



**МЕЃУНАРОДНА НАУЧНА КОНФЕРЕНЦИЈА
„СОВРЕМЕНИТЕ КОНЦЕПТИ НА КРИЗНИОТ
МЕНАЏМЕНТ”**

**INTERNATIONAL SCIENTIFIC CONFERENCE
“CONTEMPORARY CONCEPTS OF CRISIS
MANAGEMENT”**

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THE CHANGING ROLE OF THE EUROPEAN MILITARIES IN HANDLING THE MIGRANT CRISIS: THE ADAPTIBILITY OF THE MACEDONIAN ARMY

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Abstract: *The migrant crisis in Europe became a serious security challenge with a great impact on the relations between the EU members and their partners. From the idea of a Europe without borders, today we are facing erecting wire fences on the borders.*

At the same time of the ongoing migration crisis, several terrorist attacks occurred in European soil that triggered governments to reconsider engaging their militaries to prevent illegal trespassing of refugees with suspicious background. The Macedonian authorities followed the trend of the changing role of the European militaries in dealing with the migrant crisis.

The use of the army units to help police on the borders and erecting wire fence was only after such measures were already taken from other EU members and in accordance with the Macedonian laws. It was a demonstration of the army's ability to adapt to the new paradigm, but also

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evidence that the Republic of Macedonia gave a significant contribution to the European safety.

Keywords: EU, migration crisis, border security, Macedonian army.

1. Introduction

The latest migrant crisis in Europe combined with the terrorist threat caused the European countries to reconsider the military role in providing internal security for their respected countries. It turns out that the police forces are not able to fully secure the borders, and it seems that the old role of the military to guard the borders become the new reality.

The migrant crisis is perceived as a security problem for several reasons. Foremost, Europeans fear that the migrants from the non-European origin will significantly change the demographic landscape on the continent.⁴ The multicultural Europe is already facing many challenges in this sense, from right wing nationalist that see non-European descendants as a cultural threat, to an increased number of non-European descendants that refuse to integrate and accept the European way of life. Many Europeans large cities have ghettos of immigrants that resist accepting European lifestyle.⁵ Another reason is the economic burden caused by the newcomers, because most of the European societies have strong social policies that sometimes immigrants exploit and abuse.⁶

At the same time during the migrant crisis, several terrorist attacks and incidents happened in France, Belgium and Germany. Thus the third reason for a concern is the fact that immigrants come from war-torn countries might be potential terrorists. It was confirmed that one of the Paris attackers entered Europe from the Middle East through the Balkan route.⁷

Since the establishment of the European Union, its members developed a mentality that their militaries will not be used for internal security or guarding the borders, but focus toward projecting the global peace further from home. Almost all European Union members adapted their security system to give the police forces full responsibility for the border security, reducing the military forces and even abandoning the conscript system. This changed after the Paris attacks when the French government ordered its military to help police increase security on the streets. The threat from terrorist attacks pushed the European

⁴ Valerie Hudson, 'Europe's main problem', *Politico magazine*, 5 January 2016.

⁵ Philip Oltermann, 'Sanctuary or ghetto? How Mannheim created a 'city within a city' for refugees', *The Guardian*, 11 April 2016.

⁶ Frank Keith. (2015). *Europe – Germany and the Migrant Crisis*. A Socio-political Essay, 5.3.

⁷ Ali Albassam. (2015). *Europe's Refugee Crisis: Assessing the Factors Preventing a Coordinated EU Response*, Master's Thesis, University of San Francisco, p.63.

governments to return to the old concept of deploying the military forces to defend their countries at the borders.⁸

The Macedonian government also accepted share of the burden in dealing with the migrant crisis in Europe. On the path of the Balkan route, in the summer of 2015 the Macedonian southern border was overwhelmed with waves of migrants. Shortly after the crisis was declared, parts of the Macedonian army were deployed to assist the police forces. Although not a primary mission, the army demonstrated high level of proficiency and adaptability to confront this security threat. It followed the pattern of the European militaries to defend its borders, becoming an essential part of the ad hoc created integrated effort for the overall European safety.

