



ILLEGAL MIGRATION AND REFUGEE CRISIS AS A THREAT TO NATIONAL SECURITY, ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL SYSTEM - THE BULGARIAN CASE

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Abstract

Unlike all conventional forms of migration, migration crisis and migratory processes provide pressure to governments and are being expressed as different phenomenon in relation to nature and forms. The objective of this paper is to present the migration and refugee crisis as revealing numerous challenges faced by authorities responsible for the social and economic stability in Bulgaria as well as those providing conditions for reinforcement of the high level of national security in Bulgaria. The analysis is focused on exploring the multiple origins of factors influencing migration processes in Europe, in the light of the measures provided by the Bulgarian state authorities. The main results show that the society itself is facing the challenge of integrating refugees and migrants, so to be able to comply with the principles and values associated with tolerance to social, religious and cultural differences, and not allowing migrants to become marginalized community. Migration pressure creates a number of risks and threats to the Bulgarian national security. Our country has the capacity and resources to meet these potential threats, as a main factor for minimizing the risks to national security is the improvement of coordination and coherence of actions between various actors serving to the security sector.

Keywords: Migrants, refugees, legislation, security, terrorism.

INTRODUCTION

Level of illegal migration in Bulgaria are relatively low, as the refugee crises at this stage is reflected primarily in political and psychological terms on Bulgarian society, while real pressure, including economic and social remained relatively low in comparison with many other European countries especially those from Southern and Southeastern Europe.

In recent years, migration crisis and migratory pressure from citizens of countries in the Middle East represents a serious challenge to the Bulgaria. According to published data there is a substantial increase in migratory pressure both on the borders and inside the country. According to Bulgarian Ministry of Interior, every day about 200 people are detained while attempting to illegally cross the national border. According to official data of the State Agency for Refugees with the Council of Ministers, the number of foreign nationals seeking protection through the following four years (since the beginning of the Syrian crisis) marks a sharp increase: 1387 people in 2012, 7144 – in 2013, 11081 - in 2014 and 20,391 - in 2015 and during the first half of 2016 their number has reached over 7800 people.

Typically, when a migration crisis sharply increases the number of immigrants in a short period of time, usually this is as a result of a combination of internal and external factors. This requires urgent political, financial, legal, technical and organizational measures of national institutions and organizations involved in dealing with the influx of large numbers of people on borders and national territories. In such situation, the state operates in circumstances under migration pressure.

The Bulgarian state is case to protect its own interest and the interest of the European Union, preventing illegal entry across the border, which will cause threat to both national security and the security of the European Union. In parallel, it is needed to provide the necessary living conditions and integration factors for refugees and migrants seeking asylum in the country.

Essential to achieving these goals is the application of socio-economic measures to ensure normal existence and guarantee of labor rights for refugees and migrants residing in the Republic of Bulgaria. It is extremely important the proper settlement of the status of foreign nationals in accordance to Bulgarian law.

The majority of refugees and migrants, who enter to Bulgarian territory or transiting via the country do not address to the rules established by Bulgarian legislation. Such cases have been observed both when entering the country, as well as when leaving mainly directed to towards Western European countries.

The phenomenon of "smuggling" occupies an increasingly wider proportion of total cross-border crimes and forms a threat to national security. Law enforcement authorities record observe that channels for human trafficking, trafficking of goods and drug trafficking which are known to operate during the last nearly three decades are also used for smuggling of immigrants through the territory of Bulgaria.

DISCUSSION

Features of the refugee crisis in Bulgaria

Bulgaria has been considered by refugees, as virtually all the countries in South-eastern Europe, exclusively as a transit corridor towards Central and Eastern Europe. Off the main route of transportation of refugee remains the Western Balkan flow, running from Greece via Macedonia and Serbia to Central Europe. Several are the contributing key factors:

- Western Balkan route is more direct, more familiar for both the refugees themselves and traffickers;
- Because Macedonia and Serbia are not EU member states, this makes difficult the coordination of the European union approaches to regulation policy on the refugee issue.
- Because of the fact that Bulgaria and Romania are not Schengen members, this does not provide the opportunity for transition from Greece to Western Europe without leaving the Schengen zone.
- Bulgaria applies more strict regulations to illegal migrants, which creates a common attitude to traffickers and refugees to avoid the route, while considering it more risky.
- The direct percentage of illegal crossing of the national borders by refugees from Turkey to Bulgaria is relatively low in terms of quantity, regarding the fact that it involves crossing a guarded border line. Given that the security of thousands of Greek islands is practically difficult as opposed to land the Turkish- Bulgarian border, this makes migrants to prefer the route through Greece.

