Araştırma Makalesi

The European Union's Cooperation with the Accession Countries (Western Balkans and Turkey) to Deal with the Refugee Crisis

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Abstract

The huge flow of migrants to Europe in 2015 created an unprecedented irregular migration pressure over many European countries and labeled frequently as the refugee crisis. The initial reaction of the EU member states to this development became to take individual measures, such as strengthening or re-launching border controls. The failure of these responses taken at the national level and the rising existential threat towards the Schengen regime motivated the EU member states and institutions to search for a common European solution by resorting to the migration cooperation developing since the mid-1980s. After the ineffectiveness of the common measures in producing the expected outcomes, the EU decided to develop further its on-going migration cooperation with the accession countries in the Western Balkans and Turkey. This study aims to examine the EU's migration cooperation with the accession countries within the scope of the refugee crisis. After providing a short account of the intra-EU measures, the study analyses the migration cooperation with the Western Balkan countries and Turkey respectively.

Keywords: *European Union, Refugee Crisis, Western Balkans, Turkey, Migration.*

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Araştırma Makalesi

Avrupa Birliğinin Mülteci Kriziyle Başa Çıkmak İçin Katılım Ülkeleri (Batı Balkanlar ve Türkiye) ile İş Birliği

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Özet

2015 yılında tarihsel süreçte daha önce hiç görülmemiş yüksek sayılarda göçmenin Avrupa'ya erişmesi, birçok Avrupa ülkesi üzerinde büyük bir göç baskısı yaratmış ve sıklıkla mülteci krizi olarak anılmıştır. AB üyesi ülkelerin bu gelişmeye ilk tepkileri, sınır kontrollerini güçlendirmek ya da geri getirmek gibi bireysel tepkiler benimsemek olmuştur. Ulusal düzeyde alınan tedbirlerin etkinsizliği ve Schengen rejimine yönelik artanvarlıksal tehdit, AB üyesi ülkeleri ve Birlik kurumlarını 1980'lerin ortalarından itibaren gelişen göç iş birliği mekanizmasına başvurarak ortak bir Avrupa çözümü geliştirmeye yöneltmiştir. Alınan ortak tedbirlerin beklenen sonucu ortaya çıkarmakta yetersiz kalması, AB'yi Batı Balkanlarda yer alan katılım ülkeleri ve Türkiye ile halihazırda devam eden göç iş birliğini ilerletmeye sevk etmiştir. Bu çalışmada AB'nin mülteci krizi bağlamında Batı Balkan ülkeleri ve Türkiye ile göç alanında kurduğu iş birlikleri incelenmektedir. AB çatısı altında alınan tedbirlerden kısaca bahsedildikten sonra, Batı Balkan ülkeleri ve Türkiye ile yapılan göç işbirlikleri sırasıyla ele alınmaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: *Avrupa Birliği, Mülteci Krizi, Batı Balkanlar, Türkiye, Göç.*

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Introduction

Migration is a historical phenomenon, but it has become extensive in the modern era. As a result of which migration management has turned into a tough challenge for the states which are acting simultaneously in line with the dual motivations of benefitting from the potentials of the migrants and limiting the negative consequences of migration over their properly functioning systems. Significant number of catastrophes around the world continue to cause brutalities over the civilian populations and generate millions of refugees aiming to reach a safe haven to achieve their survival which are the most striking current developments regarding migration. As the geography of peace and prosperity in the world, Europe has become one of the primary destinations for the millions of refugees fleeing the on-going political and military clashes in their home countries, mainly Syria, Iraq and Afghanistan. As a result of this, the continent has faced the largest flow of refugees which was observed after the end of the Second World War in the recent few years.

The number of refugees arriving in Europe made a historical peak in 2015. Approximately 1.5 million people, mostly fleeing the conflict in Syria, moved to Europe and a high number of them asked for asylum with the hope for having better living standards and employment opportunities (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 2015; Eurostat, 2016). Many of these people achieved to reach the continent in an irregular way by paying high amounts of money to the patrons of human trafficking activities and even risking their own lives in this dangerous journey, especially while crossing the Mediterranean Sea. From the perspective of the European states which emphasized the irregular nature of this migration flow, these people did not fully satisfy the conditions and requirements set by the European states related to their entrance, stay or carrying out an economic activity in that jurisdiction.

This historical high flow of refugees to Europe has been commonly labelled as the refugee crisis due to the disruptive effects of the dense mobilities on the European border control regimes. The ineffectiveness of the national actions in producing a viable solution to the crisis has immediately transformed the matter to the status of a common problem and it

was added to the European Union's (EU) crowded agenda of the crises. The dominance of the visa-free Schengen regime among the majority of the EU member states has also played a crucial role in transforming the refugee crisis into an urgent problem, which necessitates collective action and acting in solidarity. In this contextual setting, the Schengen regime, which was previously championed as one of the jewels in the crown within the EU system, turned into a scapegoat. It was alleged that the Schengen system facilitated the mobility of refugees across the EU member states after their entrance to the Schengen zone legally or mostly illegally on their way to the European countries, mostly the Western and Northern Europe, which have the most refugee-friendly asylum systems (Reiners & Tekin, 2020: 118).

