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Belarus-Poland Migration Crisis and Supra-National Political Concerns of the Extended Actors
Belarus-Polonya Göç Krizi ve Genişletilmiş Aktörlerin Uluslarüstü Siyasi Kaygıları

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BELARUS-POLAND MIGRATION CRISIS AND SUPRA-NATIONAL POLITICAL CONCERNS OF THE EXTENDED ACTORS

Abstract

This study seeks to examine the sociological, political, and humanitarian dimensions of the Belarus-Poland migration crisis and aims to discuss the differences between migration diplomacy and state-organized-engineered migration within the framework of the instrumentalization and weaponization of migrants. Statements made by EU authorities about the Belarus-Poland migration problem, sanctions, and measures implemented are investigated to evaluate the EU's approach. Furthermore, in order to comprehend Belarus' perspective, Lukashenko's statements and press coverage of the incident are scrutinized. Theoretically, while following a descriptive analysis method, the article considers how Belarus-Poland border issue has given rise to a great deal of media interest due to Belarus's balance and interest-oriented policies oscillating between the former Soviet world and the West and argues how Russia brought a global dimension to the issue as a result of its historical political pursuits. Finally, it concludes that the migration crisis between Belarus and Poland is not a simple crisis that concerns two countries, if anything, it is a reflection and precursor of multi-actor global politics serving different purposes in the region.

Keywords: *Migration diplomacy, legitimacy, coercive-state organized migration, Russia, Belarus, the EU*

BELARUS-POLONYA GÖÇ KRİZİ VE GENİŞLETİLMİŞ AKTÖRLERİN ULUSLARÜSTÜ SİYASİ KAYGILARI

Öz

Bu çalışma; Belarus-Polonya göç krizinin sosyolojik, politik ve insani boyutlarını incelemeyi, göçmenlerin araçsallaştırılması ve silah hâline gelmesi çerçevesinde göç diplomasisi ile devlet eliyle tasarlanmış-manipüle edilmiş göç arasındaki farkları tartışmayı amaçlamaktadır. AB yetkilileri tarafından Belarus-Polonya göç sorununa ilişkin olarak yapılan açıklamalar, uygulanan yaptırımlar ve alınan önlemler AB'nin yaklaşımını ele almak üzere araştırılmıştır. Ayrıca Belarus'un bakış açısını anlamak için Lukashenko'nun açıklamaları ve olayla ilgili basında çıkan haberler irdelenmiştir. Teorik olarak betimsel bir analiz yöntemi izlenirken bu makale Belarus'un eski Sovyet dünyası ile Batı arasında gidip gelen denge ve çıkar odaklı politikaları nedeniyle Belarus-Polonya sınır sorununun medyada nasıl popülerlik kazandığını ele almakta ve Rusya'nın tarihsel siyasi arayışlarının bir sonucu olarak konuya nasıl küresel bir boyut kazandırdığını tartışmaktadır. Son olarak bu çalışmada, Belarus ve Polonya arasındaki göç krizinin iki ülkeyi ilgilendiren basit bir kriz olmadığı ancak bölgede farklı amaçlara hizmet eden çok aktörlü küresel politikaların bir yansıması ve öncüsü olduğu sonucuna varılmıştır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: *Göç diplomasisi, meşruiyet, zorlayıcı-devlet tarafından tasarlanmış göç, Rusya, Belarus, AB.*

INTRODUCTION

Globalization has enabled the expansion of transportation and communication infrastructure, which has resulted in a rise in voluntary movement, referred to as economic immigrants. With the increase in both voluntary and forced migration, migration management has become a situation that necessitates a balance in the fields of economy, politics, social policy, and international relations, which includes the management of voluntary migration as well as the fulfilment of international human rights obligations. Migration management has ceased to be solely a matter of national sovereignty and has become crucial, particularly for countries bordering the EU. As of 2020, there were 82.4 million forcedly displaced people (UN News, 2021) and 281 million foreign migrants worldwide (UN DESA, 2021).

In the 1960s, immigrants were considered as a need for European countries' development; but, with the end of the Cold War, the scenario reversed. With the breakup of the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia, Europe was confronted with a massive influx of refugees and economic migrants. Countries that intend to keep the growing refugee influx under control as a result of the wars in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo begun to enact restrictive laws. Moreover, with the 9/11 attacks, the EU's perspective of immigration has shifted to one in which immigrants are perceived as a security risk. The Syrian refugee crisis, on the other hand, represents the critical threshold for both neighbouring countries and the EU.

Migration is at the forefront of EU policy, with mass and irregular migration viewed as a threat to the EU's stability. Since the 2015 Syrian refugee crisis, the fear of immigrants has grown visible over the EU politics, and activities that violate the 1951 Refugee Convention and other international treaties, such as unlawful pushbacks, efforts to repatriate refugees, and illegal detentions, have widely become common migration policies. Migration has become a heated topic, particularly in the EU. National governments are responsible for defending their borders, but sharing responsibility for border protection inside the EU is tricky, particularly when it comes to asylum seekers. The Belarusian immigration issue has also renewed EU solidarity with a tactic that threatens the whole EU.

