

## THE REFUGEE CRISIS SINCE THE BEGINNING OF THE 21ST CENTURY AND THE THREAT TO THE NATIONAL SECURITY OF THE REPUBLIC OF BULGARIA

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**Abstract:** In the recent decades, Europe has been the subject of constant waves of refugees from countries in the Middle East and Africa. They are triggered by existing and emerging military political, economic, climate and humanitarian crises.

This spatial movements of vast masses of people with different religious and cultural backgrounds from European countries has created serious economic and social problems for the host countries, posing a huge challenges to their integration policies, which need to be coordinated with EU law and international law.

Of course, Bulgaria has not remained isolated from all of these processes, keeping in mind our membership in the EU and our borderline geographical position, which makes our borders external to the Community. In this way, our country has become the target of numerous transits of refugees from Africa and Asia.

The main focus in the study of processes related to the mass movement of vast masses of people and the processes related to them are the refugee and migration crisis. As the terms "refugee crisis" and "migration crisis" are interchangeable in the present work, both will be used.

The object of the study is the national security of Bulgaria and the challenges it faced in the 21st century as a result of the refugee crisis.

The subject of the study are the refugee flows to Europe and the risks they pose to Bulgaria's national security.

**Keywords:** refugees, risk, migration, challenges

### 1. PREREQUISITES AND FACTORS FOR THE FORMATION OF REFUGEE WAVES TOWARDS EUROPE AT THE END OF XX AND THE BEGINNING OF XXI CENTURY.

Migrations have an important role in the development of the communities.<sup>162</sup> In recent years, increasing migration and refugee flows to Europe has become a hot topic of discussion. This is due to the fact that more and more European countries are facing one of the largest migration waves since the end of World War II.

“New risks have emerged in Europe since the beginning of 2011, with a markedly visible tendency to leave European citizens from countries like Greece, Portugal, Spain, Italy, Ireland and their permanent establishment in other regions due to the prolonged economic crisis in these countries and the high percentage unemployed with good educational and professional qualifications. Contrary to this trend, immigrants from Asia, Africa and other regions illegally invaded Europe with progressive prowess, which has an impact on the demographic picture of Europe”.<sup>163</sup>

There are many reasons for this, but it seems as if the public is not aware of them and is fighting only the problems that have already arisen from the refugee waves, but not the causes. The growing military conflicts in the Middle East, climate changes and water scarcity in some parts of Africa, the accumulation of over-population in Africa, accompanied by downturns and unemployment on the one hand, and the aging population, the need for workforce in Europe, which is becoming a preferred destination for migrants, is one of the main factors behind the emergence of refugee waves towards Europe in the 21st century.

After World War II, every country allowed and encouraged the admission of workers from abroad. In the 1950s and 1960s, West Germany, Sweden, the Netherlands, Belgium and other countries introduced "guest workers" to fill the gaps in the workforce. Thus, in Germany because of this "guest worker" scheme, mostly people from Turkey came to work in the country, and because of this system today, the Turks number 4 million from the total population of Germany. Workers from Turkey and Africa also came to Belgium and the Netherlands in the 1950s and 1960s. In the middle of the last century, this migration of foreigners from other countries and continents was needed and a large part of the ruling then thought that these people would come to Europe, work and leave.

Today Europe faces one of the biggest migration and refugee crises of the last 2 centuries that call into question the survival of European values, religion, traditions and culture.

One of the major factors in shaping today's refugee and migration flows to Europe is precisely the collapse of the colonial system. This in turn has led to the creation of many new and independent states in Africa and Asia, countries that have been forced into a foreign language, culture, religion, etc.

<sup>162</sup> Katsarski, N., 2019, Factors, determining migration of the population, Knowledge – Interantional Journal, Vol. 30.6

<sup>163</sup> Ivanov, M., Naydenov, Kl., MIGRATION AND DEMOGRAPHIC CHALLENGES FOR BULGARIA, 5th International Multidisciplinary Scientific Conference on Social Sciences & Art SGEM 2018

With the decay of the colonial system, the former metropolises began to accept part of their colonial subjects, and this process did not end with decolonization, but on the contrary, it became even more aggravated and transformed from political to economic and social. With increasing integration in Europe and the formation of the Community, the continent is becoming an increasingly desirable destination for people from African and Asian countries.