Despite the Union's official discourse on developing migration dialogue with both origin and transit countries, the EU has never had a capacity to eradicate the root causes that force people to leave their home countries. Due to this shortcoming, it focused necessarily on the effects to transform the refugee crisis into a manageable phenomenon for itself. In this process, on the one hand, the EU relied upon within-Union measures by using the mechanisms which were developed within the scope of the migration integration launched in the mid-1980s; on the other hand, it pursued a strategy of externalisation by establishing cooperation with the neighbouring countries and regions.

This study aims to analyse the EU's migration cooperation with the accession countries, namely Western Balkan countries and Turkey, within the scope of the refugee crisis. Based on this general objective, the study also attempts to come up with an answer to the question of whether the migration cooperation of the Union with the accession countries is an endurable solution for tackling the irregular migration pressure or not. In line with the official Union approach towards the management of the accession process, Western Balkan countries are dealt with as a group of countries and Turkey is elaborated as an individual case. The study begins with a part examining the intra-EU measures specifically designed to come with a proper response to the refugee crisis. Afterwards, the EU's choice for the externalisation by deepening its existing migration cooperation with the Western Balkan countries and Turkey is analysed, respectively.

Intra-EU Measures to Combat against Irregular Migration Pressure Linked with the Refugee Crisis

Two tragic events in 2015 attracted the attention of the whole world including Europe to the refugee issue. In the spring of 2015, 900 refugees lost their lives in a boat near Libyan shores. After a similar accident, the lifeless body of a small child was found in Bodrum (Turkey) in September 2015. These two tragic events pushed the EU institutions and member states to deal with the refugee matter immediately under the heavy media and public pressures (Hampshire, 2015: 9). Apart from these dramatic events and pressure, the magnitude of the refugees, as well as the desire to prevent widespread human smuggling activities also raised the urgency of the issue (Carrera, Blocksman, Gros & Guild, 2015: 1). In addition, the rise of terrorist incidents within Europe produced a tendency to depict irregular entrants as the persons having great tendency to commit terrorist acts (Selçuk, 2017: 140; Zingg, 2016: 24). Apart from terrorism, irregular migrants have been also associated with the major problems, such as unemployment, crimes, violence, drug trafficking and human smuggling (Kaya, 2011: 81). That is, there was an enhanced securitisation of the irregular migration. The different cultural backgrounds and the possible effects of the irregular migrants over the cultural identities of the European countries, as well as their potential burden over the welfare systems of the European countries were instrumentalised in this securitisation process (Deniz, 2017: 247). The common EU interest to the issue of migration cannot be attached solely with the urgency caused by the refugee crisis. As the EU member states have been cooperating with each other in the management of migration since the launch of Schengen system, which was at the first stage developed out of Union system in 1985 and became integrated to the Union's legal framework with the Amsterdam Treaty of 1997. From then on, there has been an intensifying effort of the EU member states in achieving a unified approach in the management of external borders (Sansus, Troitiño & Kerikmäe, 2020: 64).

The number of refugees reaching European countries made a peak in 2015, especially following the German government's decision to apply an open door policy through allowing Syrian refugees to apply for asylum

no matter where they entered Europe without applying the common EU rules necessitating the recording of the refugees in their first entrance point (Popescu, 2016: 112). In addition to the humanitarian reasons, meeting the labour force need of its export-oriented economy also played a role in Germany's favourable attitudes towards the refugees. However, this decision of Germany caused a high level of unrest among the countries that were on the routes of the refugees trying to reach Germany (Orrenius & Zavodny, 2016: 2). When they faced with a high intensity of refugee flow, some EU Schengen member states (Germany, France, Hungary, Denmark, Sweden, Belgium, Slovakia, Austria and Malta) suspended the free movement of people temporarily. Besides, Belgium and Holland intensified the police patrols within their borders (Guild, Brouwer, Groenendijk & Carrera, 2015: 9). This shows that a great number of EU member states took steps to ensure the re-nationalization of their migration policies in the face of the refugee crisis (Hodge, 2016: 20). These protective measures brought about a fierce debate on the dissolution of the Schengen zone and directed the European Commission to invite the EU member states to terminate border controls to restore Schengen system. In this call, the European Commission also warned them about the potential economic losses they would be suffering in the absence of a well-functioning Schengen system (European Commission, 2016a).

Until the Maastricht Treaty of 1992, migration was addressed by the member states outside of the EU governance in a very informal way. With this treaty, radically reforming the EU governance, migration turned into a matter of common interest and a slow process including the formalization of the issue at the EU level and the transfer of authority from member states to the EU level initiated. With the last EU treaty known as the Lisbon Treaty, migration was determined as a shared competence area which was regulated by both member states and EU, in 2007 (Badell, 2021: 5). That is, the issue of migration is a subject which has been tackled at various governance levels in the European context. This subtitle focus on the supranational dimension of the migration management in Europe.

At the beginning of the refugee crisis, the EU institutions and member states had difficulty in bringing their efforts together to address the

common problem of irregular migration efficiently, despite the ongoing migration cooperation efforts since the 1980s. A great majority of the international and ethical obligations, as well as the principles of solidarity or shared responsibility are mostly ignored. The process of finding the best way to deal with the migrant crisis led to further divisions and disagreements among the EU member states (Popescu, 2016: 106). On the one hand, there were the EU member states which were willing to open their borders to the refugees; on the other hand, there were those which are trying to block the arrival of refugees to Europe (Mitrovic, 2015: 4). This created a difficulty to mobilize the mutual solidarity and cooperation principles to reach a fair burden-sharing within the EU.

