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Is Bosnia and Herzegovina a New Hotspot on the Balkan Route?

Abstract

Almost three years on from when the borders were sealed in March 2016, migrants are still using so-called Balkan Route to enter the Western Europe. The journey becomes now more difficult, expensive and brutal. Most migrants are not in real nor fast transit, nor can they or do they want to stay in the Balkans. While in 2015, when hundred thousands of people arrived to Europe using the Balkan route, from Greece via Macedonia, Serbia and Hungary or Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina (Bosnia) was bypassed by mass movements. Because of closed borders from Serbia to Hungary, Croatia and Romania, the migrants now try to reach the EU respectively Schengen zone from Serbia and Montenegro via Bosnia. This means new challenges for the weak Bosnian state and more uncertainty for the migrants. The total number of recorded arrivals to Bosnia and Herzegovina in 2018 was over 24.000, compared to a total of 218 during the whole of 2017. This entire people are trying to go further to Western Europe but Croatia brings back a large number of people illegally trying to cross the border. These so-called pushbacks are associated with violence and serious injury. What are the possibilities for the migrants to continue their journey? The analysis focuses on the reactions of civil society and media especial in Krajina region, and of the state authorities, as well on the institutional response in terms of legal measures and infrastructural facilities.

Introduction

Although most migrants have hoped for a quick transit through Bosnia and Herzegovina (Bosnia) during 2018, many of them spend more time in this country, as being expected or thought. They can't travel further so easily and many are trapped or stuck in Bosnia or in Serbia¹. The public, as well the state and international organizations and institutions in Bosnia, perceive these people exclusively

¹ To the situation in Serbia in 2018 see Armina Galijaš, Permanently in Transit. Middle Eastern Migrants and Refugees in Serbia. In: Südosteuropa. Journal of Politics and Society. 67,1. 2019. 75-109.

as the migrants in transit and the situation as a temporary issue. Migrants are perceived only as persons who are passing through and once they go through the issue will be resolved. The fact is, a lot of this people are going through, but the new ones are still coming and nobody can create the forecasts and say with certainty for how long this migration route in same or similar extent will be used. Most problems will therefore continue to be addressed on an ad hoc basis and, if possible, resolved as such.

Although the fact is that the number of illegal migrants who have entered the EU in the past year is equal to the average number of tourists who visit Athens in a single day in August,² makes the situation for migrants in Bosnia not easier. On average, there are constantly 4-5.000 migrants in Bosnia, but even with this relative small number Bosnian state is not willing or able to cope.

This inefficiency of the Bosnian state became very evident during the several civil protests in Bihać, when the migrants from Sarajevo Canton were redirected to Una Sana Canton respectively to Bihać. The city was unprepared for this number of migrants and without necessary infrastructure. Citizens of Bihać appealed among others by one of this occasion at the 17 November 2018 to the Ministry of Security, but also to all other state institutions "to protect the state border, in order to put the situation with migrants and refugees in the Una-Sana Canton under control".³ In the same statement they give support to cantonal government and police if they continue to "disable the inflow of new migrants into the Una-Sana Canton area."⁴ In addition, they urge the Federation of Bosnia Railways and bus operators to stop bringing unregistered people without any documents to Bihać. The citizens' representative added that the inhabitants of Bihać are also extremely unsatisfied with the work of the International Organization for Migration (IOM), and a citizen representative stressed: "We do not want inefficiency and non-transparency from them, but help in accordance with the laws of the European Union."⁵

The citizens are trying to address their problems to different recipients and to the different levels of government. Although there is also a latent xenophobia during the protests, the citizens' representatives emphasize that, everyone has to know that they are do not protesting against these people, but against Bosnian political leaders, who ignore the problems and leave citizens alone to solve it.⁶ They point out also that, in their opinion, the organizations with the most money like IOM and UNHCR, do not act in accordance with the standard of their donators from the EU.

² Ivan Krastev, Viktor Orbán and his allies won't win the EU elections, The Guardian, 20 March 2019, https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2019/mar/20/viktor-orban-eu-elections-rightwing-populists-immigration?CMP=Share_iOSApp_Other.

