



MEDIA REPORTING AND COMMUNICATION IN CRISIS SITUATIONS: A CASE STUDY OF A REFUGEE CRISIS IN B&H

Original scientific paper

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Received: 2021/5/25

Accepted: 2021/7/30

ABSTRACT

The topic of this article presents communication challenges and the role of the media in constructing an image of migrants and refugees as “the others” in our societies today. The article analyses the migrant situation in South-Eastern Europe, specifically in migration crisis in Bosnia and Herzegovina that has been going on since 2018. The aim is to present the basic aspects of this issue and offer answers to key questions - who are migrants and refugees, what’s their own identity, from which countries do they come, how do they cross the border, where do they go, what is the state’s attitude towards them, what forms and channels of communication the state and other stakeholders use toward them, who cares for them, what do they preserve from their national, cultural and/or language identities and how do they construct self-identity and confront with the “hosting identities”, who donates funds for migration management and how they are managed? Also, a special focus of the research will be on the human rights of migrants and refugees in Bosnia and Herzegovina, which is the subject of various discussions - both within the country itself and among various humanitarian, governmental and non-governmental international organizations in the EU and beyond.

Keywords: Media, communication, Balkan route, migrants, refugees

INTRODUCTION

At the time of writing of this article, there are approximately 6000 migrants and refugees living in camps in Bosnia and Herzegovina, while roughly 3000 live outside, without a proper shelter (Al Jazeera Balkans, 2020). However, numbers tend to vary as migrants illegally enter and leave the country. They do not enter the country on official border crossings and it is to assume that many come to Bosnia and Herzegovina, reside there and leave the country without being registered by the Service for Foreigner’s Affairs. Hence, we can only speak about the number of registered migrants and refugees.

They are treated as “the others”, as distant from the host societies (Zelenaga & Goga, 2021). That makes the first big challenge for them. Those “registered” migrants are the people staying in migrant centers and managed by the International Organization for Migration - IOM.

In addition to that number, hundreds of migrants and refugees live outside these accommodations - in private houses, abandoned buildings and the like. They don’t have any well-defined socio-cultural status and are considered as illegal people. But, this flow is not only flow of people. It is flow of personal (or collective) culture and identities they bring with. Probably, they have entered illegally, i.e. crossing the border illegally, so we can never determine with certainty their final number. In addition, some migrants and refugees manage to enter the European Union illegally, despite the fact that Croatia protects its borders, and thus the borders of the European Union. Also, here we want to point out that some media use only the term “migrants” or “illegal migrants” when reporting. Given that we cannot determine with certainty whether there are those among them who left their countries of origin due to

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political persecution, endangered life and security, we will use both terms “migrants and refugees”, as also practices Al Jazeera, whose reports will be considered later in this article.

Since the end of 2017, when the first illegal border crossings were recorded, and the first migrants and refugees were registered in Bosnia and Herzegovina, a number of problems have arisen on this issue, which have never really been fully resolved. Some of them are the issue of accommodation for migrants and refugees, protection of the state border, the problem of smuggling, the intertwining of competencies of the state, entity and cantonal levels when it comes to the crisis, various political problems, humanitarian crises in outdoor situations, security, health and hygiene issues in improvised tent settlements and the like. But, no one was dealing with their cultural, language and identity issues. Considering them as “the others” we a priori have excluded them from the society. A huge lack of communication is evident.

The migrant crisis in Bosnia and Herzegovina could simply be characterized as an ongoing problem. This work was created in the fourth year of the migrant crisis and at a time when numerous problems arose due to the unresolved issue of accommodation for hundreds of migrants and refugees in the northwest of the country, which is the reason why the European Union was actively involved. We will try to make the latest developments on this issue a prism through which we will look at the multifaceted problems of the migrant crisis in Bosnia and Herzegovina - current from the beginning, but we will also offer answers to key questions about migrants and refugees - who are they, from which countries they come from, how we treat them as “the others” and what are the consequences, how do the state communicate to them, how the migrant crisis occurred in Bosnia and Herzegovina, where they live, what their intentions are, what problems have arisen and the like.

The key research method of this article is a case study. Precisely through the example of Bosnia and Herzegovina, the issue of the migrant and refugee crisis was analyzed, which is a problem that has been affecting Europe and beyond since 2015. The case study with two improvised camps in Bosnia and Herzegovina was used as a prism, through which we tried to analyze this issue in detail. Key terms and concepts, current problems, the attitude of institutions towards migrants and refugees, the way of movement, i.e. the path of migration, the attitude of the EU, and the engagement of various humanitarian, governmental and non-governmental international organizations, were explained. The special focus of the research is on the human rights and cultural identity of both migrants and refugees. A multidisciplinary approach was applied, which involves a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods. In this context, statistical data were collected, compared and analyzed, which were provided to us by the competent institutions in Bosnia and Herzegovina, through which migration trends were analyzed.

They also analyzed the financial reports on EU assistance published by the International Organization for Migration. The qualitative approach involved interviews with various actors in the field of migration, which includes journalists and workers in humanitarian organizations. The method used is that of compilation, collected through articles, television reports and texts on this topic. At the same time, one of the basic methods was content analysis, especially when it comes to political messages and the way of reporting on the migrant and refugee crisis. The analyzed content includes official as well as unofficial communication channels of officials, such as social networks.