The EU members located at the external borders of the EU such as Greece, Italy and Hungary were affected more and severely from the refugee crisis due to being the first entrance point of the refugees to the Schengen zone. According to the Dublin Regulations, which define the rules related to the processing of the asylum applications in the EU member states, the first EU member state an asylum seeker enters is responsible for registering the migrants and taking their asylum applications, as well as deporting them in case of a violation. These responsibilities caused a huge burden over the states lying at the external borders of the EU and these states had difficulty in performing their duties. The borderline states felt themselves alone in the absence of any political and financial support from the other member states (Popescu, 2016: 111). It should be noted that Dublin Regulations were adopted in the 1990s and revisited in the early 2000s when the EU was not under severe pressure of migration. Hence, it was an out-of-date system even before the rise of the refugee crisis (Popescu, 2016: 112). After keeping the effects of the first disagreements over refugees limited, the primary choice of the EU member states and institutions became to stop or control huge refugee flows through developing intra-EU measures. In this scope, the European Commission prepared a document called "A European Agenda on Migration" in late 2015 as a roadmap to deal with the refugee challenge. It invited member states to "to restore confidence in the ability to bring together European and national efforts to address migration, to meet our international and ethical obligations and to work together in an effective way, in accordance with the principles of

solidarity and shared responsibility" (European Commission, 2015a). By its nature, the Agenda was a political document defining the priorities in migration, asylum and borders policies for the years to come. It aimed to equip the EU with the tools serving to the effective management of the migration crisis, as well as it concentrated on the proper use of the existing EU tools in order to handle the migration in a better way (Porumbescu, 2019: 38). The document offered various solution alternatives regarding the irregular and legal migration, asylum and borders for the short and medium terms. These alternatives focused primarily on the issues of saving the lives, fighting against human smugglers, tackling the root causes, strengthening the EU's external borders and improving the cooperation with third parties (European Commission, 2015a). The weaknesses of the already-existing EU regulations regarding the irregular migration in coping with the huge refugee flows forced the EU countries to adopt emergency measures (European Commission, 2015a). The priority was given to the measures aiming to ease the conditions of the most affected member states at the external borders. The European Commission's offer to form a European border rapid reaction force, named European Border and Coast Guard, that can intervene, even against the will of the state, to strengthen the Frontex (European *Border and Coast Guard Agency*) was found to be a violation of national sovereignty by the member states defending external borders (Koroutchev, 2016: 33). Therefore, it was agreed to strengthen the long-neglected capacity of the Frontex (Carrera vd., 2015: 7). By the way, the Frontex provided border staff support to Italy and Greece to ensure the registration of the refugees properly (Carrera & Den Hertog, 2016: 8). Besides, a decision to relocate a moderate amount of migrants (160.000 people in need of protection) over a period of two years was taken (European Council, 2015). The relocation decision was a welcoming back from the Dublin Regulations, necessitating the protection of refugees in their entrance point until a final decision about their stay or deportation. The relocation numbers were defined according to some criteria such as the population size, total GDP, average number of asylum applications per one million habitants between 2010 and 2014, and unemployment rates (Carrera et. al., 2015: 13). Some member states, especially the ones in the group of new member states like Hungary and Poland, even refrained from

applying this decision by alleging the denial of their national interests and faced with the infringement procedure initiated by the European Commission (Csehi & Zgut, 2021: 61). The missing contribution of these member states also created doubts regarding the solidarity within the Union (Tranuer, 2020: 172). In addition, the EU provided equipment and medical supply to the EU member states via the EU Civil Protection Mechanism in case of a request (Popescu, 2016: 113, 115). When the issue of reallocation debated again in 2019, only four EU member states (Germany, France, Italy and Malta) signed a memorandum of understanding to redistribute the migrants rescued in the Mediterranean, rather than launching an extensive EU initiative (Deutsche Welle, 2019). The progress report of 2019 regarding the implementation performance of the Agenda on Migration verified the success of the joint actions aiming at creating a better protection system for the European frontiers, cooperation with partner countries in order to eliminate the deep causes of irregular migration, improving the protection of migrants and fighting smugglers and the total number of illegal border crossing along the main migration routes. Most importantly, the number of arrivals reached to the lowest levels of the last five years (150.000 people in 2018). However, the progress report also identified missing points and risks, such as keeping to act in solidarity, providing a better shelter and care who are under protection, reforming asylum system, in order to have a better guarantee for now and in the future (European Commission, 2019).

