

**On a Pathway to a Global Society? The Role of States in Times of Global Migration – Implications for Bulgaria’s Handling of Syrian Refugees (2013-2014)\***

**Boryana Aleksandrova<sup>†</sup>**

**Abstract:** *The article puts into focus the concept and practice of the global society today. Striving to measure both the hindrances and potentials for its fully-fledged development a critical perspective on the term is being assumed. For this purpose, the construction of local role boundaries with regards to immigrants is being discussed against the background of Bulgaria’s immigration/border policy in the context of the EU membership of the country. How could a “Bulgarian” case study contribute to our understanding of the social role played by states in times of global migration? How does it illuminate the current status of the global society or the very value of this theoretical concept?*

**Keywords:** Migration, Globalization, Fortress Europe, Bulgaria, International Relations

---

\* The author extends her gratitude to Ms. Desislava Stoeva for her support in editing the English language of this article.

<sup>†</sup> Boryana Aleksandrova Senior assistant-professor, Department of International Law and International Relations Sofia University “St. Kliment Ohridski” borjana\_alexandrova@hotmail.com Neofit-Rilski-Str. 19, App. 2 1000 Sofia, BULGARIA +359 878 409 663

## Introduction

The arrival of thousands of Syrian refugees in Bulgaria in the summer of 2013 found the authorities in the country politically, organizationally, and technically unprepared for dealing with the massive influx of people in need. Instead, a compensatory rhetoric of “taking all necessary measures against any threat for the national security” and “staying in control of the future external Schengen frontiers” was put to use. Concurrently, a broad-based humanitarian donation campaign was initiated among some parts of the population while at the same time deep suspicion and/or open hostility concerning the construction of refugee camps in the vicinity of small and medium-sized towns were shown among others. In the autumn of 2013, a series of direct xenophobic attacks on asylum-seekers were perpetrated. Indeed, it was the first time since joining the European Union in 2007 that the issue of asylum, in particular, and that of immigration in general, were widely raised in the country.

Even so, it was not that the topics of “borders” and “movement of people” had been entirely absent from the public attention during the preceding two years of disastrous war in Syria. In fact, they were mainly articulated within the context of Bulgaria striving to become a full member of the Schengen zone – originally targeted for March 2011. A clear-cut tendency of arbitrary strengthening of the border rules in connection to select ranks of non-EU citizens, on the one hand, and their loosening vis-à-vis citizens of EU member states, on the other, turned out to be the result of this mobilization. A system of transnational classification and segmentation of human life based on the adoption and application of the European border guidelines has been put into place in the country.

Accordingly, the official and unofficial reactions on the occasion of Syrian refugees in Bulgaria are to be discussed in a much more extensive paradigm than a pure humanitarian one. The current article takes the view that they are to be re-constructed against the backdrop of the concept and practice of the emerging “global society”. It is within this pattern of analysis that the interactions between governmental and non-governmental elements on the contemporary international scene are to be detected at large. In the case of immigration, this theoretical perspective allows us to critically investigate fractures in the global social world beyond the traditional interstate competition. Simultaneously, the term enables us to experiment with the potential possibilities for genuine emancipation and integration of the excluded.

In this sense, the Bulgarian and European immigration/border policy respectively is understood to mirror the uneven consequences of the globalization for the human existence and self-fulfillment. Although the favoured official and partly unofficial rhetoric during the coming of Syrian refugees in Bulgaria almost instinctively followed strict defensive “national lines”, it should be perceived as a deep-rooted reflection of the tensions which go along with the efforts of the Bulgarian or, for that matter, European states to mould the social, economic, cultural, and political composition of their national communities in an evolving, asymmetrical global society.

The elaboration on the proposed subject matter can, in turn, serve as a testing ground for the consistency of the concept of the “global society” itself. How does a “Bulgarian” case study illuminate the present status of the global society or the very value of this theoretical concept? How could its depiction contribute to our understanding of the social role played by the states in times of globality, in general, and intensification of global migration in particular?

Instructive for the epistemological layout of the article will be the critical debate within the discipline of IR complemented by sociological, political-scientific and historical perspectives. Moreover, the text presumes that further interdisciplinary research on the topic is needed in order to deepen its critical inquiry.

## **The global society paradigm**

### ***General conceptual contours today***

30 | The concept of the “global/world society” has long been occupying the theorists of the globalization.<sup>1</sup> For the purposes of this exposé, it will be understood as a transformative phase in the interconnectedness of human society predestined by the process of globalization in the last 30 to 40 years. This kind of framing presupposes three foundational assumptions. Historically speaking, today it is possible to discern social networks relevant for all human beings. The comprehensiveness of their character, on the other side, has reaffirmed the attitude that it is necessary to speak about “world society” at least in the most general theoretical and practical sense of the word – as an encompassing global aggregation of social intercourses and influences alike without explicitly predetermining each one of them<sup>2</sup>. Third, more and more alternative sources of cultural hegemony, beyond the nation-state and/or with the participation of the human factor, have been provided or eked out throughout the inter- and transnationalization of life, the movement of peoples across porous state borders, and the rise of global media.<sup>3</sup>

Still, the definition of the global society is in its rudiments. The difficulties in this regard lie in the lack of consensus on how a society is to be specified sociologically, as well as how this specification is to be transposed to the level of globality. In the first instance, as Etzioni<sup>4</sup> summarizes it, we are confronted with at least several directions of thought. According to one stance, what we are essentially witnessing are individuals and their transactions and contracts, whereas the very concept of society should be considered a fiction. From another standpoint, societies are arenas in which classes clash, and the term itself, therefore, seeks to falsely impose unity where none exists nor should exist. A third perspective considers the concept of society as fruitfully reflecting a pattern of distribution of power (among elites and followers) and assets. There are also those who add the sharing of a consensus on core values presuming that a stable society must be ensconced in a state. Finally, various eclectic steps are being taken trying to combine some of these aspects.<sup>5</sup>

