asylum systems and procedures in line with the Geneva Convention and capacities to accommodate persons in need of international protection will be ensured by all partners. Within the framework of the EU accession process, necessary asylum reforms will be accelerated aiming at compliance with the EU acquis. For this purpose, financing of the necessary harmonisation activities via EU instruments should be supported.

12. Migrants not in need of international protection must be swiftly returned in full respect of their dignity and human rights. Therefore national and coordinated efforts have to be increased, in particular at the point of first entry into the EU. Technical assistance by Frontex and EASO would be highly welcome. In this context, Austria offered to share its expertise. Further efforts are also needed to speed up the conclusion and implementation of readmission agreements by the EU.

13. Fast and uncomplicated communication between the partners is crucial in order to promote coordinated and pro-active migration management in the region and to ensure quick responses to current and upcoming challenges. Information exchange is also decisive as regards relevant data bases in the field of migration and security like EURODAC. The necessary steps in this context will be taken.

14. Mutual support as regards asylum capacities is of utmost importance. In this regard, Slovakia assisting Austria in accommodating 500 asylum seekers was mentioned as an example.

15. The cooperation with Greece for the management of migration flows along the Western Balkans route remains essential. Further effective communication and strengthened cooperation between Greece and Macedonia is necessary and strongly encouraged.

16. In order to reduce pressure on the region, cooperation with third countries will be intensified. A special focus at EU level should be put on implementing the EU-Turkey Joint Action Plan. At the same time, initiatives with other countries of transit or origin will also be supported. In order to help people in need of protection as close as possible to their country of origin, it is necessary to develop initiatives together with third countries close to conflict areas.

17. As migrant smuggling and trafficking in human beings might increase due to certain measures taken, efforts in these fields shall be increased and already existing or planned initiatives shall be put to best possible use. In this regard, the Joint Operation Office (JOO) in Vienna was mentioned.

18. Austrian experiences have shown that targeted information may reduce the influx of illegal migrants from particular countries of origin. Therefore joint communication strategies in relevant countries of origin will be developed aiming at the dissemination of accurate information on the risks of migrant smuggling and human trafficking as well as on the consequences of illegal entries to and stays on the territory of another country. EU delegations should also be tasked to this end.

19. Appreciation for existing cross-border cooperation was underlined. With a view to supporting migration and border management and maintaining safety and security in the Western Balkans, future cooperation will build on lessons learned and make best use of existing organisations, initiatives, platforms and projects. In this regard, the Salzburg Forum and the Brdo Process have to be taken into consideration as well as the capabilities of different institutions, like the European Asylum Support Office (EASO), the European Agency for the management of operational cooperation at the external borders of the Member States of the European Union (Frontex), the International Organisation for Migration (IOM), the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the Migration, Asylum, Refugees Regional Initiative (MARRI) or the International Centre for Migration Policy Development (ICMPD), which could be used as a common Think Tank and platform for dialogue, ideas and exchange. Relevant EU projects and activities, such as the project "Regional Support to sensitive Migration Management in the Western Balkans and Turkey" under IPA II, will be supported. Moreover, all relevant available resources, including within the framework of the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) and the Instrument contributing to Stability and Peace (IcSP), should be used to achieve the defined goals.

20. In view of the increasingly visible connections between illegal migration and extremism, relevant measures agreed in the Vienna Declaration "Tackling Jihadism Together" of 20 March 2015 will be swiftly implemented.

21. Civil-military cooperation could also play an important role. The Ministers took note of the cooperation between the Austrian police and the Austrian Armed Forces in the field of border management.

The Ministers took note of the Joint Statement of Heads of Police Services from Austria, Croatia, Macedonia, Serbia and Slovenia agreed upon at the Meeting held in Zagreb on 18 February 2016. The included operational measures are a decisive contribution for the implementation of this Ministerial declaration.

The Ministers of the participating EU Member States will present and promote the results of the Conference "Managing Migration Together" at EU level.

The Ministers of Foreign Affairs and the Ministers of Interior will ensure that the agreed measures are implemented in their respective areas of responsibility and will see to it that these measures will also be pursued in the cooperation between the Western Balkans and the European Union as well as in regional cooperation fora, such as the Salzburg Forum (Ministerial Conference on 14 June 2016), the Brdo Process of the ministers of the interior (18/19 April 2016) or the cooperation with regard to the Police Cooperation Convention for Southeast Europe (15th Meeting of the Committee of Ministers to be held on 10/11 May 2016 in Austria). A review envisaging possible further steps will follow in the course of a conference of the Ministers of Foreign Affairs and the Ministers of Interior in Sarajevo in 2016.

7. EU-Turkey statement of the 18th of March 2016

International Summit

PRESS
EN

PRESS RELEASE
144/16
18/03/2016

EU-Turkey statement, 18 March 2016

Today the Members of the European Council met with their Turkish counterpart. This was the third meeting since November 2015 dedicated to deepening Turkey-EU relations as well as addressing the migration crisis.

The Members of the European Council expressed their deepest condolences to the people of Turkey following the bomb attack in Ankara on Sunday. They strongly condemned this heinous act and reiterated their continued support to fight terrorism in all its forms.