The intra-EU measures did not become enough by solely to produce the expected outcome of controlling irregular migration in the absence of intensive externalisation strategies. Apart from the mismatch of the tools at the Union's hand to the current situation, conflicting interests of the member states and fragmentation of the programmes operating at the member state levels also played a pivotal role in the emergence of this unwanted outcome (Gladysh & Sychov, 2020: 20). Intergovernmentalism prevailed and the attempts aiming to produce Europeanized solutions either failed or reflected the lowest common denominator among the EU member states, especially due to the high unwillingness of the member states making further power transfers to the Union level in the field of migration (Panebianco, 2020: 2,7; Roots, 2020: 42). In such a contextual

setting, Covid-19 pandemic has made the issue further complicated, because it adversely affected the EU member states' capacity to manage the presence of refugees and ensure their protection. The pandemic put the member states under a fierce pressure in using their scarce resources to limit the effects of this pandemic and to realise an economic recovery. On the one hand, there were refugees looking for their basic necessities and more protection, on the other hand there were native locals feeling resentment about their own well-being under fragile economic conditions (Kirisci, Erdogan & Eminoglu, 2020). Hence, all of these made the design of an EU solution mutually acceptable to all the member states harder and motivated the Union to seek for alternative solutions, mostly the ones focusing on the external dimension of the migration policy, to overcome the weaknesses of its own policies and institutions. European Commission proposed a new pact on migration and asylum on October 2020 and the EU's reliance on the externalisation efforts to deal with migratory pressures remained salient (Anatolian Agency, 2020).

Migration Cooperation with the Accession Countries

By using the instruments at its disposal, primarily the Schengen regime and Dublin regulations constituting the basis of the migration order in Europe, the EU was not able to respond effectively to the heightened refugee crisis in 2015 (Dagi, 2018: 10). This weakness motivated the EU member states to consider one of the European Commission recommendations in the "A European Agenda on Migration" that was the externalisation of the migration issue through developing cooperation with the third parties. Accordingly, the EU entered into closer cooperation on migration with the Western Balkan countries and Turkey. The EU had entered into similar kinds of migration cooperation regimes since the 1990s with the neighbouring countries located in the Eastern Europe, South Caucasus and Southern Mediterranean (i.e. Moldova, Georgia, Libya) to control irregular migration. Thanks to them, the Union benefited from the involvement of the non-EU countries in the migration management of the EU (Düvell & Vollmer, 2009: 7). Hence, in the early 2000s, the Union adopted the documents, such as EU Action Plan on Illegal Immigration (2002) and Global Approach to Migration (2005), which have formed the legal basis of the

EU's choice for controlling, containing and taming migration through externalisation (Hameršak et. al., 2020: 17).

What makes the accession countries one of the central point of externalisation efforts of the EU at this case was the arrival of a vast majority of 1.5 million refugees after making transit passages from the Western Balkan countries and Turkey (Hampshire, 2015: 9). The primary objective was to limit the access of irregular migrants to Europe by using these countries as a mobility corridor. By means of these cooperative relations, the EU ensured the creation of the buffer zones, which are lying beyond its external borders, against the migration flows in return for some economic and political concessions, including the commitments to assist them in the protection of the refugees. The EU conducts its relations with the accession countries on the basis of the association regimes, which also include the cooperation of the actors in the management of migration. Therefore, the cooperation efforts realised after the refugee crisis has been built upon an already-operating framework.

Migration Cooperation with Western Balkans

South-Eastern Europe was coined as the Western Balkans by the EU in the early 2000s. It consists of seven countries: Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Kosovo, North Macedonia, Montenegro and Serbia. Among them, Croatia achieved to be a member of the EU in 2013. During the Cold War years, Western Balkan states had become a source of guest workers for the growth-oriented economies in the Western Europe. A large number of people from the region migrated to the Western European countries for economic reasons. In addition, the migration from the Western Balkans to the Western Europe intensified after the emergence of a bloodshed with the dissolution of the Yugoslavia in the 1990s. Thousands of people moved to the Western Europe and asked for asylum in search for safety, as well as jobs (Milan, 2018: 1). The EU member states coped successfully with this migration flow. The situation was neither labelled as a crisis, nor led to the growing of right-wing tendencies inciting xenophobia (Collyer & Russell, 2016: 4).

After the end of the bloody conflicts among the Western Balkan countries, the key objective of the EU was to ensure the dominance of

stability within the region in the vicinity of Europe. The EU's approach towards the region changed dramatically in the late 1990s. The Union initiated the stabilisation and association process aiming to contribute to the peace and stability in the region in 1999, and more importantly, it started to provide an accession perspective to the Western Balkan countries after the 2000s (Miscevic & Mrak, 2017: 186). With the Thessaloniki, European Council and the EU-Balkans summit of June 2003, the accession process of the Western Balkans was formally launched (Feijen, 2008: 416). The political and economic implications of the violent clashes in the 1990s have been still going on and have had a great legacy in the bilateral relations of the regional countries. In such a contextual setting, the EU accession ideal has motivated the countries in the region to make reforms to strengthen their state capacity and normalize their relations with the neighbouring countries in order to ensure the dominance of the peace and cooperation in the Western Balkans.

Migration came to the agenda of the relations between the EU and Western Balkan countries before the eruption of the refugee crisis during the visa-facilitation negotiations to ensure the easier access of the citizens of these countries to the Schengen area. Accordingly, the EU concluded readmission agreements with all the countries in the region between 2006 and 2008 as a condition for the dominance of a facilitated visa regime. Readmission agreements set out apparently reciprocal obligations between the EU and a third country, in particular the detailed administrative and operational procedures to facilitate the return of irregularly staying migrants and thus implement return decisions adopted by Member States' authorities (Andrade et. al., 2015: 37). Apart from this, the migration issue has also become a part of the on-going enlargement processes through which the accession countries in the Western Balkans have become aligned with the EU migration policy.