In reference to the application of the term to the world affairs a differentiation should be made between the proponents of the idea of the „international society”, in terms of the unfolding of the institutions and the institutional culture of the state system stimulated by common understandings, values, and synchronized activities<sup>6</sup>, and that of the „world/global society” as logically and morally prior to international society. The notion of the „world/global society” stresses the importance of the global processes of economic expansion, cultural diffusion, and convergence within the state system as the backbone of the (universalistic) human society. The term does not necessarily require consensus around coherent value systems.<sup>7</sup>

As far as the practical realization of the global society is concerned, further empirical research is needed. However, there is a strong scientific belief that an authentic human integration has been seriously hampered due to disparate globalization and fragmentation. For the moment, it is a society beset by complex divisions – of income, wealth and class; of knowledge and power; of gender and lifestyle; of instrumentalization of cultural, national, racial, and ethnical differences.<sup>8</sup> Even more so with regards to the phenomenon of migration, given the fact how constitutive the movements of peoples back and forth across borders have become<sup>9</sup>.

### **The mobility imperative**

Unlike the traditional national societies the fabric and the power infrastructure of the global capitalistic society nowadays are deeply characterized by the imperative of mobility – both in its normative/productive (inclusive) and its repressive (exclusive) dimensions<sup>10</sup> (Bigo 2006, 42). The discourses on free movement, the most important among them the four freedoms of circulation (of the EU) concerning goods, capital, information, services, and persons, are centra.<sup>11</sup> They

normalize the majority and allow for disqualifying a minority. The imperative of mobility, thus, incarnates a necessity to construct a society beyond its national status, posing the problem of how its identity is mapped out and how the convergence of uneases circulate around the figure of the poor extracommunitarian migrant<sup>12</sup>.

It is on the track of mobility that the issue of society, predicated upon means-end rational or value-rational motivated bond of interests (*Gesellschaft*), vs. that of community, resting on affectual bindings, like solidarity (*Gemeinschaft*) (Albert et al. 1996, 14-15), particularly enters the realm of the transnational. This is how the abundance of actors in the world society and their cross-border movements provoke collision of interests and weaken meaning conventions in the framework of the interstate system. As a result, a new dynamic has been invoked on the basis of thriving inconsistencies and conflicts within the world culture (see below).

In the words of Bauman, mobility climbs to the rank of the uppermost among the coveted values in global capitalism – and the freedom to move, perpetually a scarce and unequally distributed commodity, fast becomes the main stratifying factor of our times.<sup>13</sup> In this regard, the exclusion in the world of mobility should be vastly deemed multidimensional, spatial, and always relational, not only referring to material mismatches. It substantially takes place on the ground of locally or regionally designed extra conditions in disparate functional spheres<sup>14</sup>. In the case of excluding migrating persons, the talk is about frustrating the possible cross-linking of an individual path of life with the plurality of local or regional functional contexts<sup>15</sup>.

Analogously, the performance of global governance today, and its critique correspondingly are more or less directed towards the manifestations of mobility – frontiers, people, capital. Pursuant to that, the question of governance outstrips the state's territorial form and its traditional political devices and capacities to produce decisions<sup>16</sup>. This means that domination is not less powerful, rather that it now takes on new forms: the transnationalization of bureaucracies of inspection shifts in systems of accountability between businesses and politicians regarding the definition of work and the forms of its redistribution; new transnational lifestyles; new professional cultures of surveillance.<sup>17</sup> Under these circumstances, the domain of "national sovereignty" shifts towards a domain of "autonomy" of transnationally acting entities and individuals. Any notion of emancipation should, therefore, involve the prospects for realising higher levels of human freedom and human justice across the world society as a whole.<sup>18</sup>

### **The positioning of the states in times of migration**

Despite the predicaments in substantiating the conception of the global society (of mobility) a special attention should be paid to the positioning of the states and their associations within its setting. States still occupy a significant portion of the power configurations of the international order. As such, they ambivalently succumb to and/or bestow a considerable part of the content and organization of the modern world cultural hegemonies. In this capacity, they tend to display a great deal of isomorphism in at least four ways: in their policies; in their structuration in a largely standardized manner, including legitimizing the actorhood of such subnational units as individuals and organized interests; in their allegiance to rational conduct; in their exhibition of diremption between (liberal democratic) intentions and outcomes.<sup>19</sup> Even world organizations and professionalized ideologies actively encourage countries to adopt population control policies that are justified not as good for the world as a whole but as necessary for national development.<sup>20</sup> Furthermore, world-cultural rules certify the nation-state as an identity-donating national institution. Thus, the legally sanctioned citizen equality corresponds to a great extent to the guiding nation-state principle of cultural homogeneity (language history, cultural traditions).<sup>21</sup> States also compete among each other and with other actors, such as individuals, NGOs, international organizations, social movements etc., in the establishment of world cultural norms nominally underpinned by rationalized universalistic principles of justice, progress, responsible

actorhood, and adequate representation on the field of economy, politics, culture, and social practices.

Nonetheless, under the specific conditions of globalizing capitalism, labour, environmental and low-intensity conflict-driven migration flows have stepped up and posed new challenges in front of the Westphalian status quo of the world power and cultural order.<sup>22</sup> The classical view of national borders as political artifacts circumventing territory, sovereignty, and cultural autonomy has been shaken and started transforming, so that any hermetic analytical and factual separation between domestic and world politics, between national and global society, looked more and more arbitrary. States which ambiguously balance between bolstering certain aspects of the capitalist globalization, like financial, production, and labour competitiveness, and restrictively averting others, like social justice and demographic plurality, have faced a couple of dilemmas.