TERMINOLOGICAL EXPLANATIONS

In media, political and everyday discourse, words such as “migrants”, “migrant crisis” have been used to categorize them as different, excluding them by the host society by considering them a dominated out-group (Staszak, 2008). These words have become common and usual. It is not a rare case to hear from some officials exclusively “illegal migrants”. However, it is certainly worth clarifying the terminology here, in the way it is defined by the laws in Bosnia and Herzegovina. In the Law on Asylum, the word migrant is not mentioned. The term is mentioned in the Law on Foreigners (2015). The term “daily migrant” is defined, which refers to a citizen of a neighboring country in which a person resides and comes to work or education in B&H every day and returns to his home country. According to the Asylum Act, a refugee is a foreigner or a stateless person to whom the B&H Ministry of Security has recognized refugee status in accordance with the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and the Protocol relating to the Status of Refugees of 1967. Refugee status is recognized by a decision of a competent authority, if a person meets these conditions. In order some person to gain a status of refugee or status of subsidiary protection, the conditions specified in the law should be met:

‘Refugee status will be granted to an alien who, due to a well-founded fear of persecution because of his race, religion, nationality, belonging to a certain social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his citizenship and cannot or does not want to be placed under the protection of that country, as well as a stateless person who is outside the country of his / her previous habitual residence and cannot or, due to such fear, does not wish to return to that country’ (Zakon o azilu [Law on Asylum], 2016).

The word migrants, however, has become familiar in speech in Bosnia and Herzegovina when we talk about mass influx. At one point we can really only talk about people without documents living in Bosnia and Herzegovina and coming from countries not affected by wars and persecutions, such as Morocco, Tunisia, Pakistan or Iran, but we cannot determine with certainty for each person individually whether he/she left the country of origin for economic reasons, or was exiled because of his/her ideological beliefs, ethnic origin, sexual orientation, and the like.

Therefore, we will always talk about “migrants” and “refugees”, on account of terminological precision.

METHODOLOGY AND STUDY'S LIMITATIONS

In order to reliably analyse the accumulated data, a standard multidisciplinary research methodology was used, which entails the use of mutually supportive qualitative and quantitative approaches. Statistics on migrants and refugees made available to us by the competent institutions in the country, as well as data on finances allocated for the management of the migrant crisis, have been identified. Due to the lack of quantitative data, a series of interviews with relevant actors in the field of media, as well as humanitarian organizations, was conducted with a qualitative approach. A significant number of media reports and other data on the topic were collected by the compilation method. In doing so, content analysis was a fundamental approach to various publications, media reports, and messages from officials through their official communication channels and social networks.

PROCEDURES FOR ILLEGAL ENTRY INTO BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA

Migrants and refugees found in Bosnia and Herzegovina enter the country illegally by crossing the borders of neighbouring countries. Certainly, we are not talking about crossing at official border crossings, but about the border zone of Bosnia and Herzegovina - mostly with Serbia and Montenegro, either independently or with the help of smugglers. Such persons do not carry personal and identification documents. However, when the police or the officer of the Border Police of Bosnia and Herzegovina finds a person without documents on the territory of Bosnia and Herzegovina, they hand him over to the jurisdiction of the Service for Foreigners in the nearest field office. He/she then expresses his/her intention to apply for asylum, which he/she can also express to members of the Border Police at the border crossing. A person who has expressed an intention to apply for asylum has the right to move freely within Bosnia and Herzegovina, which is a legal provision that precisely answers the question of anyone who wonders where so many migrants and refugees come from in parks, streets, abandoned buildings and the like. But confirmation of expressed intent is often the only proof of identity. It is valid for eight days, i.e. fourteen days in the case of a large number of simultaneously expressed intentions to apply for asylum, which certainly happened in Bosnia and Herzegovina. This is the deadline that, according to the law, persons have to formally apply for asylum. However, it is clear that both migrants and refugees themselves undergo these procedures for purely formal reasons. In the past four years, as long as the migrant crisis in Bosnia and Herzegovina lasts, practice has shown that asylum procedures are not completed, because the ultimate intention of migrants and refugees

is to illegally cross into Croatian territory, not to stay in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The statements given by Marijan Baotic, Assistant Minister of Security of B&H for N1 television during May 2018, confirm this fact. Baotic states that from the beginning of 2018 to May of the same year, close to 2,450 people expressed their intention to seek asylum, and out of that number, only 387 people entered the asylum procedure (Baotic, 2018).

This pattern can certainly be applied to any time frame during the migrant crisis in B&H. (However, the number of expressed intentions to seek asylum is always many times higher than the number of persons who formally apply for asylum). Here is how Baotic explains this fact:

‘The asylum procedure involves a fingerprint (...), if you give fingerprints in any country (...), if you are found in Western European countries, you will be returned to the country where your fingerprints were taken’ (Baotic, 2018).

DEVELOPMENT AND COMPLICATION OF THE MIGRANT CRISIS IN BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA

The Balkan refugee route which was the main passage for refugees was permanently closed in March 2016. (Here is used only the term “refugees”, because we are talking about people who fled from war-torn Syria and parts of Iraq, victims of ISIL terror and the like). At midnight on March 9, Slovenia began applying the rule that it no longer accepts refugees without passports and visas, and fully applies the Schengen agreement on the border with Croatia. This country, Serbia and Northern Macedonia have also closed their borders, leaving nearly 42 000 stuck in Greece (Al Jazeera Balkans 2016).

Until that moment, refugees - mostly from Syria, to the countries of the European Union entered through Turkey, Greece, Northern Macedonia and Bulgaria, Serbia, and Hungary. In parallel with the closure of the Balkan route, the inflow in Bosnia and Herzegovina is beginning to increase.

Here is how Amnesty International (2020) explains the influx of migrants and refugees in Bosnia and Herzegovina:

‘Due to the mountainous terrain and underdeveloped road and railway infrastructure, Bosnia and Herzegovina has long been largely outside the established refugee route. After Hungary erected impenetrable fences along its border with Serbia and Croatia in 2015, effectively suffocating a key point of access to EU territory, Slovenia established its borders, refugees and migrants who found themselves in Serbia, Bulgaria and Greece gradually paved a new route to Western Europe - through Bosnia and Herzegovina and Croatia. The two countries share a 950 km border, most of which is in the so-called ‘green area’ outside official crossings. The porous border is not a significant barrier for most refugees and migrants.