Since Greece does not share a land border with any of the Schengen countries, the refugees reaching Greece tried mostly to enter the Schengen zone by passing through the Western Balkan countries' territories (Dragostinova, 2016: 7). The migration route which was called as Western Balkan route gained existence in this way. Apart from the strategic location

factor, the lower risks in comparison to the Mediterranean route, the short-ness of the distance, road and railway links between the countries in the region, the deficiencies related to border control capacities, low level of cooperation among the countries in the region, the existence of criminal smuggling networks have also become influential in the rise of the Balkan route (Tuntevski, Tosheva & Kechegi, 2020: 108-109).

The Western Balkan route of migration mainly includes the EU member states such as Croatia and Slovenia, as well as the accession coun-tries such as Serbia and North Macedonia. Other countries of the region were also affected and they have became transit routes. Therefore, it is misleading to approach the Western Balkan route as a single route (Pas-tore, 2018: 8). Montenegro, Albania, Kosovo, and Bosnia and Herzegovina were less affected by the refugee crisis because they were less preferred by the refugees in their routes to Europe. However, these countries stayed under the threat of refugee flows because of their vulnerability to a change in the migration route and the emergence of new migration routes passing from their territories (Šabić, 2017: 53).

After the turmoil of the 1990s, Western Balkan countries could not have finalised their economic and political transitions yet (Šabić, 2017: 53). Western Balkans have become a migration route for centuries, but none of the countries in the region has the capacity to cope with the current refugee crisis. Apart from political stability, economic underdevelopment and poor administrative structures also affected the migration manage-ment or border control capacity of the Western Balkans. They did not have enough reception centres, the administrative capacity to register refugees or financial sources to meet the basic needs of them. Hence, as a result of these multiple weaknesses, the refugee crisis turned into a big challenge for the region (Meç, 2016: 39-40) and the refugee crisis was added to the crowded problem lists of the Western Balkan countries.

At the beginning, the Western Balkan countries tried to limit the migration by way of the strengthened border controls. They even opted to adopt harsh measures such as the laws criminalizing the humanitarian assistances to the migrants or extensive border controls (Amnesty Inter-national, 2017). Despite their commitment to the EU membership process

and their obligation to act in line with the Copenhagen Criteria of the EU membership, the countries violated the human rights of the refugees extensively. As the countries of the region took measures to limit refugee flows, migration routes shifted in a way to follow the countries with easier border passages. Thus, the adoption of fortification measures by the Western Balkan countries had the potential of creating tensions among them. Once the refugees became aware of the strict border measures adopted by a country in the region, they opted to divert their routes to the closest neighbouring country providing an easier border passage. Therefore, the rising border controls turned into a fortification race. For example, Croatia-Serbia relations deteriorated in 2015 because of the refugee crisis, when Croatia accused Serbia to act in collaboration with Hungry by directing a high number of refugees to the Croatian border and severed border controls to this country for several days (Jureković, 2016).

The EU paid effort for the mobilization of a coordinated fortification strategy based on cooperation among the countries of the Western Balkan route (Cristiani, 2017: 8). It is because there were fears about the refugees' potential as a threat to the vulnerable peace and stability in the Western Balkans by creating new problems among the countries which have not yet fully reconciled after the dissolution of Yugoslavia (Šabić, 2017: 61). Despite the years of old investment to the regional peace, stability and cooperation in the Western Balkans, the refugee crisis proved that the region was still vulnerable to the crisis (Šabić, 2017: 61). The great majority of this investment was made by the EU with the accession perspective given to the region. Hence, during the refugee crisis, the EU also felt the pressure of losing its achievements in the region. Therefore, after the inefficiency of the national actions to stop migration was observed, the EU mediated among the Western Balkan countries to promote their collective and coordinated action against the migration. In this scope, the leaders of Albania, Austria, Bulgaria, Croatia, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Romania, Serbia and Slovenia (eight EU member states and three states with the EU accession perspective) came together in Brussels for an extraordinary meeting on 25 October 2015 with the initiatives of the European Commission to address the emergency sit-

uation unfolding along the Western Balkan route. The participants were defined by Jean Claude Juncker, ex-president of the Commission, as the countries which were affected most. The meeting was framed within the general framework of the Berlin Process which initiated in 2014 and based on a five-year plan designed to show the EU's strong commitment to the Western Balkans enlargement (Turrión, 2020: 93).

The participant countries agreed upon a 17-point plan of action, which was backed by generous financial support provided by the international and regional financial institutions and including the pragmatic and operational measures to tackle the refugee crisis in the region. The measures were grouped under the following general headings (European Commission, 2015c):

1. Permanent exchange of information,
2. Limiting secondary movements,
3. Supporting refugees and providing shelter and rest,
4. Managing the migration flows together,
5. Border management,
6. Tackling smuggling and trafficking,
7. Information on the rights and obligations of refugees and migrants,
8. Monitoring.