2. The engagement of the European militaries

The migration crisis in Europe that started after the Arab spring is considered as the biggest wave of migration toward the continent since the Second World War. According to the international organization on migration, it is estimated that at the time the Macedonian government declared crisis on the southern border in the summer of 2015, more than 350000 migrants⁹ already reached the European soil through various paths. The refugees and migrants were primarily coming from war-torn Syria and Iraq, but also from Afghanistan and Eritrea.¹⁰ Because the refugees' and migrants' final destination was the western European countries, many saw it as a purely European Union problem. This caused many disputes among the members themselves around the policies of accepting the asylum seekers. The unequal percentage of migrants and refugees in the countries caused some countries to forcibly close their borders.

According to the Article 14 of the Universal Declaration for Human Rights, the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees and 1967 Protocol signed by all European Union members, "any refugee outside his country due to a well-founded fear of persecution based on his race, nationality, religion, political opinion, or membership in a particular social group may not be returned to a place where his life or freedom would be in jeopardy on account of at least one of those factors and if they meet the articulated refugee threshold, they cannot be

⁸ Geraint Hughes. (2011). The military's role in counterterrorism: examples and implications for liberal democracies. Letort paper. Strategic studies institute. U.S. Army War College. Carlisle, PA.

⁹ 'Backgrounder on the Current European Migration Crisis', The Jacob Blaustein Institute for the Advancement of Human Rights, September 7, 2015, p.1.

¹⁰ Ibid., p.2.

returned to their home countries.”¹¹ If the migrants did not meet the criteria, they could have been returned home, but this became very challenging as it is not always easy to make a distinction between political refugees and irregular economic migrants.¹²

To complicate the problem further, the Dublin Regulation allows countries to return migrants or asylum seekers back to the previous country where they entered from.¹³ In many cases this caused denial of entrance for refugees and migrants and decision to be turned back, thus trapped between borders. The first European Union member that responded more harshly to stop the migrants to transit through the country was Hungary, denying returns from other European countries according to Dublin Regulation, and then rising wire fence on the border with Serbia.¹⁴

There are already examples of terrorist using the Balkans as an entry point: the leader and two of the terrorists from the September 11 attacks, fought as mujahedin in the Bosnian war, and two of the terrorists involved in the France attacks in 2015 entered into the European Union through the Balkans as refugees from Syria. Thus, the perception of many Europeans is that the migrant crisis is a Trojan horse at the gates of Europe.¹⁵ At the same time, the Balkans is still not fully integrated in the collective security system.

The new paradigm shift in European security became a test for the European unity, integrity and consistency. Some countries refused to accept above certain number of refugees and asylum seekers, while some would accept only non-Muslim refugees. This triggered once again militarization of the borders as many governments called upon their military forces to support the internal security forces. After Hungary closed the border with Croatia, the Austrian government increased the security on its border with Slovenia. The Austrian army deployed around 300 soldiers to patrol and stay alert on the border. It took years for the European Union members to adopt the concept of securing the borders with police forces, and only a year to reconsider getting the military back on the

¹¹ Ibid., p.2.

¹² Heinrich Matthee. *Europe's Migration Policies in Crisis*. Report, Al Jazeera Centre for Studies, 19 August 2015, p.3.

¹³ 'Backgrounder on the Current European Migration Crisis', p.2

¹⁴ Matthee, p.5.

¹⁵ Sergio Carrera, Steven Blockmans, Daniel Gros and Elspeth Guild. *The EU's Response to the Refugee Crisis: Taking Stock and Setting Policy Priorities*, CEPS Essay, No.20/16 December 2015. p.16.

line. The trend of demilitarization of the borders in Europe was challenged by the threat that refugees and migrants will cross the border unchecked.

The European Union members in Eastern Europe, attempting to cope with the immigrant crisis took their own preventive measures.¹⁶ Wire fences were erected first on the Hungarian border with Serbia, Croatia, Romania and Slovakia. After this, as a chain reaction a set of wire fences were erected on the border between Slovenia and Croatia, between Austria and Slovakia, and finally in the south, on the border between Macedonia with Greece and Serbia.¹⁷ The migrant crisis concerns among the European Union countries and the decision to introduce border checks spread like a domino effect. In 2015 after many years, first Germany started with conducting border checks toward Austria, and after this Norway toward Sweden, Denmark and Germany.¹⁸