But to reach Italy or Slovenia, where the EU's open Schengen border regime begins, they must pass through Croatia, through unknown and difficult terrain punctuated by dense forests, fast rivers and active minefields that are a legacy of the 1990s wars. Multi-day travel becomes even more dangerous in winter because blizzards and low temperatures make unmarked forest trails virtually impassable' (Amnesty International, 2020).

Journalists of *Slobodna Evropa*, Arnautovic and Cilic (2020) stated that the Border Police discovered 651 people in an attempt to cross the country illegally in 2017, which is an increase of 380 percent compared to 2016. Significant data is also provided by the report of international agencies in B&H, based on operational data of competent institutions in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The report for September 2018 states:

'To date, 16,144 arrivals of refugees and migrants in Bosnia and Herzegovina (B&H) have been detected during 2018, compared to 359 in the same period in 2017. September saw the highest number of arrivals in 2018: 3,710 arrivals was detected, an increase of 62 percent compared to August, and for the first time in 2018, more than 1,000 arrivals were recorded in just one week' (UNHCR, 2018).

'Migrants and refugees entered B&H mainly through Albania, Montenegro and Serbia. Official institutions have since begun recording an increasing number of migrants and refugees. At that time, the Service for Foreigners' Affairs stated that approximately 13 people entered Bosnia and Herzegovina daily' (UNHCR, 2018).

The citizens of Iran make the only one exception regarding the illegal route from the country of origin to the final destination. During 2018, several cases were registered in which migrants and refugees from that country arrived in Serbia legally, and then illegally crossed into Bosnia and Herzegovina. Here is how the Bosnian research portal *Žurnal* writes about it:

'In *Žurnal* is documented how Iranian tourists, who do not need a visa for Serbia, enter B&H illegally in less than 48 hours. Security estimates are that over 10,000 migrants from Iran entered Europe through the Belgrade airport. Serbian authorities are avoiding readmission, i.e. the return of migrants to the country they came from' (Omerovic & Avdic, 2018)

In the continuation, the journalists of the *Zurnal* talked with Fatima Sadatnejad, who arrived in Serbia with her brother Hussein as a tourist on a regular flight from Tehran, and then illegally crossed the border with B&H.

'We came to Serbia legally. We don't need visas. And then a Pakistani man took us across the river in a rubber boat. We paid 250 Euros, Fatima explained to journalists of *Zurnal*' (Omerovic & Avdic, 2018).

The Service for Foreigners' Affairs then stated that they registered close to 2,000 migrants from Iran. The European Union estimated at the time that Serbia's visa waiver for Iran had caused nearly 10,000 migrants to enter EU territory.

With the development of the migrant crisis, Bosnia and Herzegovina faced several key problems from the very beginning. These include border protection, lack of accommodation capacity and lack of coordination between different levels of government. The statement given by the director of the Border Police of Bosnia and Herzegovina to Dnevni Avaz could be heard from that institution from the very beginning of the migrant crisis: Unfortunately, a huge problem for the Border Police is the lack of police officers. 'We have only one police officer at almost 30 kilometers, so it is necessary to adopt a new rulebook and hire new police officers' (Ajnadzic & Galic, 2020).

Completely unprepared for the mass influx, Bosnia and Herzegovina did not have enough available accommodation capacity. In the settlement of Delijaš, not far from Sarajevo, as well as the Immigration Center in East Sarajevo in the entity of Republika Srpska, they were completely filled very quickly. However, this problem will not come to the fore until the spring of 2018, when migrants and refugees form an improvised tent settlement in the center of Sarajevo in a park across from the Sarajevo City Hall, or the former National and University Library in the city center. Only then does it become clear to the citizens and the authorities that the migrant crisis has become very complicated.

'In the spring of 2018, migrants and refugees in Sarajevo were already a common occurrence. In 2018, local authorities and the European Commission recorded over 24,000 arrivals in Bosnia and Herzegovina, while in 2017 there were only a few hundred. These are people from Pakistan, Iran, Syria, Afghanistan, Iran, but also Algeria, Bangladesh and Eritrea' (Amnesty International, 2020).

Migrants and refugees stayed on the streets - especially in the very center of Sarajevo, where they mostly rented accommodation. But their intention was not to stay there. As we explained earlier, they entered B&H illegally from Serbia or Montenegro, and would head to Sarajevo, where they would usually stay for a few days, and then continue towards Bihać and Velika Kladaša - cities in the Una-Sana Canton located in the northwest of Bosnia and Herzegovina. This area is their ultimate goal in Bosnia and Herzegovina, before they try to cross the border with Croatia or Bosnia and Herzegovina illegally. In addition to Sarajevo, Tuzla also suffered part of the migrant crisis, where migrants and refugees spent months in an improvising tent settlement at a bus and train station in the city center. Tuzla is the first large city near the border between B&H and Serbia, on the way of migrants and refugees to Sarajevo and Bihać.

With the formation of an improvised tent settlement, citizens and authorities realize that they are facing a humanitarian, health, hygiene, and potential security problem. In the park across from the City Hall, migrants and refugees set up ordinary, thin tent camps in which adults, children and entire families stayed.