The agreed plan was announced as a road map aiming to avoid a humanitarian crisis. The aim of the plan was reflected as protecting refugees and their rights. After this action plan, Western Balkan countries closed and fenced their borders gradually in cooperation with the neighbouring EU member states by considering the routes followed by the migrants. With the steps taken to block migration through the Western Balkan route, the migration potential of this route has slowed down, but it is still present. Besides, the illegalization of the migration on this route increased with the rise of human smuggling activities. However, it becomes more expensive and riskier for the refugees to reach Europe by following this route (Domachowska, 2019: 61; Orrenius & Zavodny, 2016: 19). To guarantee proper implementation of the action plan, Western Balkan countries also signed status agreements with the Frontex in 2019 to cooperate on irregular migration with the deployment of Frontex officers in these countries for joint

operations. Frontex forces were given the right to act both at the border and in countries' interior. They have a right to intercept and control persons and vehicles in situations where there is suspicion of irregular migration (Savkovic, 2019).

The action plan was heavily attacked by some EU member states, especially by the Visegrad Group, namely Hungary, Poland, Slovakia and the Czech Republic, and was not implemented properly by Greece despite its involvement to its negotiation process. The plan was seen as an attempt of some EU member states to select migrants on the border between Greece and the North Macedonia (Kekenovski, 2016: 13-14). Furthermore, the plan was also found contradictory with the EU's ideal of achieving stabilisation in the Western Balkans through enlargement policy. That is, it was labelled as a short-sighted calculation undermining the EU's enlargement policy. The measures taken under the plan to solve the refugee crisis were defined as the additional burdens over the Western Balkan countries which have been already dealing with severe management problems. The duties of registering refugees and providing proper reception have been found problematic due to their potential of leading to new disputes between the countries of the region having difficulty in establishing good neighbourly relations (Liperi, 2019: 4).

The emergence of Turkey as a buffer state after the EU-Turkey migration deal signed on March 2016 and the rising controls actively preventing the refugees from leaving Turkey enabled the further fortification of the Western Balkans (Christiani, 2017: 5). Turkey-EU deal hardened the reach of refugees to Greece. Since the refugees could not enter into Greece, the use of the Western Balkan route by the refugees to reach their final destinations in Europe declined. Briefly, the closure of the Western Balkan route operated concomitantly with the Turkish deal and caused a sharp decline in the numbers of refugees reaching Europe in 2016 (Haferlach & Kurban, 2017: 90). Therefore, the future success of the migration cooperation established with the Western Balkans is very much linked with the migration cooperation of the EU with Turkey.

Migration Cooperation with Turkey

Turkey has been related to the EU since the late 1950s. The relation gained an official dimension with the signature of the Ankara Agreement in 1963 and took the form of an association regime. With the membership application of Turkey in 1987, the accession dimension was added to this relation. The economic relations between the parties deepened gradually and reached to the level of customs union in 1996. Turkey was declared a candidate for the EU membership in 1999 and it has been conducting accession negotiations with the EU since 2005 for the membership. Thanks to this long and rooted relation, Turkey and the EU have been cooperating extensively in variety of sectors (Kakışım & Erdoğan; 2018: 403-408).

After the turning of the tension in Syria into a humanitarian disaster, Turkey opted to pursue an open door policy towards the Syrians forced to flee their homes. This made it the top-refugee hosting country in the world. Turkey's choice for the open door policy created a refugee pressure over the EU automatically. Hence, in addition to be a host country for the refugees, Turkey also become a transit country at the same time. That is, the country has been providing shelter to the millions of irregular migrants on the one hand; on the other hand, it has been used as a transit country by the refugees on their way to Europe (Akın & Akın, 2017: 142). The great majority of the Syrians in Turkey were aiming to reach an EU member state by staying in the country temporarily during their transit passages. This led to tensions between Turkey and its European counterparts. Turkey was criticized extensively on the ground of its inability to manage its borders effectively (Eralp, 2016: 21). At the beginning of the refugee crisis, Turkey was extensively blamed due to its role in the emergence of the refugee crisis of the EU. Then, the EU started to approach Turkey as a key partner in controlling the refugee flows.

The cooperation between the EU and Western Balkan countries did not become sufficient to stop the use of the Western Balkan route by the refugees (Pastore, 2018: 10). There was an urgent need for cooperating with Turkey to stop the irregular movements of the refugees to the European countries, especially to Greece. Therefore, the EU wanted to con-

clude an action plan with Turkey to guarantee the country's effort to limit the number of irregular entrants (Carrera vd., 2015: 8-9). The negotiations started in May 2015 and the initial outcome was a joint action plan signed on 29 November 2015 as an immediate action to the urgency of the matter. The action plan was depicted as a coordinated response to the common challenge based on the spirit of burden-sharing. The parties started to co-operate immediately in handling of the refugee crisis by acting in line with their agreed commitments.

In the scope of this action plan, the EU intended to provide additional funds to Turkey to be used for the needs of the Syrian under temporary protection, to speed up the accession process of Turkey to the EU by opening new negotiation chapters, and to take measures to fasten visa-liberation dialogue[1] with Turkey. In return for these rewards, Turkey accepted to form a stronger migration management system viable to register Syrian refugees via legal and administrative changes, to improve its capacity to combat with human smuggling activities especially by raising its border controls, to stay in regular contact with the EU partners and to exchange information, to improve the conditions of the temporary settlement centres for the Syrians (European Commission, 2015b).