At the same time, as mentioned earlier in the second half of the twentieth century, the demographic explosion in the African countries began, and during this period the population began to accumulate mainly in working age, ie. a progressive type of age structure in which the generation of children exceeds the generation of grandparents. However, this has led to a number of social and economic problems which facing African countries (young population, unemployed people and high unemployment). From the beginning of 1970 to 2017, the continent's population increased from 366 million to 1 256 million, or a 241% increase. For the period 1970-2017, Asia's population grew from 2,137 million to 4,504 million.

The demographic explosion in the countries of Africa, South and West Asia has many negative and long-term consequences, both regionally and globally. While population growth, especially in African countries, exceeds their ability to provide employment, education, housing for many people, migration will not stop.

Another factor for migrations happening today is the aging of the population in Europe, which is historically unprecedented. Increasing the average life expectancy, along with the low birth rate and declining young active population, will cause serious problems for the social system.<sup>164</sup>

“The presence of a large number of migrant populations can lead to significant social consequences”.<sup>165</sup>

The aging of the European population, increasing the average life expectancy, will lead to a deepening of problems related to labor shortages, lack of opportunities for innovation and changes, due to the declining young population and higher taxes for the active population. On the other hand, the UN projection is expected to reduce the EU's population by 65 million by 2050, but at the same time, the problems already mentioned will continue to deepen. Only by 2020 European economies will need an additional 16 million skilled workers.<sup>166</sup>

Of course, the economic situation in African countries - fragile economies, high rates of youth unemployment - are factor which increasing migrant flows to Europe and economic crisis are one of the most frequent factors which generate migration flows to Europe.<sup>167</sup> One of the most reasons for immigration is the demand for employment.<sup>168</sup>

“The availability of highly educated, skilled and unoccupied work resources is an important factor in reducing finance to prepare and stimulate immigration in a given workforce”.<sup>169</sup>

Climate change and water scarcity are another prerequisite and factor for migration to Europe, which is causing the displacement of huge masses of people from Africa and Asia due to the deteriorating climatic conditions.

Countries in the Middle East and North Africa are at particularly high risk, with water scarcity combined with rapid population growth. Thus, regional climate change creates prerequisites for the migration of people from the affected areas, in search of a new better way of life in areas that are richer or we are witnessing a process of passage of large masses of people from underdeveloped countries in Asia and Africa to Europe.

Civil war, military conflicts and terror against the local population are the main causes of the growing refugee waves towards Europe.

## **2. RISKS AND CHALLENGES TO BULGARIA'S NATIONAL SECURITY RELATED TO THE CONTEMPORARY GEOPOLITICAL SITUATION IN THE WORLD AND THE REFUGEE CRISIS**

Development of military conflicts in the Middle East and North Africa in the recent years, political and humanitarian crises, as well as unstable economies have shaped huge migration and refugee flows to Europe.

<sup>164</sup> Burdarov, G., Immigration, conflict and identity transformation in the European Union, 2012

<sup>165</sup> Naydenov, Kl., International migration in Europe in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, International Scientific Conference GEOBALCANICA 2018

<sup>166</sup> Naydenov Kl., THE DEMOGRAPHIC DEFICIT IN THE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF BULGARIA - CONSEQUENCES AND DECISIONS, 4th international scientific conference on Social Science & Arts SGEM 2017, 2017

<sup>167</sup> Katsarsky, N., THREATS AND RISKS TO EUROPEAN UNION SECURITY RELATED TO MIGRATION, International Scientific Conference GEOBALCANICA 2019, DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.18509/GBP.2019.43>  
UDC: 314.15(4-672EY)

<sup>168</sup> Naydenov Kl., Regional image - a prerequisite for economic development, ANNUAL OF THE UNIVERSITY OF MINING AND GEOLOGY “ST. IVAN RILSKI”, Humanitarian sciences and Economics, 60, 2017

<sup>169</sup> Найденов Кл., М. Иванов, Управление на демографския риск в Р България – тенденции и перспективи, Годишник на МГУ “Св. Иван Рилски”, том 59, Annual of the University of mining and geology „St. Ivan Rilski“, Vol. 59, Part IV, Humanitarian sciences and Economics, 2016

Today Europe faces an unprecedented migration and refugee wave that challenges the stability of the Union. The enormous flows of people flooding the continent are the bearers of a number of social, economic, and cultural problems, for which countries have been unprepared and this threatens their security.