Even earlier than September 2015, the European Union countries concluded that it is necessary to control the migrant flow early as possible. Part of the solution to the migrant crisis was to increase the capacities and capabilities of the Balkan countries, primarily Serbia and Macedonia, to "effectively and efficiently respond to the migration crisis, enhancing their ability to comprehensively implement their migration policy, including management of migration flows."¹⁹ In October 2015 the European Union approved 17 million Euros to help Serbia and Macedonia provide the necessary emergency services in order to control the refugee influx.²⁰

Because of its location on the Balkans migration route, the Republic of Macedonia was recognized as one of the key filters for the migrants crossing into Europe. The Macedonian army had to follow the trends of the other European militaries as a key security factor for the European safety.

3. The role of the Macedonian army in the migrant crisis

The Macedonian armed forces are a crucial element of the state's security system. The legal framework for engaging the armed forces during crisis

¹⁶ Human Rights Watch, *Europe's Refugee Crisis – An Agenda for action*, November 16, 2015.

¹⁷ Alix Culbertson. 'End of Schengen? MEPs vote to bring BACK border controls as free movement FAILS', *Express*, Jul 7, 2016.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ 'EU approves additional €17 million to help Serbia and the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia cope with refugee influx', European Commission, Press release, Brussels, 8 October 2015

²⁰ *Ibid.*

situations is embedded in the constitution of the country, the defense law and the law on crisis management. Its main constitutional task is to protect and defend the sovereignty, independence and the territorial integrity of the Republic of Macedonia.

The Army of Republic of Macedonia can participate with part of its forces in case of a crisis situation, according to Article 6 from the law on crisis management.²¹ The Article 35 is more specific and regulates that “the Army may also participate as a support to the police, when the security of the Republic is jeopardized, and the state administrative bodies do not have adequate resources and means for its prevention and handling.”²²

The process of deploying military units to support police forces begins with the Steering Committee submitting proposal to the government. Such proposal must have precise requirements about the type and number of forces needed, their capacities, purpose and tasks required and estimated duration of their engagement.²³ However, Article 35 also empowers the president to decide upon a proposal of the government, which part of the army will be deployed to support the police forces in the crisis situation. He preserves the right to “re-evaluate the need for participation of a part of the Army at all times.”²⁴

In the incident near Veles in April 2015, fourteen migrants were killed and other injured when a train struck them while moving on the railway toward north.²⁵ Many migrants and refugees died before from drowning in the Mediterranean Sea,²⁶ but this incident opened the debate that the migrants now move toward Europe using the Balkan route. Since the incident, the border police have increased the level of security and patrols to prevent illegal trespassing. In the following months, the number of migrants and refugees amplified.

In August 2015, the number of migrants passing through Macedonia doubled from the previous month, reaching nearly 39000 people moving toward Western Europe.²⁷ On 20 August, the government of the Republic of Macedonia

²¹ The law on crisis management, Article 6.

²² Ibid., Article 35.

²³ Ibid., Article 35.

²⁴ Ibid., Article 35.

²⁵ ‘14 migrants killed by train while walking on tracks in Macedonia – police’, *The Guardian*, 24 April 2015.

²⁶ Riley M. Townsend. (2015). *The European Migrant Crisis*, Paperback.

²⁷ Tom Porter, Immigration crisis: Macedonia declares state of emergency and deploys army to borders, *International Business times*, August 20, 2015.

declared a crisis situation at the southern and northern border, calling in the army for support.²⁸ In October 2015, approximately 10 000 daily arrivals were reported.²⁹ Because of lack of capacities to process the asylum seekers, the border with Greece was temporarily closed causing violent riots.³⁰ The border was again closed in March 2016, when around 13000 migrants were stranded at the southern border.³¹

The president ordered the deployment of the army units to support the police forces on the southern border in August 2015. The decision was made according to the crisis management system and after declaring a crisis situation in the region. Army soldiers were deployed on the most critical terrain on the south border. The deployed army units covered around 50 km border line, conducting surveillance, reconnaissance, and foot patrolling to secure the area from the illegal trespassing. The army leadership developed several possible scenarios in case the number of migrants and refugees overwhelm the capacities of the police forces. The possibility to mobilize the reserve forces was also considered and suggested from the retired generals.