After this joint action plan, Turkey opened its labour market to the Syrians under temporary protection, introduced new visa requirements for the Syrians and other nationalities, stepped up security efforts by the Turkish coast guard and police and enhanced information sharing. In recognition of the measures taken by Turkey, the EU has begun to disburse 3 billion Euro of the Facility for Refugees in Turkey for concrete projects and to work for the advancement in the visa liberalisation process and to ensure the progress of the country in the accession talks, including the opening of Chapter 27 Economy and Monetary Policies on December, 2015 (European Council, 2016a).

The parties continued their efforts to negotiate further to settle down remaining issues of contention and to reach a deeper level of cooperation

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1 Turkey is the only accession country whose citizens are obligied to take visa before entering the EU member states. The EU even granted the visa-free travel to the some Eastern Partnership countries like Georgia and Ukraine.

on migration. The positive results of the action plan in mitigating the refugee pressure over Europe made the EU more eager about reaching a final deal with Turkey (European Council, 2016b). The urgency of the situation forced the EU to deepen its cooperation with Turkey by providing some more generous rewards to Turkey in return for granting the country's enhanced commitment to block the refugee flows. Turkey used the intensifying EU demand for cooperation in the field of migration as a window of opportunity to reach its long-standing demands from the EU side. The EU's urgency to conclude a final agreement made it ready to give more concessions and the negotiation phase of the deal became shorter (Okyay & Cristiani, 2016: 52). Accordingly, the parties reached a final agreement on 18 March 2016 by declaring it in the name of the EU-Turkey Statement. The objective of the statement was threefold and stated as ending irregular migration flows from Turkey to the EU, improving reception conditions for refugees in Turkey and creating safe and legal channels to Europe for Syrian refugees. By the way, the details of the cooperation between Turkey and the EU to stop irregular migration via Turkey to Europe were formally determined as follows (European Council, 2016a):

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

2. For every Syrian being returned to Turkey from Greek islands, another Syrian will be resettled from Turkey to the EU by taking into account the UN Vulnerability Criteria.

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

4. Once irregular crossings between Turkey and the EU are ending or at least have been substantially and sustainably reduced, a Voluntary Humanitarian Admission Scheme will be activated.

5. The fulfilment of the visa liberalisation roadmap will be accelerated vis-à-vis all participating member states to lift the visa requirements for Turkish citizens at the latest by the end of June 2016, provided that all benchmarks have been met.

6. The EU will provide in total 6 billion Euro financial assistance under the Facility for Refugees in Turkey to be used in financing of the projects, notably in the field of health, education, infrastructure, food and other living costs, for the persons under temporary protection.

7. The EU and Turkey welcomed the ongoing work on the upgrading of the customs union[2].

8. The EU and Turkey reconfirmed their commitment to re-energise the accession process.

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

Germany played a pivotal role in the emergence of the Turkey-EU deal on migration by using its bilateral relations with Turkey (Okyay & Cristiani, 2016: 55). Various factors motivated Germany to play the leading role in the Turkey-EU refugee statement. There were reasons based on the domestic considerations, as well as the EU-related issues. Firstly, the country was the primary destination for the majority of the refugees reaching Europe and this caused a great burden over it. Secondly, the country was always for a common European solution without causing an existential crisis for the EU. Lastly, the country had doubts regarding the xenophobic and Islamophobic feelings within Europe making extreme right political tendencies stronger across Europe. On the other hand, there were several factors which were pushing Turkey to enter a deal on migration with Europe. Firstly, the country wanted to improve its relations with the West in order to escape from the feeling of high isolation in its unstable neighbourhood. Secondly, Turkey saw the re-energised accession process as an asset to stop its economic downturn. Thirdly, it wanted to reach the long waited ideal of visa-free travel to Europe. Lastly, Turkey intended to share the high financial cost of hosting millions of refugees with the EU by getting some additional funds (Eralp, 2016: 21-22).

There were severe problems in the EU-Turkey relations before the

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2   Turkey-EU custom union relations has been operational since 1996.

conclusion of the refugee statement. However, the EU opted to prioritize its strategic interest in its cooperation on migration with Turkey. The values such as rule of law or human rights and the famous conditionality principle of the accession process stayed in the background. Turkey was rewarded in exchange for its help to the EU in externalizing the refugee problem, rather than its performance in meeting the EU's accession criteria. The previous criticisms and doubts about the democracy and rule of law in Turkey were ignored due to some calculations prioritizing the urgent EU strategic interests (Saatçioğlu, 2019: 10). Therefore, the statement also created a sense of bitterness at the EU side. Besides, the status of Turkey as a safe third country capable of protecting refugees and the implications of this cooperation in terms of the rights and effective protection of the refugees were also questioned (Fisseha, 2017: 48). Hence, the EU's image of a normative power with a high level of concern for human rights issues and humanitarian crisis took a huge blow from this cooperation (Okyay & Cristiani, 2016: 54).

The statement also caused severe unrest at the Turkish side. It was seen as an open indicator of the fact that the EU has tendency to approach Turkey as a strategic neighbour or a buffer zone rather than an accession country. Besides, after such an agreement based on bilateral interest calculations, it has become harder for Turkey to promote itself as a symbol of humanitarianism prioritizing the well-being of the refugees (Keyman, 2016: 91). Instead, Turkey has turned into an actor making negotiations over the refugees to get some fiscal and political gains (Bilgiç & Pace, 2017: 4).