With the Belarusian migrant crisis, the argument over irregular migration has evolved into a new type of government using migrants as diplomatic instruments. The construction of a new mechanism for smuggling illegal migrants through the Belarusian state-owned travel agency Centrkurort is still being debated (LRT, 2021). Moreover, the crisis has turned into a complex diplomatic and humanitarian

chaos, in which not only Belarusian companies, but also Danish and Irish companies are rumoured to be chartering aircraft to Belarus, and the border security efforts of Poland, Lithuania, Latvia and the EU, Germany, the Czech Republic, Austria and others are pressuring Iraq (Eccles & Barigazzi, 2021). Belarus has signed visa free travel agreements for up to 30 days for citizens of 76 countries and the flights from the Russian Federation is not subject to border control since it is deemed domestic (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Belarus, n.d.). However, the immigrants stuck at the border are usually immigrants from Iraq, Syria, Afghanistan or Africa, and there is no visa-free travel from Iraq. It is among the news that Belarus has simplified the visa formalities for immigrants from Iraq to enter the country as tourists in order to allow them to arrive (BBC, 2021). It was revealed that the total number of persons attempting to enter the Polish border for the year was 33 thousand, with 17 thousand attempting to do so in October alone (BBC, 2021).

The use of immigrants by Belarus as a policy instrument against sanctions or to explain their legitimacy, as well as the EU's use of immigrants as a weapon and hybrid war pronouncements, do not invalidate the event's human rights dimension and the right to seek refuge which are core EU principles. Furthermore, the distribution of humanitarian aid to refugees trapped between Poland and Belarus has grown complicated, with both sides claiming the responsibility of the other side for the migrants (Stankeviç, 2021).

There have been numerous studies on the securitization of immigration; however, this study focuses on the image of the Belarus-Poland migration crisis as a threat to the stability of the EU, as a bargaining instrument about sanctions on Belarus, and as a global balancing tool with Russia, the USA and the EU. This study is divided into 4 sections. The first, the concepts of border, immigration diplomacy, and coercive immigration are examined. The second section addresses the topic of whether the Belarusian problem is the result of state-organized migration. The third section discusses the broad shift in the EU's approach to migration. Starting with the security paradigm, the fourth section discusses Russia's effectiveness in the area within the context of the Belarusian immigration crisis. The key points are summarized with political remarks in the conclusion. The analysis in this study sheds light on the interconnectedness of international politics, migration governance and human rights. Thus, it provides insights that would prove valuable migration diplomacy, state organized-engineered migration, and also the concept of human weapons of modern wars. As far as is known, no research has been conducted that evaluates Belarusian migration dilemma from

both Belarusian and the EU perspectives. Research findings show that for the EU, this uncontrolled and mass migration movement is seen as a security threat to the EU territory and EU solidarity is tested. Furthermore, new borders and barriers have been created with new physical and political measures at the EU level to prevent this influx of immigrants. Increasing the number of border guards and providing financial assistance to Poland, Lithuania, and Latvia, as well as holding diplomatic negotiations with Iraq and imposing additional sanctions on Belarus, are all signs that the immigration issue.

1. BORDER, MIGRATION DIPLOMACY AND COERCIVE ENGINEERED MIGRATION

Border is about more than just managing the flow of things like people and money; it is also about the transformation of sovereign authority and violence, and it has two aspects: inclusion and exclusion (Mezzadra & Neilson, 2013). Controlling or managing migration is an indicator of a state's obligation to maintain its borders and its sovereign authority (Friðriksdóttir, 2017, p. 13). In the 14th article of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the right of asylum is protected with the expression 'Everyone has the right to seek and enjoy sanctuary from persecution in other countries' (Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 1948). Furthermore, the right to asylum is enshrined in article 18 of the European Charter of Fundamental Rights, and the Dublin Regulation establishes countries' obligations in the examination of asylum applications. In addition, the 1951 Geneva Refugee Convention, along with the concept of refugee, protects refugee rights and prohibits refoulement. So, refugee status is a privileged status recognized by the 1951 Geneva Refugee Convention and other international agreements, and everyone has the right to seek asylum. Individuals have the freedom to leave the country in this circumstance, but the right to enter another country is not automatic (Walzer, 1983, p. 39). As according to Walzer (1983, p. 39), a political community forms via membership, and entry limitations may be established to protect freedom and the welfare state. Blake (2013, p. 104) argues that states have the right to exclude unwanted immigrants because states, as territorial and legal communities, have their own rules to apply, but this power to exclude does not justify every sort of exclusionary activity. Therefore, the state's right of exclusion cannot be used to justify every action, and immigrants' fundamental rights must be protected.