Naturally, accelerated global migration far overstrains the innate instruments of the states to influence the collective economic, political or cultural life of their communities. Hence, the amplified ambition of many governments in the last decades to practice governance more through selective exclusion of given „undesirable” categories of people and less through responsiveness to a dynamic, diverse, but discriminative global environment and re-orientation of the normative implications of the (democratic) citizenship towards an egalitarian cosmopolitan world society. In this framework, mechanisms of exclusion are being deployed at a cross-border level — a tendency reconstructed by Karolina Follis as “re-bordering” of the state supervision apparatus<sup>23</sup>. Governments strengthen their collaboration in more or less globalized, Westernized or Europeanized spaces, both physical and virtual.<sup>24</sup> Such transnational policing is conducted by (in)security professionals on the basis of biometric technologies, extraction of information, and coercion acting against societal and state vulnerabilities. It very much disconnects security from human, legal, and social protection of individuals.<sup>25</sup> Exclusion is further directed towards the management of life of both the “normalized mobile majority” and the potentially unsuitable “others” resulting, first and foremost, in legal and physical ostracizing of the poorest foreigners. Last but not least, it is considered to be a rational, pro-active choice towards managing groups of people in advance analyzing their future potential behavior (profiling).<sup>26</sup> On this background, it remains important to ask for how long states and their supranational formations respectively will have exit-options from the global society, both its societal (Gesellschaft) and communitarian (Gemeinschaft) varieties, at their disposal.<sup>27</sup>

## **European projections on the Bulgarian border and immigration regime**

### ***Geopolitical implications***

After decades of occupying the position of an outpost of the Soviet Union, Bulgaria has gradually approached a situation of assuming a new “border identity” in the process of accessing the EU. A complex interplay between elements of regionalization and re-nationalization of its border and immigration regime has started influencing its behavior in a globalizing social world. Taking into account the size of the programmatic and operational documentation on the matter as well as the predominant official discourse on the topic the prevalence of the “European” perspective is to be distinguished.

The “National Strategy in the Area of Migration, Asylum, and Integration (2011-2020)” declares migration to be a worldwide phenomenon that needs to be governed by “effective” mechanisms. Nominally, three guiding principles appear to be of special importance for the Bulgarian authorities handling European immigration: the demographic and economic trends on the continent; the security of the European borders; the human rights standards of the EU.<sup>28</sup> In fact, the preponderance of (neoliberal) economic and a priori defensive arguments over universalistic or, for that matter, “European” legal approaches in the National Strategy and other similar documents needs to be underscored. In 2009 the Bulgarian Parliament took a decision for

the issuance of a five-year residence permit for non-EU nationals in exchange for a deposit of 1 million BGN (approx. 500,000 euros) in a Bulgarian bank. Besides, a preferential clause for the attraction of persons of Bulgarian origin living abroad or emigrated Bulgarian citizens as a resource for achieving the above social and economic goals complements the utilitarian immigration formula in the National Strategy for Migration on its nationalist side.

Such kind of programmatic distinction between “desirable” and “undesirable” immigration has its legal, although questionable, and discursive implications as well. On the whole, several categories of “legal” and “illegal” immigrants, among them the “refugee”, the “highly qualified migrant” or the “illegally residing person”, are subjectively introduced in the National Strategy. In the end, the complex and ambiguous realities of human mobility in a global era make persecution, victimhood, suffering, and voluntary versus forced departure relative and contested matters.<sup>29</sup> Likewise – the unfounded discursive equation of migration with “risk” (alarm/threat) for the collective European security, and of the common immigration measures of the EU with a “guarantee for stability”.<sup>30</sup>

The highest priority among all political, social or legal measures bears the European/Bulgarian policy of “effective” and “long-lasting” return. The National Strategy for Migration, the “Multi-Year National Program for the Use of the European Return Fund (2008-2013)”<sup>31</sup> or the “Strategic Program for the Integrated Management of the Return (2011-2013)”<sup>32</sup> enumerate a detailed list of activities to be organized in that direction. The “National Strategy for the Integration of Refugees (2011-2013)”<sup>33</sup>, on its hand, is characterized by general and scarce wording. The coming of Syrian refugees in the summer and autumn of 2013 caught the local authorities by surprise in this regard too.

A decisive impetus for the sophistication of the restrictive European/Bulgarian immigration pragmatism gives the Dublin system. According to one of its two regulatory pillars, the Dublin II, meanwhile Dublin III, regulation, an asylum-seeker is allowed to apply for an international protection only in the country of his/her first entry into the EU which usually happens to be one of the periphery European countries like Bulgaria. The Eurodac regulation supplements the Dublin system in that it creates a Europe-wide database with fingerprints of asylum-seekers and eases their exchange among the member states. The perpetualization of border and life control across frontiers and time zones in Europe underpins also the contents of the Schengen agreement, a mandatory piece of the European legislation, which Bulgarian governments have been trying to join since the spring of 2011. The Schengen area is conceived of as a secure space around the European Common Market surrounded by “impermissible” external borders. In 2004, a common European Agency for the regulation (prevention) of the movement of people towards the EU, called FRONTEX, was set up. The EU has also been undertaking measures to bind its immediate and far neighbors with readmission agreements facilitating the deportation of “illegal migrants” back into non-EU states that have signed these treaties.