³ Novi protest u Bihaću: Nismo protiv migranata, već lidera, N1, 17 November 2018, <http://rs.n1info.com/Region/a436708/Novi-protest-u-Bihacu-Nismo-protiv-migranata.html>

⁴ N1, Novi protest u Bihaću.

⁵ N1, Novi protest u Bihaću.

⁶ N1, Novi protest u Bihaću.

This short message from *N1* shows complexity of the responsibilities and how many independent actors are involved in the problem. The demands of the citizens of Bihać are not only aimed at the local actors, rather are they very broad. Citizens demand the control of the borders, relocation of the migrants' accommodations, as well the controlled transfer of migrants in USC, as if they try with their requirements to coordinate the whole situation. On 17 November 2018 citizen representative Ramić stressed, that the state needs to solve this problem.⁷ “The migrants have only shown us that we do not have a state,”⁸ added Ramić.

How far the state dysfunctionality influencing the migrant situation in Bosnia? How is the acceptance of migrants in in this country? To what extent is the (un)acceptancy influenced through the media and what are differences and similarities compered to Serbia? Is there any option for migrants to stay in Bosnia or any legally solution for them to continue their journey? Could Bosnia become a new hotspot on the closed Balkan route?

The questions above will be explored on the basis of a series of semi-structured interviews with different stakeholders and a sample of migrants,⁹ as well as detailed analyses of selected documents and reports as well media samples. While the migrants have been crossing the entire Bosna, this paper is focusing on Bihać and Krajina region, due to the high numbers of migrants.

Bevor answering the question above I first attempt to give an accurate picture of the size of this migrant population, and to shed light on their composition in terms of nationality, gender, and age. I illustrate who and how has tried to shelter, nurture and help these people. I also consider the role of the numerous NGOs working in this policy and social field.

Under what conditions do migrants stay and live in Bosnia?

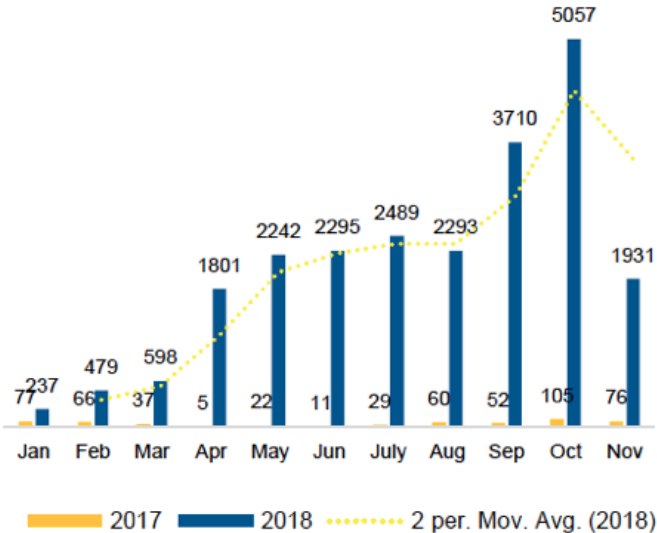
After the closer of the EU borders in March 2016 and increased control of the borders between Serbia and the EU it was just a matter of time until the migrants were “redirected” to Bosnia. Du to long land border between Bosnia and Croatia (932 km) this seems to be the last option for the migrants to reach Western Europe by land. The Council of Ministers of Bosnia adopted in March 2016

⁷ Protest i peticija za izmještanje migranata iz Bihaća, Radio Slobodna Evropa, 17 November 2018, <https://www.slobodnaevropa.org/a/bihac-protest-migranti/29606192.html>.

⁸ Državni vrh nas doživljava kao turiste, a talgo je otvoren da bi se Krajini poslali migrant!, 15 November 2018, USKinfo.ba, <http://www.uskinfo.ba/vijest/intervju-sej-ramic-drzavni-vrh-nas-doživljava-kao-turiste-a-talgo-je-otvoren-da-bi-se-krajini-poslali-migranti/45520>; Also the City Council of Bihać submitted requests to the government: Gradsko vijeće Bihać traži zabranu transporta migranata prema USK, *Faktor.ba*, 4 April 2019, <https://www.faktor.ba/vijest/elizabeta-ii-priredila-prijem-prije-50-godina-charles-je-postao-britanski-princ-hoce-li-i-kralji/25878>.