Al Jazeera journalist Aida Hadzmusic, who worked for the regional television N1 at the time, has been following the migrant crisis from the very beginning, that is, the influx of the first migrants and refugees. She described her impression when we met with an improvised tent settlement in the center of Sarajevo:

‘Until then, I saw mostly only single men on the streets, but when I came to the tent camp in the park, it was my first encounter with children among refugees and migrants. I saw a boy about 4-5 years old. I later found out that his name was Hussein, and that his parents went on a trip to Europe via Bosnia and Herzegovina with him and his twelve-year-old sister Tabak. They were from Iraq and claimed to be from Mosul. Almost every time I would walk through the park, we would have some interaction. One day they were very nervous. They said they were going to Bihać and would try to cross the border. The girl had my phone number and a few weeks later she sent me a message saying she was in Nuremberg, Germany’ (Hadzmusic, 2020, personal communication, 15 November)

HUMAN RIGHTS OF MIGRANTS

Most migrant camps have opened in the Una-Sana Canton in north-western Bosnia and Herzegovina. Bihać and Velika Kladuša are the final destinations in B&H, because they are the closest to the border with Croatia. Despite the opening of camps and the expansion of capacity, the lack of capacity would appear as a constant problem, due to the increase in inflows. Literally at the end of each autumn, international and humanitarian organizations warned that the existing accommodation facilities should be equipped for the winter. This is evidenced by parts of the report of several international agencies from 2018. On September 30, TPC Sedra filled its capacity of 400 beds, and works are underway in Borici. Appropriate accommodation for winter conditions is urgently needed. [Sedra is a hotel in Cazin - a town in Una-Sana Canton. It has been converted into a reception center for vulnerable groups - families, women and children. Borici is a former dormitory in the center of Bihać, which is also managed by the International Organization for Migration and which serves to accommodate migrants and refugees]. Despite the existing accommodation facilities, some migrants and refugees stayed outdoors. One of such locations was in Velika Kladuša - not far from the border with Croatia. The report of different international organizations such as IOM, UNHCR and various state institutions from 2018 states the following:

‘Due to limited capacity in TPC Sedra and the lack of operational alternatives, previously established informal settlements of various sizes at various locations in the USC survive as a transitional solution. The two largest such settlements are the so-called Borici Student Home in Bihać and the field in Trnovi in Velika Kladuša (VK). Although the population is quite unpredictable and the numbers change daily, it

is estimated that up to 1,000 refugees and migrants, including families and children, regularly stay in one of these two locations where there are no adequate sanitation and living conditions, causing a number of protective and security challenges. The number of split meals remains the best way to track the size of the population at these locations. The number of refugees and migrants with limited financial resources who rent private accommodation in the USC [Una-Sana Canton] is unknown’ (UNHCR, 2018).

The existing accommodation facilities in Sarajevo were simply not interesting enough for migrants and refugees, given that Una-Sana, and not Sarajevo Canton, is the closest to the Croatian border, i.e. the European Union. In December 2020, IOM operates six migrant camps in which nearly more than thousand migrants and refugees reside. This number includes the controversial Lipa camp, which IOM will leave by the end of December, which will be discussed later in the context of the humanitarian crisis. It is estimated that nearly 3,000 are currently staying outside registered migrant centers - in private accommodation, abandoned facilities and the like (Al Jazeera Balkans, 2020).

Another problem when it comes to accommodation is the opposition of local communities. Here are a few examples: In February 2019, the International Organization for Migration relocated more than 200 migrants and refugees from Una-Sana Canton to the reception center Ušivak near Sarajevo. This was the reaction of the Hadžići Municipality, where the reception center is located:

‘The current number of migrants in the former ‘Ušivak’ barracks (around 500) has greatly changed the demographic picture of Ušivak and Donji Hadžići and has significantly changed living conditions. The announced transfer of an additional 250 migrants of problematic character will certainly worsen the living conditions of the surrounding population and complicate the security situation, they say from this municipality’ (KLIX, 2019).

‘The locals in Bradina, which was mentioned in public as a potential location for the relocation of migrants and refugees from the unconditional camp Lipa near Bihać in December 2020, reacted similarly for their security’ (KLIX, 2020).

GOVERNMENTAL NON-COORDINATION

The lack of coordination between different levels of government has proven to be one of the key problems in managing the migrant crisis. Here are a few more significant examples. During the spring of 2018, migrants and refugees formed an improvised tent settlement in the park across from the Sarajevo City Hall - the former National and University Library. But state authorities - primarily the Ministry of Security, which manages the migrant crisis, have decided to relocate migrants and refugees to another location. It was decided that it would be the Salakovac reception center near Mostar.

On May 18, 2018, in the early morning hours, migrants and refugees were placed in a convoy of buses and sent to Mostar.

However, convoys of buses with migrants and refugees were stopped at the border of two cantons - Sarajevo Canton and Herzegovina-Neretva Canton. The convoy with migrants and refugees was stopped by the cantonal police. That it was a “coup d’etat”, the then Minister of Security of B&H Dragan Mektic, said in a telephone conversation with the journalist N1 (later Al Jazeera Balkans), with whom we spoke for the purposes of this research. The journalist remembers that situation:

‘I received the first information about stopping the convoy from Denisa - a volunteer of Bosnian origin who lived in Germany and who arrived in Bosnia and Herzegovina from that country to prepare meals for migrants and refugees in the camp near the City Hall. She called me in a panic and said that the police stopped the buses with weapons, not allowing the migrants and refugees to get out. The news soon began to be transmitted by various portals. I went there with the team, and the Minister of Security of B&H, Dragan Mektic told me that it was a “classic coup d’etat managing the migrant crisis in Bosnia and Herzegovina.” (Hadzimusic, 2020, personal communication, 16 January).

Furthermore, The Government of the Herzegovina-Neretva Canton stated:

‘The question is who and in what way made the decision to send them to the Herzegovina-Neretva Canton. “We believe that making such a decision, no matter who made it, is a blatant example of disregard for the constitutional structure of B&H and an attempt to destabilize the HNK, which we will not allow” (Vlada Hercegovacko-neretvanske zupanije [Government of Herzegovina-Neretva Canton], 2018).