Hollifield (1992, p. 5) points out that border control is the core of sovereignty, and that even if immigration is financially beneficial, attempting to limit immigration is 'political and, to a certain extent symbolic'. Border security mechanisms are crucial for sovereign states because they defend their territory by

controlling irregular migration, and countries have spent a lot of money on barriers, fences, and border guards in recent years (Vietti & Scribner, 2013, p. 23). Adamson and Tsourapas define migration diplomacy as "'states' use of diplomatic tools, processes, and procedures to manage cross-border population mobility" (Adamson & Tsourapas, 2019, pp. 115–116). Tsourapas (2017) distinguishes between 'cooperative' and 'coercive' migration diplomacy, and considers readmission agreements, deportation rules, and immigration laws as tools of migration diplomacy. Thiollet (2011, p. 10) discusses 'Arab migration diplomacy', where formal channels and agreements are circumvented and labour movement is governed by regional and international politics. On the other side, with the Syrian refugee crisis in 2015, the refugee issue began to be addressed under the notion of 'migration diplomacy', particularly through the Turkey-EU Readmission Agreement and 6 billion Euro funding, and granting the 1.4 billion Euro aid to Jordan (Adamson & Tsourapas, 2019). However, there are also examples of countries from other regions in the world utilizing coercive migration.

Using the migration issues by the countries is not a new topic, and Greenhill (2010, p. 15) mentions 56 coercive engineered migration initiatives since the 1951 Refugee Convention. Regarding the Syrian refugee crisis, there are studies that show that countries such as Turkey, Jordan, and Greece use refugees as a bargaining and negotiation tool to get more aid from the EU using the concept of migration diplomacy (Düvell, 2017; Kelberer, 2017; Seeberg, 2020). There are also studies that utilise the notion of migration diplomacy, such as in Africa-EU relations and migration diplomacy in the Gulf–non-state actors (Geddes & Maru, 2021; Malit & Tsourapas, 2021). According to Greenhill, 'coercive engineering migrations (or coercion-driven migrations)' are as follows:

those cross-border population movements that are deliberately created or manipulated in order to induce political, military and/or economic concessions from a target state or states. (Greenhill, 2010, p. 13)

Although migration management has always been a political concern, Greenhill demonstrates that with the idea of 'coercive engineering migration' migration has become strategic, including its use for political, military, and economic reasons, whether intentionally or manipulated.

2. BELARUS ORGANIZED MIGRATION CRISIS

While Belarus received immigration for ecological and military reasons in the 1980s, after gaining its independence in 1991, ethnic migration started and due to increasing unemployment and recession in independent states, it started to receive

immigration from the Baltic countries, Moldova, Ukraine and the Caucasus (Chubrik & Kazlou, 2013, pp. 24–25). The population of Belarus is 9,398,861 as of 2020 (WB, 2020), and according to the 2019 data of the Belarusian Statistical Institute, the number of arrivals of international immigrants from non-CIS countries is 12,313 (Belstat, n.d.). Belarus has 1,069,400 international migrant stock as of 2019, with the majority coming from the Russian Federation, Ukraine, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, and Lithuania (UNDESA, 2019). As a consequence, Belarus mainly gets immigration from CIS and Baltic states, whereas immigration from Middle Eastern countries is uncommon.

The latest migration problem, which began at the EU's eastern border, is becoming more and more complicated due to the mingling of immigrants from different countries, airline companies; and so many countries involved such as Belarus, Poland, Latvia, Lithuania, Russia, Ukraine and Germany. It is unclear if those waiting to cross the Belarusian border into EU countries, particularly Germany, are economic migrants or refugees. However, Belarusian President Lukashenko publicly acknowledges that it is 'absolutely possible' their assistance to migrants in reaching the Polish border while denying any participation in transporting migrants to Belarus (Rosenberg, 2021). Belarus and the EU signed the visa facilitation and readmission agreements on January 8, 2020; with these agreements, the entry of Belarusian citizens into EU countries was facilitated, visa fees were reduced and the safe and orderly return of irregular immigrants was accepted (EC, 2020). However, Belarus declared on June 28, 2021, that it suspended the readmission deal, and the EU announced on November 9, 2021, that it suspended its visa facilitation agreement with Belarus (EC, 2021b).

This process that started with the controversial re-election of President Lukashenko, Belarus instrumentalizes immigrants by implementing a policy of pushing immigrants in order to avenge the sanctions imposed by the EU. Migrants have been used as a tool to weaken and bargain with NATO and the EU. In fact, the issue of legitimacy and sanctions between Lukashenko and the EU has been ongoing since 1996, with the use of immigrants as a threat on the table since 2002. Lukashenka, first elected in 1994, halted economic reforms, and the country became renowned for financial crises and political pressure, with no economic development since 2012 (Åslund & Hagemejer, 2021, p. 4). While the EU sanctions included the postponement of the Technical Assistance Program in 1996 and the freezing of the partnership agreement, the visa ban in 1998, the lifting of sanctions in 1999, and the reimposition of sanctions in 2004, the US has also begun to impose sanctions on Belarus since 2006 (Åslund & Hagemejer, 2021, p. 4).