Consequently, already in the beginning of 2011 the number of visa denials for persons from countries of “an intensified immigration risk”, such as Algeria, Afghanistan, Iraq, and Syria, rose. According to the National Strategy for Migration an increase of 30 to 40% was to be observed at that moment.<sup>34</sup> Pursuant to the databases of the National Institute for Statistics, the Bulgarian population has kept its emigration rate very high all the years during the EU membership of the country.<sup>35</sup>

### **Practical developments**

The arrangements for meeting the Schengen requirements have led to the renovation or the building of new detention and reception facilities financed by European means. In addition to the detention center in Busmantzi, a suburb of the capital Sofia, which has a capacity for 400 people and was opened a year before Bulgaria became a EU member, a new detention center for 350 people was inaugurated in Lyubimetz, close to the Bulgarian-Turkish border, in the summer of

2011. The local practice shows that immigrants who have “illegally crossed” the EU borders have been sent to these closed institutions for many months against international legal standards on numerous occasions.<sup>36</sup> The daily routine in the two detention facilities is being managed by the Ministry of Interior.

The reception centers, for their part, operate on a semi-open regime where residents are permitted to leave the site during the day and are under the control of the State Agency for Refugees (SAF) – a civil ministerial body. Even there, the access to medical, psychological, and recreational care or legal advice has regularly been qualified by human rights organizations as deficient.<sup>37</sup> Despite their open-door policy all of the reception sites are situated on the outskirts of the respective places of residence which has made them “invisible” for the local residents and has impeded the mutual contacts. Interestingly, before the arrival of the Syrian refugees the accommodation places of the three reception centers in the country almost corresponded to the capacity of the closed facilities: the one in Sofia – 500; the one in the village of Banya, Eastern Bulgaria – 80; the so called transition center in Pastrogor, in the vicinity of the Bulgarian-Turkish border – 350. Both the existing detention facilities and the reception centers have become overcrowded since the autumn of 2013.

Parallel to these developments, the border control and militarization measures were boosted and their synchronization with European services expanded. Driven by the expectation of turning into an external frontier of the EU, special attention was paid to the Bulgarian-Turkish border. These steps resulted in the increasing of the border staff, more surveillance towers, acquiring new sophisticated military technologies, such as thermovisual equipment, night vision devices, gas analyzer for the detection of hidden persons, off-the-road vehicles, three new helicopters purchased for 30 million euros etc.<sup>38</sup> Altogether, the Bulgarian governments have spent 160 million euros for the accession of the country to the Schengen agreement. Bulgarian policemen are also taking part in the FRONTEX mission “Poseidon” along the Greek-Turkish water and land border. Since March 2011 FRONTEX policemen have been directly present at the Bulgarian-Turkish border. Beyond that, a Black Sea border coordination and information center was established in 2004 in the city of Burgas with active Romanian participation and German sponsorship. Similar measures have been taken at the seaside of the town of Varna.

In the meantime, the official political rhetoric with regards to the migrants has sharpened under the influence of the European bureaucratic and discursive preferences. The “illegal” migration was put on par with a “migration pressure” that needed to be opposed.<sup>39</sup> Last but not least, the introduction of the Schengen criteria in Bulgaria has also spurred the already strong nationalistic trends in the country. For example, only a day after Greece announced its decision to build a wall along its whole land border with Turkey (after that the Greek state leaned back for 12,5 km in the northern part of this border) in 2011, a Bulgarian party called “Society for a new Bulgaria” insisted that such a wall should be built along the whole Bulgarian-Turkish border (250km).

## **The influx of the Syrian refugees**

### ***The „unexpected” arrival***

In the beginning of 2014, the UNHCR and the European Commission intensified their calls to the European governments to accept the temporary settlement of Syrian refugees inside their borders. Pursuant to UNHCR, in March of the same year 667 496 Syrian refugees were registered in Turkey, 593 540 in Jordan, and approx. 1 million in Lebanon.<sup>40</sup> Whereas from August to November 2013 about 2 000 asylum-seekers, mostly Syrians, were entering Bulgaria each month<sup>41</sup>, their number dropped to 99 in the first five weeks of 2014<sup>42</sup>. According to the self-assessment of the Bulgarian authorities, these figures are due to their own resolute organizational efforts to countervail the “migration threat generated by the Syrian crisis”.<sup>43</sup> It is the assertion of the current article that more general geopolitical trends, outlined above, are to be traced in the

midst of these developments. Furthermore, while the preparation for joining the Schengen zone had been notably speeded up under a center-right government, Syrian refugees happened to cross the territory of Bulgaria on a mass scale under a left-leaning expert cabinet.

In 2013, the country received 9 325 applications for protection, 7144 of which were registered for further administrative processing. 63% of the registered applications were submitted by Syrian refugees. The refugee authorities started accommodating 8 to 15 people in rooms with capacity for 2 to 4 persons.<sup>44</sup> After the existing reception and detention centers became overcrowded a couple of ad hoc refugee camps, partly with tents, partly in dilapidated school buildings and old barracks, were set up lacking any ordinary conditions of living. On 10 January 2014, the UNHCR asked EU member states not to send asylum-seekers to Bulgaria by applying the Dublin Regulation, because the country could not guarantee adequate reception.<sup>45</sup> Gradually, owing to the financial transfers of around 6 million euros by the European Commission, the Bulgarian state came into a position to improve the situation of the refugees while keeping them in the periphery of the EU.

Moreover, the (initial) ineptitude of the government to provide food supply or medical assistance was extensively accompanied by a demonstrative rhetoric of “control over any possible threat under the emerged circumstances”. Pragmatically speaking, this dual instrumentalization of the symbolic of “danger” and of “strength” correlated with the wish of the administration to provide evidence of Bulgaria still being a trustworthy candidate for the Schengen area as well as to compete with internal political actors, such as oppositional parties and reactionary nationalist forces. However, putting it in a broader context, the behavior of the Bulgarian state could be interpreted as a claim to remain a relevant political factor, unchallenged by the heterogeneous global economic, political, and cultural developments.