⁹ The interviews have not been conducted until now. They are carried out during May and June 2019.

the migration and asylum strategy and action plan for 2016-2020¹⁰, but two years later in 2018, thousands of people were living in the streets, fields, forests, or makeshift camps, all over the country, and Bosnia still doesn't seem prepared for this situation.¹¹ Since the beginning of 2018, Bosnia has witnessed a dramatic increase in the number of migrants and refugees entering the country. Compared to the year 2017, the number of migrants has increased more than a hundredfold.



Number of detected refugee and migrant arrivals to Bosnia per Month, January-November 2018¹²

According to the UNHCR date form November 2018 estimated number of refugees and migrants was at this point 4.500-5.000 and available winterized accommodation as of 30 November was 4.144.¹³ The number of detected refugee and migrant arrivals for the period from January to November 2018 was 23.132. The majority of them, 21.320, expressed so-called “an intention to seek asylum”, what means they are registered migrants. The migrants have theoretically the opportunity to express this intention orally or in writing to any police officer or competent official of the Ministry of the Interior at a border checkpoint or within Bosnian territory, and to receive a “certificate of the expressed intention to seek asylum”. The migrants do not apply automatically for asylum and have to wait for the Sector for Asylum (SA) to invite them for an asylum registration interview. This procedure due to

¹⁰ Ministry of Security of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Strategy in the Area of Migrations and Asylum and Action Plan for the Period 2016-2020, March 2016, http://www.msb.gov.ba/PDF/Strategija_ENG_2016.pdf.
¹¹ Nidžara Ahmetašević and Gorana Mlinarević, People on the Move in Bosnia and Herzegovina in 2018: Stuck in the Corridors of the EU, January 2019, https://ba.boell.org/sites/default/files/people_on_the_move_in_bosnia_and_herzegovina_-_21-02-2019_-_web.pdf.
¹² UNHCR, Refugee and Migrant Situation Report, Bosnia and Herzegovina, 1-30 November 2018.
¹³ UNHCR, Refugee and Migrant Situation Report, Bosnia and Herzegovina, 1-30 November 2018.

lack of staff and complicated bureaucracy can take a long time and is quite confusing.¹⁴ Until November 2018 1.356 persons or six percent of all registered migrants had formally been able or willing to lodge their asylum claim with the Sector for Asylum.¹⁵ In 2018 asylum requests were filed by people coming from 27 countries and only 2 persons got a positive response and subsidiary protection.¹⁶

The majority of migrants in 2018 was from Pakistan (33%), followed by migrants from Iran (15%). The third largest groups of migrants were from Syria and Afghanistan (each 12%) followed by Iraqis (9%).¹⁷ The relative high number of Iranians is directly linked to the Serbian abolition of the visa regime for Iran in August 2017.¹⁸ Thus Serbia becomes the first and only country in mainland Europe to offer Iranians visa-free travel. Although the Serbian government points to economic reasons as an explanation,¹⁹ many doubt this and see it as a reward for support in the case of Kosovo. Namely Iran does not recognise Kosovo and thereby supports Serbian foreign policy and its political goals.²⁰ The number of Iranian migrants that have entered Bosnia by September 2018 is more than 100 times higher than the year before. According to data from Bosnia's Foreigners' Affairs Service, 16 Iranians expressed intention to seek asylum in the country in 2017, but by September 2018 this number already stands at 1,647.²¹ The 'fake Iranian tourists' issue was also raised by the Chairman of Bosnia's Council of Ministers, Denis Zvizdić, who said: "The fact is that they come to Serbia as tourists, and emerge in Bosnia without any identification documents."²² Until they reach Serbia they are tourists, after they leave Serbia they become migrants. Serbia received criticism about this from the European Union, and the European Council demanded that it respect EU visa policies. On 8 October 2018, the Serbian government gave in to this pressure and on 16 October it reintroduced its visa requirement

¹⁴ Interview with Nidžara Ahmetašević, 15 February 2019.

¹⁵ UNHCR, Refugee and Migrant Situation Report, Bosnia and Herzegovina, 1-30 November 2018.