As journalist Arduana Pribinja states in a TV report for Al Jazeera Balkans, the migrant crisis was one of the main reasons for mutual accusations of violating the Constitution. In May 2018, both the Minister of State for Security and the Cantonal Government referred to the Constitution, claiming that it wanted to protect the safety of citizens in that area. Here is what the Minister of Security Selmo Cikotic told the journalist Pribinja: ‘The migrant crisis is a reflection of a dysfunctional state structure, a constitutionally correct organization, where you have the fact or the possibility that one part of the state says - we will not deal with this problem’ (Pribinja, 2020).

Pribinja states: ‘Republika Srpska has taken a clear position on migrants from the beginning - that it will not allow their detention and that it will not allow the creation of their collection or I don’t know what centers’ (Pribinja, 2020).

Republika Srpska has never agreed to form migrant centers, and often the highest entity officials spoke about the migrant population without any sensibility. There were many such statements. Here are the messages of Milorad Dodik - member of the Presidency of Republika Srpska after the meeting with Josep

Borrell - EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy in January 2021:

‘After all, the EU has encouraged these people to embark on this long journey from their homes. That they do not return those migrants to us, because that generates additional problems.’ (Delegation of the European Union in Bosnia and Herzegovina], 2021). Dodik spoke similarly in June 2020: ‘We cannot make accommodation policies for them. This is unacceptable and the Republika Srpska said that it would not allow it, because it is not just a matter of humanitarian character, having in mind that during their stay in the local communities where they live, attacks on the local population take place, and that there are conflicts between them. (Radio Televizija Republike Srpske [Radio Television of Republika Srpska], 2021). ‘We did not call these migrants. Europe has opened this process out of its egoism to procure as much cheap labour as possible for its industry, which it is developing - said Dodik’ (BL-PORTAL, 2020).

Analyzing the approaches to the migrant situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina since the beginning of 2018, it is noticeable that the migrant situation has, in many cases, been “blown out of proportion” and not adequately treated both by the media and by individual politicians (mainly coming from the authorities of the Republika Srpska entities) (Krzalic et al., 2019).

Amnesty International’s messages in Bosnia and Herzegovina also show how poor the coordination of the authorities in Bosnia and Herzegovina have proved. In requests from that country, Amnesty International requests: ‘To take concrete steps, including seeking additional financial and technical assistance from the EU and improving internal coordination, to ensure that the country is better prepared to respond adequately to the needs of refugees and migrants passing through or remaining in Bosnia and Herzegovina, including by providing them with adequate and safe accommodation, food, sanitation, basic education, medical care and legal assistance, in accordance with domestic and international law; to take full control and management of temporary refuge and migrant reception centers from the International Organization for Migration (IOM)’ (Amnesty International, 2020).

MIGRANTS AND THEIR RIGHTS - THE VUČJAK CASE STUDY

The Vučjak case study shows interest in more intensive cooperation with countries that can influence the flow of refugees to the EU in various ways. Camp Vučjak near Bihać was a temporary improvised tent settlement for migrants and refugees. It was formed during the summer of 2019 at the insistence of cantonal and local authorities in Una-Sana Canton and Bihać, which demanded the relocation of migrants and refugees from the city center, and was closed in December of the same year due to inhumane conditions in which hundreds of migrants and refugees.

After the decision of the city authorities to relocate migrants and refugees from the city to Vučjak, which was one of several possible locations, the cantonal police started transporting migrants who stayed in parks, abandoned buildings and the like. However, warnings from international and non-governmental organizations arrived very quickly, indicating that the location was not conditional on people staying. The UN in B&H stated that it poses a “significant health and safety risk”, that it is located near minefields, but also that there is a risk of fire or explosion due to the possible presence of methane under the ground, because it is about the location where the landfill used to be.

That this unconditional location was not conceived as a permanent solution for the accommodation of migrants and refugees is also shown by the statement of the Mayor of Bihać Suhret Fazlic, who stated for the Klix.ba portal:

‘We are trying to ensure more or less normal conditions. We have no other way out and are looking for another location because Vučjak is not a permanent solution. We gave three options: not to come to Bihać in any way, to find another location outside the Una-Sana Canton, and the third is to find a location that is acceptable to everyone in the USC. We are not happy with the conditions in which they live, but we try as hard as we can’ (KLIX, 2021).

The bad conditions in the Vučjak camp provoked continuous reactions from international and non-governmental organizations and institutions, which will culminate only with the worsening weather conditions during the winter. In October 2019, even before the weather deteriorated significantly, the BBC reported Vučjak as a “nightmare camp” (BBC News, 2019).

Extremely poor humanitarian conditions have alarmed the B&H and international public, forcing the country’s authorities to act, but not without difficulty, which is just one in a series of examples of poor management of the migrant crisis, as we will see below. During a visit to the camp in December 2019, the Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights stated that the conditions were shameful, and that keeping people in such conditions was inhumane and unacceptable (Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights, 2019).

‘For the relocation of migrants and refugees from Vučjak, it was necessary to provide alternative accommodation. But old problems arose. Following a proposal by the then Minister of Human Rights and Refugees to relocate underage migrants and refugees from Vučjak to Salakovac near Mostar, the cantonal police in that part of the country strongly opposed it, saying it was “unacceptable from a security point of view” and that the movement of migrants “causes fear and discomfort to the local population” (MUP HNK [Ministry of the Interior of the Herzegovina-Neretva Canton], n. d).

In addition, the announced relocations to the Blažuj camp near Sarajevo were postponed, as speculated in public - because the center was simply not ready to accept migrants and refugees.

The relocation to the Ušivak camp - not far from Sarajevo - was also postponed. However, after numerous problems that followed the closure of that unconditional camp, Vučjak was disbanded. However, numerous media reports - including the Klix.ba portal - showed that migrants and refugees were relocated to camps that were not fully ready for reception in December 2019. According to the mentioned portal, the inspection determined that there were numerous irregularities and that the location was ready for accommodation at the last minute (KLIX, 2019).