In October 2013, the Minister of Defense Angel Naydenov and the Minister of Interior Tzvetlin Yovchev alike qualified the enhanced refugee flow as a “threat for the national security” that could be dealt with. In an interview the Minister of Interior reassured the public that Bulgaria is not supposed to send back asylum-seekers because of its international and European legal obligations but it is free to repatriate other “illegal immigrants”. According to him, the number of deported persons had risen three times since the arrival of the Syrian refugees. The technical exchange with the Turkish border authorities was expanded, so that information about people being noticed on their territory could be passed over in the fastest possible way. This simulacrum of reassuring the “good Bulgarian citizens” and keeping the “unfamiliar aliens” at a distance<sup>46</sup> has produced both a potent source for cultivating national loyalty and a fruitful ground for nurturing nationalist propaganda and stigmatizing the immigrants. Simultaneously, in November 2013, the Bulgarian Parliament reconfirmed its decision for granting a five year residence permit to any national of a third country who can prove a bank deposit of 500,000 euros at a Bulgarian bank.

A series of xenophobic attacks on foreign nationals were committed in November 2013. Most of the victims were defamed by the perpetrators as “Arabs” or “Africans”. In many of the cases, no help was given by other Bulgarian citizens who happened to be in the proximity of the incidents. A massive procession against the “aliens” was organized by the openly racist political party “Ataka”, represented in Parliament. Other nationalist and neo-nazi formations, such as the “IMRO – Bulgarian National Movement” and the “National Resistance”, initiated separate marches against the “immigration terror”. In the end of September 2013, a “heroic march” to and a partial blockade of the biggest check point on the Bulgarian-Turkish border, “Kapitan Andreevo”, took place with the participation of nationalist movements.

Furthermore, the accommodation of some of the Syrian refugees in two of the suburbs of the capital Sofia was met with discontent and suspicion. The plans of the government to build ad hoc refugee camps in smaller places, such as Kazanlak in Southern Bulgaria and Telish in Northern Bulgaria, provoked anxiety, life chains, blockades of the roads, and threats with self-inflammation among their residents.

Contrary to these official and non-official manifestations (although the attempt of some institutions like the Presidency and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to counter the hostile



discourses with regards to the Syrian and other refugees in the country should be mentioned), a broad-based civil campaign for collecting clothes, donating food or money, delivering Bulgarian language courses or helping with registering or accommodation unfolded during the first months of the Syrian presence. The work of tens of volunteers organized around the internet platform “Friends of the Refugees”, the “Council of Refugee Women in Bulgaria” or the humanitarian activities supported by the New Bulgarian University are to be distinguished among others. Human rights organizations, such as the Bulgarian Helsinki Committee or the Office of the UNHCR in Sofia, urged the government to abide by international and regional humanitarian practices and norms and to treat the Syrian asylum-seekers according to them. In November 2013, the UNHCR issued its first warnings against any possible steps of the Bulgarian border police to push asylum-seekers back into Turkish territory. In February 2014, the first on its scale in Bulgaria open protest against xenophobia and discrimination took place where the role of the state and the political parties in treating the whole issue of the Syrian refugees was partly put into question.

### **The new „containment” plan of the government**

The measures for limiting the presence of “undisirable” immigrants in Bulgaria with regards to the period of the arrival of the Syrian refugees found their most systematized expression in a document published by the Council of Ministers on November 7, 2013, officially entitled “Plan for the Management of the Crisis Situation Occured as a Result of the Heightened Migration Pressure on the Territory of the Republic of Bulgaria”. Again, both its contents and its wording speak for a generally negative approach towards the phenomenon of migration – now unequivocally separating the “Syrians with a status” from the rest of the immigrants, even from other Syrian asylum-seekers who might be willing to apply for protection in Bulgaria in the months to come.

The fundamental priorities of the plan have been defined as follows in descending order of importance: 1. Decreasing the number of “illegal” immigrants on the territory of the country with respect to preventing persons entering Bulgaria, as well as deporting those already inside the country; 2. Providing for the security of Bulgarian citizens by curbing the risks connected with the stay of “illegal” migrants, asylum-seekers and persons under protection on the territory of the state, such as terrorism and radical extremism, pandemics and epidemics, ethnic, religious and political conflicts, criminal activity; 3. Guaranteeing order, security and humane living conditions in the reception centers; 4. Lessening the number of asylum-seekers in Bulgaria; 4. Accelerating the integration of the persons with humanitarian and refugee status and their contribution to the social systems at their disposal; 5. Supplying additional external financing for the solution of the refugee problem; 6. Effective communication with the society.<sup>47</sup>

On November 20, 2013, the State Agency for National Security has announced the conclusions of its own report in connection with the (Syrian) immigrants coming to Bulgaria. Five national security considerations were underscored among others: 1. unfavorable financial and organizational impact on the institutions and the budget; 2. increasing threat of terrorism; 3. social tensions of different nature, especially xenophobia; 4. deterioration of the criminal situation, including human trafficking; 5. proliferation of infectious diseases.<sup>48</sup> Analogously, the official rhetoric, prevalent since September 2013, has been oriented towards juggling between a demonstration of state power, projecting the image of potential security risk upon the immigrants in the country, assuring the rightness of the biopolitical control mechanisms installed and perfected in the course of the previous years and (to a lesser degree) promoting the idea of a temporary sympathy with the humanitarian plight of the Syrian refugees.