Since our country's accession to the EU in 2007, our borders have turned out to be external to the Community, on the other hand our geographical location and proximity to the countries of the Middle East and Africa have further intensified the threats to Bulgaria's national security.

Obviously, all of these facts pose risks of increasing migration pressure on Bulgaria, which in turn leads to problems in the social and economic system for the support of these refugees and migrants and the provision of places for them. Among the many people entering our country it is impossible to determine which of them really need asylum and protection, and it is possible to activate international terrorist networks and radical movements.

Bulgaria is a transit corridor on the way to Central and Western Europe. However, there are some reasons that somewhat restrict migration flows to Bulgaria, namely the fact that our country and Romania are not part of the Schengen Agreement, which in turn limits the ability to move from Greece to Western Europe. Secondly, the passage of refugees from Turkey is somewhat restricted due to the fact that these people have to cross the whole territory of Turkey, and the presence of security at the Bulgarian-Turkish land border makes Greece a preferred route for illegal immigrants.

At this stage, the immigrants arriving in Bulgaria show a low interest in the offered opportunities for integration in Bulgarian society, as a large part of them (mainly economic migrants from the country of origin of Afghanistan) consider their stay here only as an intermediate stage of their movement to other countries. Some immigrants accommodated in places of temporary residence view this as restricting their ability to settle in the countries of Western and Northern Europe, which creates tension.

According to Eurostat data, the largest number of immigrants in Bulgaria in 2019 were registered from Asia and second from Africa.<sup>170</sup>

The reason for the overwhelming flow of Asian immigrants is due to the military conflicts in the Middle East region, our country's external borders to the Community, which makes Bulgaria a transit country for immigrants from these regions.<sup>171</sup>

The main countries which generate the migration flows from Africa to Bulgaria are Nigeria, Egypt, Algeria and Tunisia. The main countries which generate migration flows to Bulgaria from Asia are Syria, Iran, Palestine, Iraq.

Obviously, our country is not as much in the face of the refugee wave as it is by the pressure of illegal immigrants caused by economic reasons, not by military conflict. As already mentioned, Bulgaria is a transit country for immigrants whose ultimate goal is to reach Western and Northern European countries with better economic conditions.

### **3. SOCIAL, ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL RISKS AND THREATS TO BULGARIA'S NATIONAL SECURITY RELATED TO IMMIGRATION PRESSURE**

Migration flow is a serious challenge for our country, which threatens national security. This in turn conceals a number of threats related to the various spheres of socio-economic life in Bulgaria. At this stage, as we have mentioned several times, Bulgaria is still a transit country for immigrants and refugees due to the fact that most of them want to reach countries with a higher standard of living in Northern and Western Europe. However, this does not mean that we are not affected by the migratory pressure of third countries entering the country. Although not in such large quantitative terms, even our transit role alone, it poses a number of challenges and problems that we face, as well as risks to the national security of the country.

First of all, the maintenance of applicants for asylum and status as foreigners, as well as illegal migrants residing in temporary accommodation centers, requires considerable financial resources, which, of course, is diverted from other areas sensitive to Bulgarian society. Not to mention that measures related to the protection and counteraction of migrant pressure at borders are also a significant resource.

The second problem or threat related to the national security of our country are the cultural differences that can be prerequisites for the emergence of lasting problems in integration, encapsulation of communities, risks of radicalization of individuals and groups and the activity of end structures related to these processes. In this sense, there is always the risk of tension escalating, which can turn into conflicts caused by racism.

The third threat to our country's national security is related to the labor and social integration of immigrants. Many of the arriving immigrants have low educational qualifications, which is a big problem when trying to integrate into our country.

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<sup>170</sup> [https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Migration\\_and\\_migrant\\_population\\_statistics](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Migration_and_migrant_population_statistics)

<sup>171</sup> <https://www.iom.int/countries/bulgaria>

The fourth threat to Bulgaria's national security are the cultural differences that are a prerequisite for the emergence of lasting problems in the integration of communities, which in turn creates risks of radicalization of individuals and groups, and the activity of end structures related to these processes. Currently, our country is experiencing an extremely deteriorated internal environment of integration.