Since 2004, both the EU and the United States have imposed sanctions, however the essence of the two groups of penalties differs. While the US tends to sanction significant state institutions, the EU typically sanctions election fraud, human rights violations, and Belarusian officials (Åslund & Hagemejer, 2021, p. 4). It is seen that Belarus is faced with sanctions generally applied by the EU and/or the USA after each election. This scenario may be characterized as the strong EU imposing sanctions on weak Belarus based on ideals such as human rights and democracy, and weak Belarus attempting to rebuild the power relationship through the use of immigrants over the concepts of human rights and the right to asylum. Belarus overcame the financial crisis in 2011 thanks to Russian investments, and since 2015, with the expectation of reform, institutions such as the IMF and the World Bank have begun to invest in the country (Åslund & Hagemejer, 2021, p. 4). Owing to the allegations of fraud and violence in the 2020 Belarus Presidential Elections, the EU started to impose sanctions such as banning flights from the EU airspace to the country as of October 2020 and Belarus suspended the Eastern Partnership on 28 June 2021 (*EU Relations with Belarus*, n.d.). Lukashenko responded to each new sanction move, often by backtracking with reforms or actions such as the release of prisoners, but in 2021 this situation was reversed.
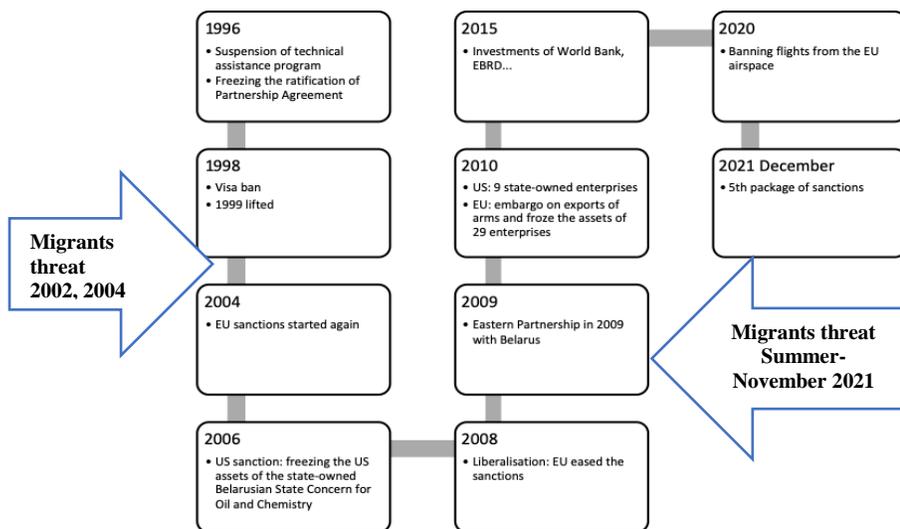

Figure 1. Sanctions on Belarus Since 1996

Note. This figure was created by authors, summarizing information from Åslund, A., & Hagemejer, J. (2021). EU sanctions on Belarus as an effective policy tool [Belarus Insights No. 2/2021]. CASE and news.

Relations between Belarus and the EU deteriorated in May 2021 after a Greek-Lithuanian plane was diverted to Belarus and a journalist was detained, prompting the EU to impose more sanctions (Karmanau, 2021). Since October, the news about immigrants waiting at the Polish border and trying to go to EU countries, especially Germany, has increased. In October 2021, news began to spread that 16,000 immigrants were waiting at the Polish border, and a Syrian family paid $16,000 to agencies to obtain a secure visa (Schmitz, 2021), that they were mostly Syrians, Iraqis, but departed from 3 points in Iraq (DW, 2021). The focus of the news is on the use of immigrants as a weapon, Lukashenko's intention to negotiate sanctions, and her lack of legitimacy (Gressel et al., 2021). Some news connects the 2015 Syrian refugee crisis to the Belarusian migration problem (Faiola, 2021). However, there is a big contrast between the Belarusian migration crisis and Syrian refugee crisis in Greek-Turkish border which caused accelerating the EU and Turkey agreement in 2015. The movement of refugees from neighbouring Syria to Turkey began in 2011, and the number rose dramatically in 2015. Both statistically and symbolically, the Belarusian migration crisis differs from the 2015 refugee crisis not neighbouring the conflict areas such as Syria, Iraq and Afghanistan, and not being a tourist destination. This new crisis has evolved into a political catastrophe, as evidenced by notions like as the instrumentalization of migration for political purposes, weaponizing, and border wars, rather than the event's humanitarian character. In comparison to what occurred between Turkey and the EU in 2015, the situation of Belarus has transformed into a different bargain, which involves easing sanctions as well as providing help to Belarus in exchange for keeping the immigrants in the territory. Furthermore, the transportation of immigrants through tourism organizations, the ease of visas, and the establishment of a new migratory route from Iraq might be viewed as indicators that the issue is being orchestrated by the state. The Belarusian migrant crisis has evolved into a crisis in which Lukashenko's own legitimacy is being questioned, and the EU has responded in four ways.