Soon after the new „containment” plan of the government was announced around 1500 police officers and 140 units of technique were dispatched to the Bulgarian-Turkish border. The acting national inter-agency emergency plans and the National Plan for Countervailing Terrorism

were reviewed. Notwithstanding general financial difficulties in Bulgaria and the actual needs of the refugees, the government made a decision to build a 30km wire fence on the border with Turkey at the cost of about 10 million BGN (approx. 5 million euros) to end “illegal” border crossings into the country.<sup>49</sup> The work on the fence was launched in March 2014. The meaning of the cooperation with FRONTEX or other European police partners was underscored. FRONTEX officers were directly engaged as interviewers for the newcomers in order to use their better training for identifying the “right” country of origin of the asylum-seekers. The government, in the meantime, appealed to the rest of the EU member states to share common responsibility with respect to the Syrian refugees. Being confronted with the prospect of a prolonged Syrian conflict and the critique of the European Commission the topic of the integration of “recognized refugees” has found its place, although sporadic, in the statements of the Bulgarian representatives as well.

### **The push-backs**

According to the summary report of the Ministry of Interior on the activities undertaken by the state institutions concerning the situation of the Syrian refugees in Bulgaria from February 2014, the influx of “illegal” immigrants was declared to be stopped in practice around January 31, 2014.<sup>50</sup> On April 15, 2014, the UNHCR reiterated its concern, first made in November 2013, over the measures undertaken by the Bulgarian authorities to restrict access to the territory along the Turkish border. These, according to the agency, could be preventing people in need of international protection from requesting asylum in Bulgaria and in some cases had resulted in family separations. UNHCR added that it had received several reports of alleged “push-backs” from Bulgaria regarding nationals of Syria, Afghanistan, and Sudan, as well as Palestinians from Syria.<sup>51</sup>

In the end of April 2014, Human Rights Watch (HRW) presented a report called “Containment Plan: Bulgaria’s Pushbacks and Detention of Syrian and other Asylum-Seekers and Migrants” based on a visit of their representatives in Bulgaria in December 2013 and interviews with 177 immigrants in various locations in both Bulgaria and Turkey. Of these, 41 gave detailed accounts of 44 incidents involving at least 519 people in which Bulgarian border police apprehended and returned them to Turkey, in some instances using violence. The organization spoke of a systematic and deliberate practice of preventing undocumented asylum-seekers from entering Bulgaria to lodge claims for international protection. The report was also critical of the fact that the Bulgarian authorities provided little or no support to asylum-seekers once they had been granted status or had left reception centers while at the same time the EU and national laws made it difficult for recognized refugees and beneficiaries of subsidiary protection to work in another EU state, or to adjust their status once there.<sup>52</sup> Editions like the Guardian also reported about possible push-backs having been observed on the Bulgarian-Turkish border.<sup>53</sup>

The Bulgarian government immediately and categorically denied the HRW report as having been forged and not reflecting correctly the efforts of the Bulgarian state to relieve the situation of the Syrian refugees. There were no attempts to provoke a serious and long-lasting political discussion on the topic among the non-governmental sector either.

### **Conclusion**

The concept of the “global society” has sparked a wealth of research among its scientific proponents and opponents alike for years. Still, a unified definition of the term and a homogeneous methodological framework for its analysis are missing. Against this background, taking a critical point of view on the matter in the current article has been considered as the most plausible way of describing a global “reality of becoming” filled with various contradictions.

Nevertheless, central for understanding the logic and the hierarchies within the contemporary global capitalist society is the paradigm of mobility. State governance today is very much engaged in selectively precipitating as well as deterring global mobility of different kinds – capital, people, culture. The ambiguity of this sort is even more obvious in the immigration/border policies of the states where chances for enabling a fully-fledged, functionally premised human integration (*Gesellschaft* and *Gemeinschaft*) look rather tiny.

In particular, the reaction of Bulgarian authorities in the course of the arrival of the Syrian refugees in Bulgaria in 2013 and 2014 should be discussed within a mixed paradigm of a renationalization of the local border regime, as well as its transnationalization in accordance with the restrictive European legislation. It is in this light that the official rhetoric of “threat for the national security” and “Bulgaria’s reliability for the Schengen zone”, the drastic drop of Syrian asylum-seekers, and the increase of deportations of “illegal immigrants”, since January 2014, should be commented. The same concerns the general unwillingness of the other EU member states to accept refugees from Syria and other immigrants. It is this kind of regional “re-bordering” that expands the bio-technical police control over a “normalized” majority “inside” and separates it from a select “undesirable” minority “outside” aggravating the existing social, economic, political, and political-cultural global stratifications.

At the same time, as the Bulgarian case study has shown, a considerable amount of spontaneous humanitarian solidarity has been expressed to the Syrian refugees on the part of many civil groups, NGOs or individual citizens. Local human rights organizations and the Office of the UNHCR have been insisting that the Bulgarian state does not circumvent international humanitarian norms and apply them to all asylum-seekers on an equal basis.

The question should then be asked whether the social and normative potential for strengthening the integrative processes within the global society available in such bottom-up or supranational activities could be enough for enabling the global social and legal emancipation (autonomy) of the individuals. For the moment, it seems rather difficult that the powerful nature of the state could be easily reoriented or overcome. For this purpose, an intensive “glocal”, politicized debate beyond humanitarian spontaneity or nationalistic exaltation would be needed, so that long-term political tendencies in the inter-state world could be recognized (from the Bulgarian civil society) and solidarity be paid beyond political, economic, and cultural boundaries. In the end, a mobilization for a different pattern of globalization and, for that matter, non-economic and non-hierarchical regulation of the uneases of migration is urgently needed.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* [in Bulgarian]. Sofia: IK LIK, 2006; Manuel Castells, *The Rise of the Network Society, vol I: The Information Age: Economy, Society and Culture* [in Bulgarian]. Sofia: IK LIK, 2004; David Held, *Democracy and the Global Order: From the Modern State to Cosmopolitan Governance* [in Bulgarian]. Sofia: K&H, 2004.

<sup>2</sup> John W. Burton, *World Society*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1972.