The above-mentioned circumstances restrict the levels of illegal migration in Bulgaria to relatively low levels, in relation to those of the countries on the main route through the Western Balkans. On the overall background of the migration crisis in Europe, data shows that Bulgaria remains away from major migration and refugee flows. The statistics provided by the International Organization for Migration show that over 1 million refugees have entered into Europe by sea in 2015 and only 35 000 have entered by land.

Challenges for the Bulgarian national security

The potential risks and threats to the national security of the Bulgarian country are primarily related to the management of migration flows, international terrorism and increasing level of cases of organized crime.

Dealing with migration - challenges for Bulgaria on the management of migration flows are mainly related to security of the national border and the capacity of accommodation centers for migrants. Crucial to manage the migrant crisis is the adoption of agreements on readmission of illegal migrants and the possibility of returning them back to their countries.

Terrorist threats - Bulgaria is a territory on transit route for radical Islamists from Western Europe to Syria and Iraq and vice versa. Establishing channels of terrorists, including persons professing radical and extremist ideas, members of terrorist groups and recruit fighters for ISIS pose a risk to national security.

Threat of increased organized crime - with its strategic geographic location, Bulgaria has always been part of migration routes, including route for trafficking humans, drugs and weapons. Smuggling of migrants in Bulgaria is carried out by using legal, illegal and combined channels, while traffickers could be defined on several categories: traffickers from border areas; independent traffickers from inside the country; traffickers participating in organized criminal groups, using tour operators as undercover mechanism; Bulgarian citizens participating in illegal international trafficking organizations, providing and delivering documents, transportation and facilities for accommodation of migrants. Transit channels are being used for trafficking migrants through Bulgaria from Turkey to Macedonia or Serbia, and from there to Western Europe. These channels are being used mostly for trafficking citizens of Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan and Palestine.

Challenges toward domestic social and economic system

Increased migratory pressure poses a number of challenges to social and economic systems in Bulgaria. Our country is obliged to do what is necessary to ensure social conditions and integration of refugees and migrants and their families. The country provides social and health care to all migrants living in the territorial divisions of the State Agency for Refugees with the Council of Ministers, as well as to those living in special homes for temporary accommodation of foreigners, Migration Directorate of the Ministry of Interior of the Republic of Bulgaria.

People with acquired refugee status or humanitarian status have the right to work, right to social security and right to health insurance, similar to those provided to Bulgarian citizens. Refugees, who have acquired the relevant status, are also entitled to primary and secondary education, including professional education and training. Minors, who are entitled to primary and secondary education, are also provided with the relevant training and education even during the procedure of obtaining refugee status. Obtaining a relevant refugee status in Bulgaria provides the right to the person to be joined by his family on the territory of the country. Family members are granted with permit for continuous residence in the country for a period of one year, which permission may be renewed.

Foreigners with a permanent residence permit in the Republic of Bulgaria have equal rights to social assistance and provision of social services as to those of Bulgarian citizens. According to Art. 2 para. 1 of the Social Assistance Act, several categories are entitled of social assistance. Those categories include: foreigners with permission for long-term stay in the country or those who have obtained permanent residence in Bulgaria, as well as foreigners who have been granted asylum, refugee status or humanitarian status, as well as foreigners granted temporary protection. Another form of social assistance is also provided through benefits in cash or guaranteed basic social services.

Under national legislation, refugees or foreigners who have obtained humanitarian status according to Bulgarian law, can receive monthly recurring benefits, including:

- Monthly social assistance provided as income to unemployed registered at the Labor Office to the Ministry of labor and social policy.
- Grant for incidental personal needs related to healthcare, education and other vital demands.
- Grant for issuing personal ID documents.
- Grant for rental payments on state accommodation.



The integration of people granted refugee or humanitarian status, in relation to their socio-economic life in the country, has been realized by providing a set of services aiming to supporting their inclusion to the labor market. Integration measures include personal education courses on Bulgarian language, social and cultural adaptation, training and consulting on employment programs.

All these relevant activities, associated with personal care and integration of people granted humanitarian status or refugee status are burden to the socio-economic and financial system in Bulgaria. However, as a member state of the European Union, Bulgaria has ratified numerous legal acts and policy documents protecting the integration of people applying for refugee status in Bulgaria.

CONCLUSION

The refugee crisis is reflected primarily in political and psychological terms on to the Bulgarian society, while real pressure, including one with economic and social factors remains relatively low, in comparison with those observed in other European countries, especially those from Southern and South- eastern Europe.

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