In tweets dated November 23, Ursula von der Leyen (Leyen) stated that they will oppose Belarus's hybrid offensive with humanitarian aid, diplomatic methods, sanctions, and border security, and that they will increase border protection assistance to Lithuania, Latvia, and Poland (U. von der Leyen, 23 November 2021). Despite the fact that Poland aims not to give an opportunity to this organized strategy of Belarus by avoiding providing humanitarian aid, refusing to open a humanitarian corridor and only local people help migrants at the border, the

humanitarian dimension is neglected in this crisis (Pikulicka-Wilczewska, 2021). Instead of protecting the rights of immigrants and refugees, the terminology adopted in this incident became 'war at the border', the use of refugees as weapons, and the employment of a military vocabulary in Brussels and media (Vallianatou, 2021). In her "State of the Union" speech on September 15, 2021, Leyen described this occurrence as 'a hybrid attack to destabilize Europe'(EU Commission, 2021). Leyen's Twitter posts show that the new hybrid migrant crisis is regarded differently from prior crises. Leyen's tweets are about hybrid attack, EU unity and solidarity, support of EU and NATO, assistance for Latvia, Lithuania and Poland (U. von der Leyen, 28 November 2021). Furthermore, the EU has announced the fifth package of sanctions to be applied to Belarus for human rights violations and the use of immigration in a press release dated December 2, 2021, and has begun to impose sanctions on individuals and organizations associated with the use of immigrants, such as politicians, tour operators, Belavia, and hotels (Belarus, 2021).

Refugee stock on the Polish-Belarusian border is not a new phenomenon; in 2016, refugees from the North Caucasus region who sought to enter European countries waited in the border town and did not leave even after the pandemic began (Анзоров, 2021). Furthermore, in the cases filed after Poland denied asylum applicants from the Caucasus after relatively brief interviews, determining that they were economic migrants, the European Court of Human Rights, in its decision on the application on this subject, considered Poland's refusal of the Chechen asylum application from Belarus to be a violation of the Convention (*Case of M.K. and others v. Poland*, 2020). In a similar case brought against Lithuania after a Russian family and their children, who arrived in Chechnya and sought asylum, were not allowed to apply, the European Court of Human Rights ruled that the rights in Article 13 of the European Convention on Human Rights had been violated (*M.A. and others v. Lithunia*, 2019).

Lukashenko has manipulated immigration before, immigrants were not used for the first time in the crisis of 2021. In response to comments that his entrance to the NATO enlargement meeting in Prague in 2002 would not be permitted, he used the words 'If the Europeans do not pay, we will not protect Europe from these flows' (Shepherd, 2002). However, Greenhill (2010, p. 35) claims that Lukashenko's attempts in 2002 and 2004, when he utilized immigrants to seek diplomatic recognition and assistance, were unsuccessful. The Belarusian migrant problem encompasses not only the instrumentalization of migrants and refugees, but also their transportation to the country for this reason. Furthermore, the Belarusian

migration crisis is a direct exclusion and differential treatment of refugees, as it restricts their right to seek asylum and refuses them without a thorough examination of their circumstances. The use of refugees as a threat and/or tool has turned into ignoring the humanitarian dimension of the event. The Belarusian migrant crisis is seen as a violation of human rights at the EU's external borders (Zander, 2021), but it stands as a unique crisis in which the foreign policy dimension of the event precedes the humanitarian dimension.

3. THE EU APPROACH TO IMMIGRATION AND THE GROWING CRISIS

After the Roman Empire became an important cultural and commercial centre, the European continent turned into an attractive target destination. The level of development of the region and its availability in terms of land and trade have always led to a high interest in the continent. Before the great destruction experienced after the First World War was fully repaired, the European mainland, which became the site of another huge destruction like the Second World War, got through this process quickly, but it was not easy. More difficult than repairing desolate cities was the replacement of the lost men; that is, the arbitration of the workforce.

In Western European countries, where the economic devastation of the Second World War was felt heavily, studies have been initiated for restructuring in various sectors such as metro and road construction, industry and mining after 1950s, however; the lack of sufficient workforce for the realization of this structuring Western European countries were compelled to import labour from other countries (Kütük, 2015). As of 1955, labour migration from developing countries began, especially to the Federal Republic of Germany; and in the 1960s, in order to overcome the bottleneck in European countries and Germany, workers started to be imported from Spain, Portugal, Italy and Greece in the first place, and then from Mediterranean countries such as Turkey, Morocco, Algeria and Tunisia (Murat, 2000).