The implementation of the statement has been influenced by the rising tensions in the relations between EU and Turkey and the unfulfilled commitments of the parties to the conditions of the cooperation have brought about some additional elements of tension. The unfulfilled promise of the visa-free travel due to Turkey's refusal to make a change in its anti-terrorism law, the EU's attitude towards the failed coup attempt in Turkey of 15 July 2016, Turkey's transition to a presidential model in 2017 after a referendum and the inactivity of the EU member states and institutions towards the assaults of the Syrian regime targeting Turkey in

2020 can be defined as the major developments posing an existential threat to the EU-Turkey cooperation on migration (Cristiani, 2017: 11). During these tension moments, the parties of the deal warned and even threatened each other several times to comply with the conditions of the statement. Accordingly, Turkey warned the EU several times about stopping the implementation of the statement by opening all borders and sending millions of refugees to the European countries. In return, the EU threatened Turkey with freezing of the financial transfers or the accession talks temporarily (Aybars, Copeland & Tsahouras, 2019: 791).

Despite all the challenges, the EU-Turkey cooperation on migration has been sustained until now and delivered the expected results. Thanks to the measures taken within the scope of this cooperation, there have been dramatic falls in the number of irregular entries, losses of lives during irregular passages and human smuggling activities. However, as long as Turkey's unrest about the contemporary burden and responsibility-sharing with the EU continues, it is probable that Turkey will not refrain from taking actions aiming to remind its importance in the achievement of the EU's security in the face of the refugee crisis (Uras, 2020).

Conclusion

After the dominance of crisis in the neighbouring geographies, especially in the Middle East, millions of people flee their home countries and took refuge in the neighbouring safe countries, including European ones. When the number of refugees reaching Europe made a historical peak in 2015, a high number of refugees who moved Turkey to survive at the initial stage found a way of reaching one of the EU member states legally or illegally mostly by using the Western Balkan route. As a result, the flows of refugees turned into the most urgent matter in the agenda of the EU member states and institutions. After the ineffectiveness of the individual national responses to deal with the crisis, the EU member states tried to design a common solution based on solidarity and fair burden-sharing principles. Yet, none of the measures taken intra- EU measures did not produce the expected outcome and the EU member states could not overcome their disagreements relying mostly upon the national interest calculations.

In such a contextual setting, the EU decided to rely on a tested and proven strategy and intensified its externalisation efforts, especially after the adoption of the Agenda on Migration document providing a new approach to manage migration by combining the intra-EU measures with the externalisation strategies. Accordingly, the EU also took initiatives to enhance the migration cooperation with the countries of accession in the Western Balkans and Turkey through various legal tools such as readmission agreements and financial aid. The first chain of this cooperation was the joint action plan concluded with the Western Balkan countries in 2015 and then, the joint statement declared with Turkey in 2016 complemented this action plan. Thanks to this externalization effort, the EU tried to limit the number of refugees reaching Europe by ensuring the access of some limited and legitimate asylum seekers to the EU member states and realised this objective to a great extent with the operation of this dual cooperation system.

After the construction of refugee crisis narratives and extensive securitisation of migration basing upon the misinformation, untruths and fake news, the issue of limiting migrants' entry turned into an urgency. This weakened the EU's conventional asymmetrical power over the accession countries and curbed its bargaining power significantly. Hence, the EU became more willing to give high concessions to the Western Balkan countries and Turkey in return for guaranteeing their support. As it was elaborated in the article, in comparison to the Western Balkan countries, Turkey accepted to carry a higher burden of refugees, and thus, concluded a more favourable cooperation deal with the EU. After its enhanced cooperation with the Western Balkans and Turkey on migration, the EU formed buffer zones beyond its external border stopping the reach of the unwanted migrants to Europe.

As long as the crisis-prone nature of the EU's neighbourhood remained intact, the migration will continue to be a high-priority agenda item for the Union. Therefore, the EU has to pay effort to revise its migration, asylum and refugee policies in order to gain a higher capacity to deal with upcoming crises. Furthermore, the refugee crisis has already shown the importance of the Western Balkans and Turkey for the security of the EU.

After this crisis, the Union has become aware of the fact that there is a pressing need for making the Western Balkan countries and Turkey stronger for the future catastrophes having the potential of creating insecurity within Europe. Apart from approaching to the Western Balkans and Turkey to solve its current problem of refugees, the EU is obliged to go beyond of its saving the day tendency through developing a grand strategy aiming to form closer and stronger links with the accession countries by energising the enlargement processes and enhancing the credibility of its enlargement conditionality. Otherwise, the Union's conventional policy of exporting its way of doing to the accession countries will not function properly. Accession countries will sooner or later notice that the EU has been paying a significantly limited effort to ensure their full preparation to the membership. This will adversely affect the Union's capacity to deal with the common security threats in the shared neighbourhood. In this vein, the EU should escape from its opportunist tendency to deepen some selected aspects of the ties, such as migration cooperation, with the accession countries in times of urgency. Otherwise, none of the cooperation efforts would be sustainable and the EU would come face to face with the risk of losing its leverage over the accession countries, especially due to the unfulfilled promises.

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