THE LIPA CASE

In April 2020, the authorities in Bosnia and Herzegovina established a temporary camp Lipa near Bihać. At that time, 120 migrants and refugees who had been staying outside the reception centers in Bihać until then were accommodated in that camp - mostly on the streets, in parks and in abandoned buildings. At that time, Bosnia and Herzegovina had already introduced measures to avoid the spread of coronavirus, and there was a danger of the gap spreading among migrants and refugees. A tent was formed inside the camp, which was to serve as an isolation ward. At the end of September of the same year, the Bira camp, located in the center of Bihać, was closed. The cantonal and city authorities insisted on that, stating that hundreds of migrants in the city center represent a health and safety problem for them.

‘This has solved a security and health-epidemiological problem,’ said Una-Sana Canton Prime Minister Mustafa Ruznic after the Bira camp closed’ (Ruznic, interview, April 2020).

Some migrants and refugees from Camp Bira were relocated to Camp Lipa. The idea was, therefore, to form new camps outside the territory of Una-Sana Canton, but also to officially declare Camp Lipa a reception center for migrants and refugees, which would open the way for its equipment for winter and long-term accommodation. In order for part of the funds allocated by the EU to Bosnia and Herzegovina for the management of migrant camps to be operational for equipping Lipa, it was necessary for the Council of Ministers to formalize the camp as a reception center. However, the resistance was offered by the ministers from the ranks of the Serbian people, stating that Serbs live in the area of the Lipa camp. After not adopting the decision on the establishment of the Lipa camp, the Ministry of Security of Bosnia and Herzegovina said: ‘Unfortunately, the proposal was not accepted by the Council of Ministers, more precisely by the members of the Council of Ministers from the ranks of the Serbian people. By not adopting this decision, the financing of the tent settlement, i.e. camp, for the accommodation of migrants “Lipa” by international organizations ceases, and thus produces a serious humanitarian, security and political crisis on the territory of Una-Sana Canton and thus on the entire territory of Bosnia and Herzegovina’ (Ministarstvo sigurnosti Bosne i Hercegovine [Ministry of Security of Bosnia and Herzegovina], 2020).

After that, the International Organization for Migration stated that it would withdraw from the camp, which in practice means that more than 1,000 migrants and refugees are left without services, food and humanitarian aid (Slobodna Evropa, 2021).

The IOM stated that they were leaving the camp, because it was unconditional for the winter. They expected a decision from the Council of Ministers to declare the camp an official reception center, but also alternative accommodation in which refugees and migrants would be accommodated while the Lipa camp is being equipped. The IOM repeatedly postponed the decision to withdraw from the camp, but they finally did so on December 23, although the Council of Ministers had made the necessary decision two days earlier and made Camp Lipa official as a reception center (Vijeće ministara Bosne i Hercegovine [Council of Ministers of Bosnia and Herzegovina], n. d.).

However, it was necessary to temporarily relocate migrants and refugees to another location, while the Lipa camp is being equipped for several months. State authorities, the IOM and the EU expected local and cantonal authorities in Bihać to reopen Camp Bira in the city center, but encountered fierce resistance. Not only did the cantonal and city governments oppose, but citizens also protested day and night in front of Camp Bira, saying they did not want to relocate migrants and refugees to the city center. On the day when the IOM withdrew from the Lipa camp, a fire broke out in the tents where migrants and refugees were staying, which the police determined to have been set. Migrants and refugees remained under the open sky, and this humanitarian crisis lasted for days. The only help they received for several days was a meal of the Red Cross once a day. The fact that the European Commission also questioned the European path of Bosnia and Herzegovina shows how much this humanitarian crisis had an impact in Europe.

European Commission spokesman Peter Stano called on the country's authorities to resolve the crisis urgently, calling the situation "unacceptable":

'The inability of the authorities to implement decisions and fulfill their obligations negatively affects the image of Bosnia and Herzegovina in the international arena, and could also affect the country's European aspirations' Stano said (BHRT, 2021).

Criticism of Bosnia and Herzegovina and the management of the migrant crisis also came from international organizations. Here is what they said about Camp Lipa in Human Rights Watch:

'Hundreds of migrants and asylum seekers in north western B&H spend the winter in difficult conditions because the authorities have repeatedly failed to address their basic needs. Hundreds of migrants and asylum seekers in north western B&H spend the winter in difficult conditions because the authorities have repeatedly failed to address their basic needs. (...) Local, federal and state authorities in Bosnia and Herzegovina should immediately take coordinated and urgent measures to ensure that migrants have access

to adequate accommodation for winter conditions and medical and other assistance', said Lydia Gall, a senior European researcher at Human Rights Watch (Human Rights Watch, 2021).

After the withdrawal of the IOM, migrants and refugees faced very difficult conditions - lack of accommodation, food and basic living conditions. That took days. Then, the Ministry of Security asked the Ministry of Defense to set up tents on the location of the Armed Forces of B&H, so that the abandoned camp would be somewhat more conditional. The presidency approved the setting up of the tent. However, migrants protested the poor conditions, refusing food, which lasted for several days. The situation with the Lipa camp shows the scale of the humanitarian crisis and the lack of coordination of the B&H authorities in managing the migrant crisis, but also the fact that the same issues arise from the beginning that are not systematically resolved, and that the authorities have learned very little from previous failures and they have allowed migrants and refugees to welcome B&H for the fourth winter in a row without resolving the issue of accommodation.