While immigrants were seen as necessary for development in the 1960s, after the end of the Cold War the subject took a completely different turn. Immigrants were no longer coming under the conditions and in numbers determined by the receiving countries. With "the end of the Cold War; countries, who were once a member of the Warsaw Pact or who broke away from Russia and gained their independence, turned into countries of producing immigrants towards the West for

various reasons, especially for economic reasons and this process of migration is remarkable just because migrants were mostly composed of qualified people" (Karakoç Dora, 2020a).

After the collapse of the communist Eastern Bloc, the immigration movements towards the West, which had a high level of prosperity, gained a great momentum with the disintegration of Yugoslavia and the events that developed in Bosnia and Herzegovina. When the number of refugees increased at an astonishing rate as a result of the Kosovo War, countries adopted restrictive policies aimed at reducing and controlling the influx of refugees. When the 9/11 attacks are added to all these, there has been a great shift in the EU's approach to the perception of immigration and the issue started to be handled as a threat due to security concerns. The 2015 Syrian refugee crisis marked a new turning point for restrictive measures. For the EU who received as many refugees as it wanted within the conditions and qualifications it had determined during the 60s, 70s and 80s, then positively welcomed the qualified workforce that came with the collapse of the Eastern Bloc, put the crisis caused by the Kosovo War on its own way, and brought the immigration from Muslim countries to a close mark after the 9/11 attacks by taking security-related restrictions; the Syrian refugee crisis represents the point where the situation starts to spiral out of control. Since 2014, borders could no longer be effectively guarded, flocks of refugees have been awaiting a welcome in front of the world at EU borders. Immigrants from Syria, where more than half of the country's population was displaced, were then called millions, and this number was even more than the population of some European countries. This crisis has led to the expansion of control mechanisms and the dominance of security concerns by many methods such as walls, barbed wires, border controls, biometric cards, border monitoring mechanisms, differentiated statuses and practices, and limitation of aid given to asylum seekers by EU member states.

As such, the EU decided to resolve the refugee issue outside its own borders and preferred to solve it by making Turkey a buffer zone (Karakoç Dora, 2021) and making the refugees a material of a political agreement. After the 18 March Agreement, which is also called as the Refugee Deal, the whole world has seen that the refugee issue is the soft belly of the EU and could be used as a tool in political negotiations. For the EU, which has gone through many difficult turns among its member states due to refugees trying to enter EU territory by using countries such as Italy, Malta, Bulgaria, Spain, and especially Greece; uncontrolled migration is one of the most important agenda topics in the international arena. In order to

protect the security of EU citizens, who are uncomfortable with the sharing of wealth, the EU seeks to externalize uncontrolled migration through negotiations and agreements with other countries. However, in the case of Belarus, the situation is somewhat unusual. Although immigrants still pose a great threat for the EU in the crisis in Belarus, and immigrants are used as a tool for diplomatic initiatives, it is different in that the issue is not limited to Belarus, but in the background the efforts of an important actor like Russia is seen.

Since 1996, the EU has been implementing a systematic policy of sanctions and exclusion against Belarus, which is known for its closeness to Russia, which the EU and its long-time ally the USA see as a rival. For this reason, the fact that the refugee issue is not limited to Belarus and the EU, that one of the main actors of the negotiation is Russia, should not be ignored and how the refugee crisis in Belarus is used as a means of global balancing should be well evaluated. For this, Russia's EU policy, the EU's Russia policy, and the US's Russia policy over the EU should be interpreted through the immigration crisis within the framework of the security paradigm.

4. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND, SECURITY PARADIGM AND RUSSIA'S GENERAL ATTITUDE IN THE REGION

Belarus is one of the former Soviet countries that declared its independence after dissolution of USSR in 1991. The situation that was experienced in many former Soviet lands after independence was also seen here, and the country found itself in great poverty during the first years of independence. While poverty was hitting the Belarusians, the former Soviet Supreme Member Alexandr Lukashenko came to power with the elections in 1994 with the promise 'to ensure the re-implementation of the old Soviet system in a modernized and redesigned way' which could be regarded as the first knot in Belarus's destiny to date. As soon as he came to power, he changed everything from the constitution to the flag of the state, and Belarus became a part and/or ally of Russia that seemed independent but was highly integrated with Russia. Considering that Lukashenko had voted against the dissolution of the Soviet Union when he was a Soviet Supreme Member, it will not be difficult to make sense of the Russian influence in his political decisions towards Belarus.