<sup>3</sup> Seyla Benhabib, *The Claims of Culture: Equality and Diversity in the Global Era*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002, 180.

<sup>4</sup> Amitai Etzioni, “Can There be a Global Society?”, *Perspectives* 25, no. 1 (2002): 2, accessed January 10, 2015, <http://www.csun.edu/~egodard/asatheory/newsletters/Perspectives-2002-Jan.pdf>.

<sup>5</sup> Mathias Albert, Lothar Brock, Hilmar Schmidt, Christoph Weller and Klaus Dieter Wolf, “Weltgesellschaft: Identifizierung eines “Phantoms”, *Politische Vierteljahresschrift* 37, no. 1 (1996): 5-26.

<sup>6</sup> Hedley Bull (1997) cited in Martin Shaw, *Global Society and International Relations: Sociological Concepts and Political Perspectives*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 1994 [online ed., 2000], accessed January 14, 2015, <http://www.sussex.ac.uk/Users/hafa3/globalx.htm>; Ian Clark, “Globalization and the Post-cold War Order”, in *The Globalization of World Politics. An Introduction to International Relations*, edited by John Baylis and Steve Smith, 634-647, 2nd ed., New York: Oxford University Press, 2001.

<sup>7</sup> Shaw, *Global Society and International Relations*.

- <sup>8</sup> Ibid.; Andrew Linklater, "Globalization and the Transformation of Political Community", in *The Globalization of World Politics. An Introduction to International Relations*, edited by John Baylis and Steve Smith, 617-632, 2nd ed., New York: Oxford University Press, 2001.
- <sup>9</sup> Benhabib, *The Claims of Culture*, 161.
- <sup>10</sup> Didier Bigo, "Globalized (in)Security: the Field and the Ban-optikon". Paper presented at the Harvard University conference "Muslims in Europe and in the United States: A Transatlantic Comparison", Cambridge, Massachusetts, December 15-16, 2006), 42, accessed January 12, 2015, <http://www.people.fas.harvard.edu/~ces/conferences/muslims/Bigo.pdf>.
- <sup>11</sup> Ibid., 35.
- <sup>12</sup> Ibid., 45.
- <sup>13</sup> Zygmunt Bauman, *Globalization: The Human Consequences* [in Bulgarian]. Sofia: IK LIK, 1999, 2.
- <sup>14</sup> Rudolf Stichweh, "Inklusion/Exklusion und die Theorie der Weltgesellschaft", in *Differenz und Integration: die Zukunft moderner Gesellschaften; Verhandlungen des 28. Kongresses der Deutschen Gesellschaft für Soziologie im Oktober 1996 in Dresden, vol. II: Sektionen, Arbeitsgruppen, Foren, Fedor-Stepun-Tagung*, edited by Karl-Siegbert Rehberg, 606, Opladen: Westdt. Verl., accessed January 13, 2015, [http://www.ssoar.info/ssoar/bitstream/handle/document/16897/ssoar-1997-stichweh-inklusion\\_exklusion\\_und\\_die\\_theorie.pdf?sequence=1](http://www.ssoar.info/ssoar/bitstream/handle/document/16897/ssoar-1997-stichweh-inklusion_exklusion_und_die_theorie.pdf?sequence=1). 1997.
- <sup>15</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>16</sup> Benhabib, *The Claims of Culture*, 179-180.
- <sup>17</sup> Bigo, *Globalized (in)Security*, 11.
- <sup>18</sup> Andrew Linklater (1981) cited in Sara Ormes-Ganarin, "Do We Need to be 'Critical' When Studying International Relations?", accessed January 15, 2015, <http://www.e-ir.info/2014/03/27/do-we-need-to-be-critical-when-studying-international-relations/>.
- <sup>19</sup> John W. Meyer, John Boli, George M. Thomas, and Francisco O. Ramirez, "World Society and the Nation-State", *American Journal of Sociology* 103, no. 1 (1997): 144-181.
- <sup>20</sup> Deborah Barrett and David Frank (1997) cited *ibid.*, 159.
- <sup>21</sup> Ulrich Beck, "Toward a New Critical Theory with a Cosmopolitan Intent", *Constellations* 10, no. 4 (2003): 453-468.
- <sup>22</sup> Tommy Gavin, "Challenging the Dominant Globalization-Migration Discourse", accessed January 15, 2015, <http://www.e-ir.info/2013/07/03/challenging-the-dominant-globalization-migration-discourse/>; Patric A. Taran and Eduardo Geronimi, "Globalization, Labour and Migration: Protection is Paramount". Geneva: International Labour Office, 2003, 1-27, accessed January 18, 2015. <http://www.ilo.org/public/english/protection/migrant/download/pom/pom3e.pdf>.
- <sup>23</sup> Karolina Follis, *Building Fortress Europe. The Polish-Ukrainian Border*. Philadelphia: The University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012, 12.
- <sup>24</sup> Bigo, *Globalized (in)Security*, 35-36.
- <sup>25</sup> Ibid., 8.
- <sup>26</sup> Ibid., 41.
- <sup>27</sup> Mathias Albert et al., *Weltgesellschaft: Identifizierung eines "Phantoms"*, 16.
- <sup>28</sup> Council of Ministers, "National Strategy in the Area of Migration, Asylum, and Integration (2011-2020)", 3-5, accessed January 15, 2015, <http://www.strategy.bg/StrategicDocuments/View.aspx?lang=bg-BG&Id=667>.
- <sup>29</sup> Follis, *Building Fortress Europe*, p. 119.
- <sup>30</sup> Ministry of Interior, "Multi-Year National Program for the Use of the European Return Fund (2008-2013)", 9, accessed January 14, 2015, [http://www.dmp.mvr.bg/NR/rdonlyres/20C2EA4E-CCD1-442D-8B6F-43D6EBBEC600/0/Mnogogodishna\\_programa\\_BG.pdf](http://www.dmp.mvr.bg/NR/rdonlyres/20C2EA4E-CCD1-442D-8B6F-43D6EBBEC600/0/Mnogogodishna_programa_BG.pdf).
- <sup>31</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>32</sup> Ministry of Interior, "Strategic Program for an Integral Management of the Return (2008)", accessed January 14, 2015, <http://www.mvr.bg/NR/rdonlyres/CC91C347-0224-4938-847A-7CAAD1D35A7E/0/StrategicProgrammeFINAL300311.doc>.
- <sup>33</sup> Council of Ministers, "National Strategy for the Integration of Refugees (2011-2013)", accessed January 15, 2015, [www.strategy.bg/StrategicDocuments/View.aspx?lang=bg-BG&Id=667](http://www.strategy.bg/StrategicDocuments/View.aspx?lang=bg-BG&Id=667).
- <sup>34</sup> Council of Ministers, *National Strategy in the Area of Migration*, 20.
- <sup>35</sup> National Institute of Statistics, "External Migration According to Age and Sex", accessed January 13, 2015, <http://bit.ly/1mrL4oZ>.
- <sup>36</sup> Bulgarian Helsinki Committee, "Annual Human Rights Reports for Bulgaria" 2006-2012, accessed January 14, 2015, <http://www.bghelsinki.org/en/publications/bhc-reports/annual-human-rights-reports/>.
- <sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> Ministry of Interior – Principal Department “Border Police”, “Upgrading the Technical Equipment”, accessed January 14, 2015. <http://www.nsgp.mvr.bg/EUIntegration/EUCommPrograms/default.htm>.