¹⁶ The data provided by the Ministry of Security, specifically from the Department for Asylum. See People on the Move in Bosnia and Herzegovina in 2018, 5.

¹⁷ Refugee and migrant country of origin is self-declared when documents are not available. See UNHCR, Refugee and Migrant Situation Report, Bosnia and Herzegovina, 1-30 November 2018.

¹⁸ Armina Galijaš, Permanently in Transit, 105-108.

¹⁹ Srbija ukida vize za državljane Indije i Irana, *Danas*, 22 August 2017, <https://www.danas.rs/drustvo/srbija-ukida-vize-za-drzavljan-indije-i-irana/>.

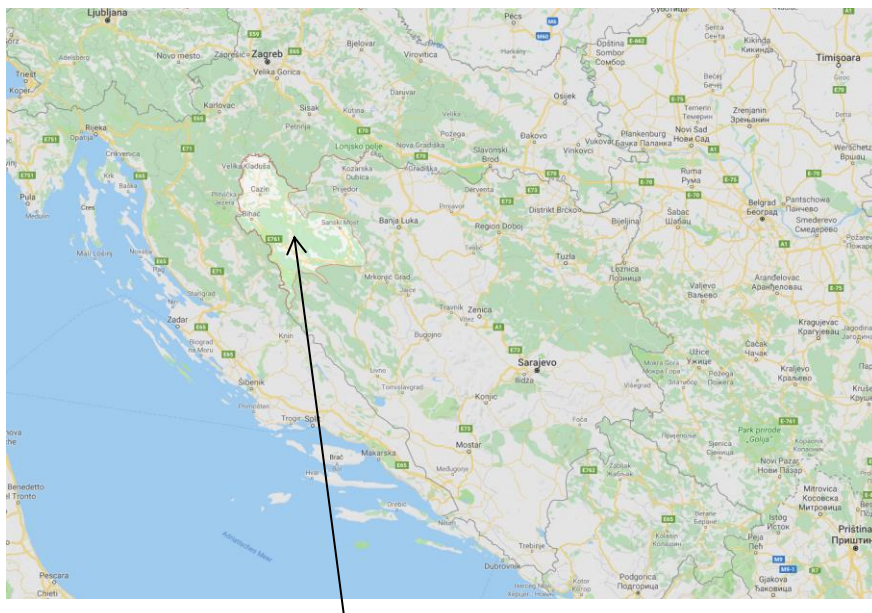
²⁰ Gedošević, Srbija je ukinula vize, *Blic*, 4 July 2018; Veliki poslovni forum Srbija - Iran šansa za naše građevinarstvo, tekstilce, drvnu industriju,, *Blic*, 21 June 2018, <https://www.blic.rs/biznis/veliki-poslovni-forum-srbija-iran-sansa-za-nase-gradevinarstvo-tekstilce-drvnu/kcv6k9g>; "Iran mora da ulaže u srpsku privredu, a njima fale auto-delovi", *b92*, 27 February 2018, https://www.b92.net/biz/vesti/srbija.php?yyvy=2018&mm=02&dd=27&nav_id=1363472.

²¹ Iranians tourists, *N1*, 7. September 2018.

²² Iranians tourists, *N1*, 7. September 2018.

for Iranians.²³ The Serbian minister of the interior, Nebojša Stefanović, said in parliament that Iranians had ‘abused the abolition of visas’.²⁴

The majority of migrants and refugees arrive overland and entering Bosnia in an irregular manner, that means at non-official border crossings. They use two main routes. While the largest population continues to arrive from Serbia, the others come from Montenegro.²⁵ The majority of migrants and refugees coming from Serbia remained in that country after the closure of the so-called Balkan-Route in March 2015. The other main route starts in Greece and runs through Albania and Montenegro into Bosnia.²⁶ According to the activists and volunteers on the field, some of migrants had been on the move for several years. They spend a years in Turkey or Greece. Some others started their journeys several months before reaching Bosnia, but very often all say the same “We need to begin life, waiting around does not mean having a life.”²⁷ During the first months of 2018, migrants quickly moved from border areas toward Sarajevo, but a new trend was observed where migrants and refugees increasingly avoiding Sarajevo and heading directly to Una-Sana Canton (USC) in North-Western Bosnia.