It is also important and should not be under-estimated that Belarus signed a Partnership and Cooperation Agreement with the EU in 1995, just one year after Lukashenko gained power, yet, the EU has not ratified the agreement claiming the

lack of commitment to democracy and political and civil rights (EC, 2021a). Although this stance of the EU is the first official stance that symbolizes the distrust towards Belarus, it is also an important breaking point for Belarus, who gained independence not long before and determined to fight against poverty since afterwards. EU's exclusionary policies have brought Belarus, having not many options, even closer to Russia and Belarus's policies became more integrated with Russia with the State of the Union Agreement signed in 1997. Although this Agreement did not mean the unification of two countries, it included close political, military and economic cooperation. This Agreement, which engaged Belarus well with Russia, brought new sanctions by the EU, and thus the inextricable vicious circle began in relations. This strict approach of the EU, consisting only of sticks and no carrots, has made Belarus a satellite of Russia and a symbol of the permanent presence of Russian policy in the lands neighbouring the EU countries.

On December 8, 1999 'The Treaty on the Establishment of the Union State of Belarus and Russia' was signed as a kind of pinnacle in the series of bilateral documents signed in the second half of the 1990s including: Treaty on the Formation of the Community of Russia and Belarus (concluded on April 2, 1996); Treaty on the Union of Belarus and Russia (April 2, 1997); Charter of the Union of Belarus and Russia (May 23, 1997); Declaration on the Further Unification of Russia and Belarus (December 25, 1998) (Preiherman, 2019). Indeed "Lukashenka's survival strategy always consisted of a balancing act, playing Russia against the West in order to extract benefits from both and operationally, it relied on geopolitical blackmailing of Russia, threatening to seek a rapprochement with the EU to force Moscow to resume subsidising its economy" (Marin, 2020).

When geopolitical location of Belarus is examined, it is seen that Belarus is surrounded by five countries, three of which are EU members, Latvia, Lithuania and Poland, and the other two are Russia and Ukraine. For this reason, Belarus represents an extremely important political area and an important exit door for Russia, which frequently expresses its desire to return to its former power with its policies. However, Belarus, which has been systematically brought closer to Russia and isolated, frequently referred to this point in its statements at the level of the head of state and stated that Belarus would remain an independent state and would not unite with Russia. As a complement to this, Russia's annexation of Ukraine's Crimea in 2014 brought serious concerns for Belarusians (Bag, 2019). Belarusian President Aleksandr Lukashenko warned Russia not to force the two countries to

unite, otherwise this step could -naturally- trigger war, and said that Moscow's initiative would be perceived as a threat by the West and would stand against Russia (Isachenkov, 2019).

However, this statement of Lukashenko was not appreciated enough by the West owing to democratic concerns of the EU. As his message to the West did not receive the necessary response, and on top of that, Belarus began to experience economic difficulties as Russia increased energy prices and decreased subsidies to Belarus. When Russia re-arranged the tax regime and increased the oil prices, Belarus requested the compensation of its economic losses from Russia. It was the end of 2018 when Medvedev, bringing the Union back to the table, indicated that the resumption of subsidies in general was conditional upon Belarus agreeing to deeper integration within the Union State (Sivitski, 2019). Lukashenko's constant beatings from Russia and the EU, which he tried to keep in balance, and the dependency of his not very strong economy turned him into the biggest obstacle to his free movement in the international arena.

Indeed, Belarus' geopolitical loyalty began to fade out following Lukashenko's refusal to recognise the independence of the breakaway republics of Abkhazia and South Ossetia following the Russia-Georgia war in 2008, which contributed to the lifting of some sanctions and the invitation to join the Eastern Partnership in 2009. (Marin, 2020, p. 2). But for Belarus, which adopted the opposite of the political stance desired by Russia after the events in both Georgia and Ukraine, things started to change after 2020 elections. Both the EU and the USA did not recognize the elections held in Belarus in 2020 giving the power to Lukashenko on the grounds that the elections were not held in fair conditions and in a democratic environment; new sanctions were added leaving Belarus without options by the West. Thus, Lukashenko lost one leg of the bilateral balance mechanism and afterwards Belarus started to drift in favour of/to the side of Russia. Having signed the visa facilitation and readmission agreements in the very beginning of 2020 with the EU, Belarus declared on June 28, 2021, that it suspended the readmission deal planting the seeds of the migration crisis. And finally, without many economic options and having not much way out, on September 10, 2021 Belarus did what it never wanted to do and had declared it over and over again: it decided to unite with Russia. Putin announced it by phrasing 'I would like to note with satisfaction that today the entire 28-point program has been accepted' (Russia and Belarus Agree on "State of the Union Program", 2021).

Russia, which has excluded the West from the options for Belarus, has thus put into effect its plans to corner the EU over Belarus. A new crisis thus began for the EU, which has already had great debates and tests on irregular migration within itself and with transit countries for the last decade. With the not-so-secret artificial migration crisis, which was an outcome of the migration engineering that Russia inherited from the Soviet regime, political pressures on the neighbouring EU countries, especially Poland, through Belarus increased. In fact, the embattling country was not directly Belarus, nor were the EU countries bordering Belarus were the embattled ones. The timing was in favour of Russia to further break the weakening Western Bloc following the US withdrawal from Afghanistan and to restore Russia to its former power in the political arena, and uncontrolled immigration -the weak belly of the EU, was one of the most convenient weapons to achieve this.