Turkey and the European Union reconfirmed their commitment to the implementation of their joint action plan activated on 29 November 2015. Much progress has been achieved already, including Turkey's opening of its labour market to Syrians under temporary protection, the introduction of new visa requirements for Syrians and other nationalities, stepped up security efforts by the Turkish coast guard and police and enhanced information sharing. Moreover, the European Union has begun disbursing the 3 billion euro of the Facility for Refugees in Turkey for concrete projects and work has advanced on visa liberalisation and in the accession talks, including the opening of Chapter 17 last December. On 7 March 2016, Turkey furthermore agreed to accept the rapid return of all migrants not in need of international protection crossing from Turkey into Greece and to take back all irregular migrants intercepted in Turkish waters. Turkey and the EU also agreed to continue stepping up measures against migrant smugglers and welcomed the establishment of the NATO activity on the Aegean Sea. At the same time Turkey and the EU recognise that further, swift and determined efforts are needed.

In order to break the business model of the smugglers and to offer migrants an alternative to putting their lives at risk, the EU and Turkey today decided to end the irregular migration from Turkey to the EU. In order to achieve this goal, they agreed on the following additional action points:

1) All new irregular migrants crossing from Turkey into Greek islands as from 20 March 2016 will be returned to Turkey. This will take place in full accordance with EU and international law, thus excluding any kind of collective expulsion. All migrants will be protected in accordance with the relevant international standards and in respect of the principle of non-refoulement. It will be a temporary and extraordinary measure which is necessary to end the human suffering and restore public order. Migrants arriving in the Greek islands will be duly registered and any application for asylum will be processed individually by the Greek authorities in accordance with the Asylum Procedures Directive, in cooperation with UNHCR. Migrants not applying for asylum or whose application has been found unfounded or inadmissible in accordance with the said directive will be returned to Turkey. Turkey and Greece, assisted by EU institutions and agencies, will take the necessary steps and agree any necessary bilateral arrangements, including the presence of Turkish officials on Greek islands and Greek officials in Turkey as from 20 March 2016, to ensure liaison and thereby facilitate the smooth functioning of these arrangements. The costs of the return operations of irregular migrants will be covered by the EU.

2) For every Syrian being returned to Turkey from Greek islands, another Syrian will be resettled from Turkey to the EU taking into account the UN Vulnerability Criteria. A mechanism will be established, with the assistance of the Commission, EU agencies and other Member States, as well as the UNHCR, to ensure that this principle will be implemented as from the same day the returns start. Priority will be given to migrants who have not previously entered or tried to enter the EU irregularly. On the EU side, resettlement under this mechanism will take place, in the first instance, by honouring the commitments taken by Member States in the conclusions of Representatives of the Governments of Member States meeting within the Council on 20 July 2015, of which 18.000 places for resettlement remain. Any further need for resettlement will be carried out through a similar voluntary arrangement up to a limit of an additional 54.000 persons. The Members of the European Council welcome the Commission's intention to propose an amendment to the relocation decision of 22 September 2015 to allow for any resettlement commitment undertaken in the framework of this arrangement to be offset from non-allocated places under the decision. Should these arrangements not meet the objective of ending the irregular migration and the number of returns come close to the numbers provided for above, this mechanism will be reviewed. Should the number of returns exceed the numbers provided for above, this mechanism will be discontinued.

3) Turkey will take any necessary measures to prevent new sea or land routes for illegal migration opening from Turkey to the EU, and will cooperate with neighbouring states as well as the EU to this effect.

4) Once irregular crossings between Turkey and the EU are ending or at least have been substantially and sustainably reduced,

a Voluntary Humanitarian Admission Scheme will be activated. EU Member States will contribute on a voluntary basis to this scheme.

5) The fulfilment of the visa liberalisation roadmap will be accelerated vis-à-vis all participating Member States with a view to lifting the visa requirements for Turkish citizens at the latest by the end of June 2016, provided that all benchmarks have been met. To this end Turkey will take the necessary steps to fulfil the remaining requirements to allow the Commission to make, following the required assessment of compliance with the benchmarks, an appropriate proposal by the end of April on the basis of which the European Parliament and the Council can make a final decision.

6) The EU, in close cooperation with Turkey, will further speed up the disbursement of the initially allocated 3 billion euros under the Facility for Refugees in Turkey and ensure funding of further projects for persons under temporary protection identified with swift input from Turkey before the end of March. A first list of concrete projects for refugees, notably in the field of health, education, infrastructure, food and other living costs, that can be swiftly financed from the Facility, will be jointly identified within a week. Once these resources are about to be used to the full, and provided the above commitments are met, the EU will mobilise additional funding for the Facility of an additional 3 billion euro up to the end of 2018.

7) The EU and Turkey welcomed the ongoing work on the upgrading of the Customs Union.

8) The EU and Turkey reconfirmed their commitment to re-energise the accession process as set out in their joint statement of 29 November 2015. They welcomed the opening of Chapter 17 on 14 December 2015 and decided, as a next step, to open Chapter 33 during the Netherlands presidency. They welcomed that the Commission will put forward a proposal to this effect in April. Preparatory work for the opening of other Chapters will continue at an accelerated pace without prejudice to Member States' positions in accordance with the existing rules.

9) The EU and its Member States will work with Turkey in any joint endeavour to improve humanitarian conditions inside Syria, in particular in certain areas near the Turkish border which would allow for the local population and refugees to live in areas which will be more safe.

All these elements will be taken forward in parallel and monitored jointly on a monthly basis.

The EU and Turkey decided to meet again as necessary in accordance with the joint statement of 29 November 2015.

Press office - General Secretariat of the Council
Rue de la Loi 175 - B-1048 BRUSSELS - Tel.: +32 (0)2 281 6319
press.office@consilium.europa.eu - www.consilium.europa.eu/press