In November 2015 the army started deploying a wire fence.³² Setting the fence was intended to prevent refugees and economic migrants to illegally enter the country. This did not close the border, but canalized and direct the refugees to checkpoints for registration toward official entry points. This measure was announced from the Security Council as a last resort if necessary. Such decision was made after several European Union countries already deployed physical protection with fences on their borders.

As the economic migrants from Syria, Afghanistan and Iraq increased, attempting to cross the border illegally, the fence deployed by the army prevented an estimated 19 000 illegal trespassing on the southern border with Greece. One of the measures to stop crossing with forged documents was making a biometric registration of migrants at the entrance. This information could be used further to provide intelligence for partners in the European Union. While the police found

²⁸ Velina Lilyanova, *The Western Balkans Frontline of the migrant crisis*, Briefing, European Parliamentary Research Service, January 2016, p.6

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p.6

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p.6

³¹ 'Migrant crisis: Macedonia shuts Balkans route', *BBC News*, 9 March 2016.

³² *АРМ почна со поставувањето ограда кај котата 59 на границата со Грција*. МЕТА.мк. 28 Ноември, 2015.

more than 5000 forged documents, either passports or IDs that the economic migrants used to portray themselves as refugees, the Army personnel helped with registration of migrants and protection from illegal border crossings.

Throughout 2016, the army units together with the police forces continued their usual patrols on the southern border, as the Macedonian security forces prepared for a second wave of migration. So far there were around 700 recorded attempts of cutting the fence. Thus, the army had to deploy one more row of barbed wire fence on the south to strengthen security along the border and to prevent illegal crossing of refugees in Europe.³³ In March 2016 the southern border was partially open to the flow of migrants. The president as commander in chief increased the number of soldiers to assist police security forces due to the growing number of migrants of about 13 thousand.

In April 2016, riots on the southern border broke when 3000 thousand migrants began with violent protests shouting, throwing stones and various objects with intention of violence and organized illegal entry in the Republic of Macedonia. Police officers from the Interior Ministry and Army immediately started with a rejection of migrants using non-lethal methods as tear gas. A total of 23 police officers and soldiers were injured and three police vehicles and five army vehicles were damaged.³⁴ Because of the incident, the presence of law enforcement officers and the Army soldiers was increased.

Since the beginning of the migrant crisis in Macedonia, in 12 months the army prevented estimated 19 000 refugees from trespassing. Around 2500 soldiers were deployed since the beginning of the crisis. By assisting the police security forces, the Macedonian army made a tremendous contribution to secure the Balkan migrant corridor.

4. Conclusion

The changing role of the European militaries due to the migrant crisis combined with the terrorist attacks in France and Belgium heavily influenced the perception of the military as only a force for the missions abroad. Similar to other European militaries, the Macedonian army was tasked to help the police forces in providing internal security by enhancing the security at the borders.

³³ *APM ја удвојува оградата на јужната граница.* Охрид 24, 8 февруари 2016.

³⁴ *МВР: Повредени 23 припадници на полицијата и АРМ во инцидентот со мигрантите.* Сител, 11. April 2016.

The Army of Republic of Macedonia demonstrated high level of adaptability and swiftly engaged in helping the border police forces when the president gave the order. Although the Macedonian army has smaller capacities compared with most of the European armies, it reacted decisively and gave a significant contribution for the European safety by controlling part of the Balkan migrant route. The strategic intention of the Macedonian authorities has always been to develop small, modern and mobile forces, and the migrant crisis was one of many tests to confirm that the Macedonian army is indeed capable of rapid deployment to conduct various tasks.

The engagement of the Macedonian army to support the police forces in securing the borders open several questions that need to be addressed in future planning. First, the role of the armed forces must remain primarily to defend the integrity, sovereignty and territorial integrity of the Republic of Macedonia. Aside from the projection of global peace with participation in coalition operations abroad, the army must sustain the mental capability to preserve the peace at home. Second, in a democratic society the engagement of the army must always be accordance with the law and as part of the crisis management system. The civilian authorities will preserve control over the army and decide on the ways and means how to use it in crisis situation. Last but not least, the Macedonian security system and its army as the most vital tool will have to fit in the European security system, and if needed to follow the European trends.

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