VIOLENT RETURN

The journalist we spoke to for the purposes of this research told us about her first encounter with what later became recognizable as pushback, i.e. the forced return of migrants and refugees from the Croatian border:

'In the spring of 2018, an improvised tent settlement in the park across from the City Hall in Sarajevo was disbanded. Migrants and refugees were relocated to Camp Salakovac near Mostar. But some have previously tried to go into the game - that is, crossing the border illegally. At the moment when the tents had already been removed, I saw a woman from Iraq and her eight-year-old son Ali in the park. They had been known to me for a long time, because they stayed in tents. The woman was sitting on the ground and looked very bad. It was not clear to her what had happened in the meantime to the tents she intended to return to after a failed attempt to cross the border with Croatia illegally. She showed me scratches on her body, stating that the Croatian police tore off her hijab, physically injured her, and kicked her son Ali. She also told me that the police had broken her phone. I heard many such stories later. The scenario recounted by migrants and refugees almost always involved the same scenes - violence, beatings, kidnappings or the destruction of mobile phones' (Hadzimusic, 2021, personal communication, 16 January).

For the purposes of this research, Hadzimusic told us that she later encountered several similar cases. One of the migrants allegedly showed her back, which showed visible injuries. The person, originally from Tunisia, stated that he was traumatized by the actions of the Croatian police, and that he would rather return to Greece than try to cross the B&H-Croatia border for the fifth time:

If I have to, I will return to Greece sooner, but I will never try through Croatia again. I would rather stay in Bosnia than go there. I tried to cross three times. I was returned twice without any problems. I came to Slovenia for the third time, entered, and then they brought me back to Croatia. There the police beat me and I came back here. They took off our T-shirts, took our mobile phones, and took 800 euros from me. I have phobias, I can't sleep and I can't stay alone anymore. I am going through a very stressful period' (Hadzimusic, 2018).

One of the cases she dealt with was quite brutal', says our interlocutor. It is about a refugee from Syria. He crossed the border, according to the report. However, the police found him deep on Croatian territory, and, as he says, they let the dogs bite him. Here is what else Muhammad told Al Jazeera in late 2019:

'They came with a Škoda, and back there was a cage with a dog. First two policemen arrived, and then another with a mask. He let the dog attack us. I suffered the most. The man put his foot on my back and let the dog bite me. It lasted about 10 minutes. We waited at that place for another three hours, and then they took us to the border with B&H in a bigger car. So I ended up in Bihać again. The worst thing for me was when he asked me - does it hurt you, saying - that's good, laughing at me' (Hadzimusic, 2019).

The world media also covered this topic. Among them is the respected British Guardian, which published videos of migrants and refugees allegedly, beaten by Croatian police (Tondo, 2018). Numerous international organizations and institutions - UNHCR, Amnesty International, HRW, Commissioner for Human Rights, pointed to the violent return of migrants and refugees from Croatia to B&H, and the violence perpetrated by the country's police. Here is what is stated in one of the Human Rights Watch reports:

'Despite credible reports during the year of illegal and violent return of migrants to Bosnia and Serbia by Croatian police, in violation of EU refugee and human rights law, Croatia did not suffer the consequences of EU institutions. In December 2018, the Croatian president confirmed the occasional use of force for Swiss television, but later withdrew her comments' (Human Rights Watch, n. d.).

The non-governmental organization "No Name Kitchen", which operated in the area of Velika Kladuša, also published its own report with the testimonies of migrants about the violence of the Croatian police. They also documented their bodily injuries as well as broken phones. One of the testimonies published by the mentioned organization states:

'While I was on the ground, a police officer in a black suit pointed an electric shocker at my neck. I told him I had heart problems, but he kept beating me. He stopped when he seemed tired. I got up with the intention of putting on my shoes, but he continued to beat me again, even though I was already on the territory of Bosnia and Herzegovina' (No Name Kitchen, 2018).

The Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (2019) called on Croatia to investigate allegations of violence, stating: 'We are very concerned about the force that the Croatian police continuously use against migrants during coups. Victims, including children, suffer physical abuse and humiliation only because of their migrant status' (Office of the High Commissioner, 2020).

Criticism also came from European officials. Commenting on the Danish Refugee Council's report on violent returns on Twitter, EU Commissioner for Home Affairs Ylva Johansson said: "I take these reports very seriously. I plan to discuss this and other reports of violations of fundamental rights with Croatian officials" (Johansson, 2020).

Therefore, allegations and accusations against the Croatian police and the treatment of migrants and refugees were in the media, but also in various international and non-governmental organizations. However, the Croatian police continuously deny reports of violence against migrants and refugees.

HUMANITARIAN RESPONSE - EXPERIENCE OF THE LOCAL ORGANIZATION 'POMOZI. BA'

Since the beginning of the migrant crisis in B&H, the humanitarian organization Pomozi.ba has been engaged in providing assistance. The organization was mainly in charge in preparing and distributing meals in camps and providing food and non-food items for people living outdoors. Our interlocutor for the needs of this research was Adnan Tatarevic from the mentioned organization. Tatarevic said that his own experience was very positive and that there were no security issues. However, he underlined that the response of the state was far from satisfying:

The response of the competent institutions to the migrant crisis is the same as to all other crises - bad. There are several reasons for the above - negligence, ignorance, inaction, transfer of authority and the like. At the beginning of the crisis from 2018 until about the end of 2019, we were more than empathetic as a nation and we tried to help people on the move in all possible ways. At the moment, we have various examples - from people who fully understand the situation and try to help, to people who call for lynching, persecution, beatings and the like. Among the main culprits are some media with their inaccurate reporting and hordes of commentators on social networks calling for a lynching. When it comes to prejudices, they exist in every possible way - racial, religious, etc.

According to Tatarevic, the main problem in that regard is the lack of political will and engagement:

I am of the opinion that, if there was the political will to resolve the situation in an adequate way, the security and humanitarian problem would not even exist on such a scale.

First of all, the country should take a clear position when it comes to the migrant crisis, which means adequate response of all levels of government in accordance with their powers, then strengthen the Border Police, and open more temporary reception centers throughout B&H (including RS), where would accommodate up to 500 people.