The fifth threat is the health risks for our country when foreigners come in, whose countries of origin do not have permanent measures for prevention, immunization and treatment. Preventing these health threats to our country puts a strain on the health insurance system, especially with regard to viruses, diseases and infections, which are non-specific for Bulgaria. On the other hand, the lack of early diagnosis and prevention of viruses and infections could lead to the spread of these diseases to more people.

Next, the risk of radicalization could be mentioned, especially for immigrants who do not have a radical attitude. The factors that can influence and contribute to this are the low level of education among these persons, their low qualifications, their different religions, which lead to their social exclusion. We cannot forget that the risk lies in the possibility of the future radicalization of Bulgarian citizens against refugees.

Bulgaria is also a transit territory for radical Islamists passing from Western Europe to Syria and Iraq and back. Establishing channels for terrorists, including those which profess radical and extremist ideas and are complicit in terrorist groups to recruit fighters for the Islamic State, poses additional risks to national security.

#### **4. EXPECTED DEVELOPMENT OF THE REFUGEE CRISIS IN EUROPE BY THE MIDDLE OF THE 21ST CENTURY AND POLICIES AND MEASURES OF BULGARIA TO PROTECT ITS NATIONAL SECURITY IN THIS GEOPOLITICAL SITUATION**

The first possible development of the refugee crisis in Europe is for Turkey to open its borders. This is a great threat for Bulgaria, as this migration stream will first pass through Turkey and from there it will enter in Europe through Bulgaria. The likelihood of this happening is extremely low because Turkey is bound by serious treaties with Europe and secondly, if they open their borders completely, it means that these 8 million immigrants will cross first through its territory, which will pose huge problems for Turkey itself. Third, it has many serious geopolitical interests in the Middle East, and in particular in Syria, dating back to the mid-20th century. It should be further noted that the Islamic State held Syria's rich oil fields and it was believed that Turkey was buying dumped oil prices from there. Separately, Turkey wants to have a strong influence in Syria after the war, as Syria is a rich country of culture, oil, the center of the Islamic world, and having influence there has influence throughout the Arab world.

The second scenario that is likely to happen is one related to the repatriation of refugees either in the country of origin or in the country where they entered in the EU. What is most discussed with regard to this option is to set up export refugee camps in peripheral EU countries, including Bulgaria, in non-EU countries or in North Africa and the Middle East. At this stage, Bulgaria is very much in favor of this position, but it poses a serious threat both to our country and to Europe, because the imprisonment of thousands of young men behind wire fences is extremely dangerous, as these people can very easily be radicalized due to the fact that they are illiterate, young, and they cannot be held in such camps for a long time. Not to mention that if these camps break, it is like a dam that can flood the whole of Europe, starting with Bulgaria and the Balkans. This scenario is extremely dangerous, as thousands of men behind tall fences cannot be expected to close families, create families there, raise children, and live for several generations together in this shaky world.

The third scenario proposed by geopoliticians is the creation of buffer zones in North Africa, through paid puppet governments of Europe, African countries to hold the flow of migration into their territory. This is just as unacceptable and a very dangerous option for Europe, as practice shows in the second half of the twentieth century that such puppet governments in Africa very often emerge as extreme dictatorships with brutal regimes against the local population - the Central African Republic with Bokassa, Mobutu Sese Seko of Zaire, Amin of Uganda or the "Arab Spring", which began similarly through the corrupt Tunisian government, which suppressed its own population backed by France, and where the Tunisian premier has exported much of the country's gold reserve.

It is also a possible option African puppet governments would agree to take money from Europe to detain refugees in Africa. However, this is only a temporary option that would lead to even greater perversions within the countries themselves and would generate even more migration flows to Europe, and this could become a much greater security threat.

A fourth option is related to climate change, and in particular climate migrants. This will generate a new wave of refugees from 2030-2040 with hundreds of millions of Africans fleeing impossible living conditions. One example is from Uganda, which has a population of 24 million at the beginning of the 21st century and is already suffering from a severe shortage of drinking water. The UN expects a population growth of 302% of Uganda's population by 2050, reaching 100 million, which means only one - the only possible chance of survival is a massive escape to Europe.

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