<sup>39</sup> European Migration Network – The Bulgarian Contact Point, *Annual Policy Report*. Sofia: 2012, 9, accessed January 15, 2015, <http://migration.mvr.bg/NR/rdonlyres/B137D345-B1ED-495E-8C1C-2340256FAD3A/0/RezumeEMN2012.doc>.

<sup>40</sup> UNHCR, “Syria Regional Refugee Response. Inter-agency Information Sharing Portal”, accessed January 15, 2015, <http://data.unhcr.org/syrianrefugees/country.php?id=224>.

<sup>41</sup> Ministry of Interior, “Report on the Activities Undertaken by the Institutions of the State Power Regarding the Management of the Crisis Evolving from the Increased Migration Pressure”, February 02, 2014, 3, accessed January 14, 2015, <http://press.mvr.bg/NR/rdonlyres/49B64387-FD86-4F9B-88C2-8E56EBC2E866/0/Doklad.doc>.

<sup>42</sup> Human Rights Watch, “Containment Plan: Bulgaria’s Pushbacks and Detention of Syrian and other Asylum-Seekers and Migrants”, accessed January 14, 2015, <http://www.hrw.org/news/2014/04/29/bulgaria-asylum-seekers-summarily-expelled>.

<sup>43</sup> Ministry of Interior, Report on the Activities Undertaken, 2.

<sup>44</sup> Bulgarian Helsinki Committee, “Annual Human Rights Report for Bulgaria 2013 – Summary”, 64-69, accessed January 14, 2015, <http://www.bghelsinki.org/media/uploads/info.pdf>.

<sup>45</sup> Maurizio Molinari, “Bulgaria’s Turn to Reject Immigrants”, accessed January 15, 2015, <http://www.novinite.com/articles/158133/Bulgaria%27s+Turn+to+Reject+Immigrants>.

<sup>46</sup> Bigo, Globalized (in)Security, 39.

<sup>47</sup> Council of Ministers, “Plan for the Management of the Crisis Situation Occured as a Result of the Heightened Migration Pressure on the Territory of the Republic of Bulgaria”, 2, accessed January 14, 2015, <http://www.government.bg/cgi-bin/e-cms/vis/vis.pl?s=001&p=0211&n=82&g=>.

<sup>48</sup> dnevnik.bg, “The Report of the State Agency for National Security to the Consultative Council says: There are Migrants, Most of them from Syria”, accessed January 13, 2015,

[http://www.dnevnik.bg/bulgaria/2013/11/20/2186679\\_dokladut\\_na\\_dans\\_za\\_konsultativniia\\_suvet\\_ima\\_migranti/](http://www.dnevnik.bg/bulgaria/2013/11/20/2186679_dokladut_na_dans_za_konsultativniia_suvet_ima_migranti/).

<sup>49</sup> dnevnik.bg, “The Materials for the Fence at the Border will be Provided by Five Firms”, accessed January 13, 2015,

[http://www.dnevnik.bg/biznes/companii/2014/02/20/2246357\\_pet\\_firmi\\_shte\\_dostavjat\\_materialite\\_za\\_ograde\\_na/](http://www.dnevnik.bg/biznes/companii/2014/02/20/2246357_pet_firmi_shte_dostavjat_materialite_za_ograde_na/).

<sup>50</sup> Ministry of Interior, Report on the Activities Undertaken, 6.

<sup>51</sup> UNHCR, “Bulgaria: UNHCR Says Asylum Conditions Improved, Warns against Transfer of Vulnerable People”, Briefing Note, accessed January 13, 2015, <http://www.unhcr.org/534cfae69.html>.

<sup>52</sup> Human Rights Watch, Containment Plan: Bulgaria’s Pushbacks, 43.

<sup>53</sup> Harriet Grant and John Domokos, “The Refugee Challenge: Can you Break into Fortress Europe?”. accessed January 13, 2015, <http://www.theguardian.com/global-development/ng-interactive/2014/jan/refugee-choices-interactive>.