Immigrants are still one of the biggest separation issues in the EU, member countries tried to give its first tough test in the crisis created by the immigrants who turned up at the EU borders in 2015-2016 owing to which Dublin system lost its functionality. It is not a hidden fact that migration crisis at the borders of Belarus and Poland is a perfect political tool for Lukashenko who were left alone in the region by the EU. However, the table in the middle hides more than meets the eye. The possibility of NATO's, which had been founded against Soviet Russia, possibility of its enlargement to include Ukraine has caused Russia to introduce new policies. For Russia, which wants to weaken the West or at least prevent it from dealing with itself by keeping it busy with other things, such a humanitarian crisis has turned into a tremendous opportunity to distract its rivals in the region while realizing other political goals in a controlled manner.

CONCLUSION AND POLITICAL REMARKS

The Belarusian-Polish migrant crisis was the culmination of the transnational use of state-organized migration and the instrumentalization of people, way beyond the use of immigration as a method of migration diplomacy. This situation initially manifested itself in the form of the migration crisis, which has been at the centre of global politics for the last decade, though; in time it has revealed that it is a planned outcome of the more in-depth policies of the extended actors. In order to better understand the situation on Belarus-Poland borders today, it is necessary to grasp how Lukashenko, president of Belarus, has moulded Minsk's foreign policy since its independence and it is equally important how the EU has made relentless efforts to turn Belarus against Russia and how Moscow has always formulated its policy

in accordance with its interests in the region to counter-balance Western influence permeating the region in particular Belarus.

Never-ending sanctions imposed by the EU and the USA against Belarus under the rule of Lukashenko, who has opposed a Western-style economic model since the first day he came to power in 1994, certainly determined the foundation on which Belarus' foreign policy was based. This paved the way for Lukashenko to establish his close relations with Russia, as he put it: 'two states one policy'. From the moment he came to power in 1994, on the one hand, he preferred a balancing act between Russia and the EU due to its geopolitical and political importance, which is of great importance for both sides, and has tried to increase its gains. Although Belarus has tried to stick to that with the objective of making the best of the two sides, it has soon realised that there are serious qualifications: for one thing the EU's sponsorship of democracy gradually turned into a vicious circle, leading to continual sanctions and isolation of Belarus. For another, Minsk had no practical policy option other than to lean on Moscow more heavily particularly after the presidential elections in 2020, for in that election process the EU began to openly back the opposition.

The geographical location of Belarus, which is almost like a buffer zone between the EU and Russia, is of critical importance for Russia in a possible EU-Russia conflict. Russia seeks to regain its former Soviet-era power. It seems that Russia's intention to re-establish this power over its previous lands takes place at a time when Ukraine is fighting against Russian invasion is far from coincidence and could be evaluated as the product of a specific policy. In this context, the artificial and designed migration crisis created through Belarus is important for Russia, which wants to break the power and resistance of Europe in case of a possible wider conflict in the region involving/against Moscow. Russia, which uses regional dynamics and global problems to serve its own purposes, has thus transformed the migration crisis from being an issue between Belarus and Poland into an instrument in which supranational political concerns are brought to notice. The EU's constant sanctions and isolation policy against Belarus appear as a functional argument that serves Russia's plans. It seems that there is a new evolution towards the German experience, which had manifested itself as a result of the policies of the West. Germany, having collapsed economically after the First World War, paved the way to the Second World War with nationalist feelings as a conclusion of "aggressive policies of the West leaving Germany alone without options".

Europe with a high level of social welfare is an ideal destination for immigrants, and its prosperity is both the strong and paradoxically fragile side of Europe. However, at the point reached today, immigrants, who served as a lever for the development of countries until 50 years ago, have now turned into one of the biggest threat perceptions in Europe's security context. However, Europe who constantly isolate and punish Belarus for its imperfect democracy, harsh policies towards immigrants on its own borders, calls into question the unique and universal values of democracy perception. By turning refugee crisis, the subject of which is "human", into a bargaining tool, the EU leads its perception of democracy under question (Karakoç Dora, 2020b). Addressing the immigration problem, one of the biggest crises of the time, from a humanitarian perspective will cause the issue to remain under the actual importance it deserves of course. Migration is, beyond any doubt, also an important security issue. However, the current policies pursued today bring forth scenarios that are not at all heart-warming for the future.

Immigrants, who were seen as symbols of development until recently by the West, and who would be welcomed as they would be expected to contribute to western societies greatly, have now been used as a political bargaining chip by almost all countries, especially the EU, for the last decade in particular. And what is going on at the Belarusian-Polish border today goes beyond this and shows that "human" is used as a physical pressure element, almost like a war machine. It is important that the migration crisis, which have become the human weapons of modern wars, are sought to be resolved solely from security perspective without taking its humanitarian dimension into consideration.

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