EUROPEAN UNION RESPONSE

Since the beginning of the migrant crisis in Bosnia and Herzegovina, the European Union has been paying special attention to the situation in that country. The events at the end of 2020 and the beginning of 2021 in connection with the humanitarian crisis in the Lipa camp attracted the special attention of European officials and called into question the European path of Bosnia and Herzegovina. The European Union has repeatedly asked the domestic authorities to urgently intensify activities to resolve the difficult humanitarian situation in Una-Sana Canton and to provide basic and safe living conditions for all who continue to sleep in the cold in extreme conditions. This is evidenced by the telephone conversation between High Representative Josep Borrell and B&H Presidency Chairman Milorad Dodik. Borrell then said that B&H should open centers throughout the country, noting that failure to do so would have serious consequences for Bosnia and Herzegovina's reputation (Delegacija Evropske Unije u B&H [Delegation of the European Union in Bosnia and Herzegovina], 2021).

In addition, the EU is the largest donor for migration management in B&H. Since the beginning of the migrant crisis, i.e. since 2018, the EU has remitted approximately 89 million euros to Bosnia and Herzegovina. Most of these EU funds were paid through the International Organization for Migration - 76,851,217 million euros. Funding was provided through the Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA), the Directorate-General for Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations, and the Instrument Contributing to Stability and Peace (IcSP) in response to the COVID-19 pandemic (International Organization for Migration, 2021).

By January 2021, IOM had spent 67% of the remittances, or 51,560,327 euros, leaving 25,290,890 euros, or 33%. According to data released by the IOM, most of these costs are "humanitarian aid", which includes food and nutrition, distribution of non-food products, shelter and labour costs, security - or costs related to insurance services, and protection, health and education.

Below is a more detailed overview of the funds spent, according to the International Organization for Migration:

‘Total allocated funds: 75 217 167

Funds spent: 51,560 327

Humanitarian aid: 39 788 225 (77%)

Establishment of reception centers for migrants and refugees: 7,047,055 (14%)

Direct support to B&H institutions: 3 398 679 (7%)
Operating and administrative expenses: 1,326,368 (2%)’ (International Organization for Migration, 2021)
The international organization in Bosnia and Herzegovina, however, has been the target of much criticism for its spending. From the very beginning, it was not entirely clear to the public in B&H how the funds are paid and who manages them and public criticism was often directed at the expense of B&H institutions. However, state institutions have clearly indicated that the money that the European Union pays is not paid directly to them. Here is a part of the announcement of the Ministry of Finance / Finance and Treasury of B&H:

‘Following a series of reports by IOM officials and press inquiries into allegations that millions of euros have been allocated to address the migrant crisis, the B&H Ministry of Finance and Treasury is informing the public that money for this purpose has not been paid into the B&H Treasury Single Account. Allegations that financial reports from the IOM on the use of these funds are submitted to the Ministry of Finance and Treasury of B&H is also incorrect because illegal migrations are the exclusive competence of the B&H Ministry of Security and all contacts end in that ministry which prepares reports for B&H Council of Ministers sessions’ (Ministarstvo finansija/financija i trezora BiH [Ministry of Finance and Treasury of B&H], 2021).

In the published report, IOM made available only the approximate costs, without publishing details, in terms of how much money was allocated to salaries and the like. Therefore, that organization found itself the target of criticism even after the publication of the report, which the public insisted on. The Minister of Police in the Una-Sana Canton, Nermin Kljajic, stated that no investments were seen in the Bira camp in Bihać. For Al Jazeera Balkans, Kljajic stated:

‘Earlier, there was some information that 3.5 million euros were invested in Bira, and 1.5 million in Sedra. We who live in the USC area see the condition of these facilities today; there's nothing there but containers so those amounts of them are a little weird. (...) We only got 50 boots for the specialist support unit, but if we read the report, we get the impression that the entire MUP USK is equipped’ (Hadzimusic, 2019).

In the same article, Damir Masic, Member of the Parliament of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, stated:

‘In our opinion, it is not right for a third of the money to go to the salaries of consultants, administration, and that it is difficult to get the data we get. When you enter the cost structure, you will see that, in our opinion, these funds were not spent most adequately and happily. This way you have one organization that doesn't account to anyone and that isn't responsible for that money’ (Hadzimusic, 2020).

However, according to a report by Al Jazeera Balkans, the European Union said it had channelled aid to Bosnia and Herzegovina through international and NGOs due to insufficient institutional capacity and a lack of coordination in the country to manage the migrant crisis.

CONCLUSION

This article was drafted in the fourth year of the migrant crisis in Bosnia and Herzegovina. It describes its complication, concluding with the events of late 2020 and early 2021. However, the migrant crisis in Bosnia and Herzegovina is an ongoing problem. From any time point since the complication of the crisis, we could always describe the same phenomena - increased influx of migrants and refugees, border porosity, lack of accommodation, continuous humanitarian crisis and warnings of European officials in this regard, but above all lack of coordination of different levels of government in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

When it comes to the number of migrants and refugees, the data we have given testify to a significant increase since 2018, which was mostly contributed by the earlier closure of the Balkan route. The influx trend has not stopped, but has slowed in the months of lockdown at the very beginning of the corona virus pandemic. Bosnia and Herzegovina largely borders Croatia, and thus the European Union, which protects its borders from illegal migration. On the other hand, the border zone with Serbia is porous, because the Border Police does not have the capacity - human and material, to protect the borders. Migrants welcomed four winters in Bosnia and Herzegovina without a final accommodation solution. The case of "Lipa", which we described in detail in this article, shows that the authorities did not learn anything from the experience with the improvised tent settlement "Vučjak", which was also discussed in this article.

A special problem that the institutions themselves drew attention to, the EU as the largest donor for migration management in B&H and other actors is the intertwining of competencies of different levels of government. Migration is a global phenomenon, but the continuous humanitarian crises, the reactions of the EU and international actors, show that the state response is not satisfactory.

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