Una-Sana Canton in North-Western Bosnia

²³ EU Forces Serbia to Return Visa Regime for Iranian Passport Holders, Schengen Visa Info, 11 October 2018, <https://www.schengenvisa.info/news/eu-forces-serbia-to-return-visa-regime-for-iranian-passport-holders/>; Cf. Posle kritika iz EU Srbija ukinula bezvizni režim sa Iranom, *Blic*, 10 October 2018, <https://www.blic.rs/vesti/politika/posle-kritika-iz-eu-srbija-ukinula-bezvizni-rezim-sa-iranom/c8yz115>.

²⁴ Vlada Srbije ukinula bezvizni režim za građane Irana, *Radio Free Europe*, 10 October 2018, <https://www.slobodnaevropa.org/a/29536566.html>; Službeni glasnik Republike Srbije, Odluka o prestanku važenja Odluke o ukidanju viza za ulazak u Republiku Srbiju za državljane Islamske Republike Iran, no. 75, 9 October 2018.

²⁵ UNHCR, Refugee and Migrant Situation Report, Bosnia and Herzegovina, 1-30 November 2018, p 2. See also Institucija ombudsmena za ljudska prava BiH, Specijalni izvještaj o stanju u oblasti migracija u Bosni i Hercegovini, Novembar 2018, p 68.

²⁶ OSCE, Assessment: Migrant and refugee Situation in Bosna and Herzegovina. Overview of the intervention of key actors in the field, 25 September 2018.

²⁷ Nidžara Ahmetašević and Gorana Mlinarević, People on the Move in Bosnia and Herzegovina in 2018.

The USC location is linked to attempts to enter EU respectively Schengen zone. The majority of the migrants in Bosnia was in 2018 in Una-Sana Canton, in the cities Bihać and Velika Kladuša from where is the shortest distance to Slovenia, which is a part of Schengen zone. Schengen zone is the actual begin of the final destination for migrants, which is often Germany, France or Italy. Croatia is 70 km wide here and if everything goes well for migrants, this is the fastest way to cross it.

If we compare the numbers of all registered migrants during the 2018 (ca. 24.000) with the number of migrants currently (February 2019) stayed in Bosnia (4.500-5.000) it's obviously that the route is in function. It must be emphasized that the migrants continued to arrive to Bosnia, with e.g. 1,117 detected arrivals in February 2019.²⁸ Although under difficult circumstances the people still move on.

This influx has challenged the human and financial resources of responsible institutions. Similar as in Serbia, EU decided to give support for the migrants in these countries. Since the beginning of the refugee crisis in Serbia until July 2018, the European Union has allocated more than €25 million in humanitarian aid to assist refugees and migrants. Furthermore, "approximately €80 million have been allocated by the European Commission and EU Member States to assist Serbia in effectively managing the migration flow. EU funds are used for better border management, running costs of the centres and also for improving reception conditions and provisions of services in the education and the health sector."²⁹ The assistance also includes the provision of informal education. But different as in Serbia, with the aim of preventing major humanitarian and security issues, EU decides to direct its entire donation in the total amount of EUR 9,2 million for migrants in Bosnia toward IOM, UNHCR and UNICEF, instead the local government.³⁰ The EU probably tried to avoid allegedly corrupt Bosnian politicians and distributed money direct to the international organization, but stripping the state authorities from any responsibility, and taking over their role, could be dangerous. It allows a situation where the blame is always possible to be pushed back and forth and shifted among the actors. "(O)rganizations that became responsible for distribution of money are stating that the government has been responsible for the provision of the accommodation, while the government has stated that it is the UN agencies and their related organizations that received the money for that purpose."³¹ The Operational Headquarters of the Ministry of Security of Bosnia for managing the migrant situation has appointed International Organization for Migration (IOM) as a leading organization that will prioritize its activities in establishing the Temporary Reception Centers for

²⁸ UNHCR, Inter Agency Operational Update, Bosnia and Herzegovina, 1-28 February 2019, <https://www.undp.org/content/dam/unct/bih/PDFs/UNCTBiHSitReps/Inter-agency%20refugee%20and%20migrant%20operational%20update-%20February%202019.pdf>.

²⁹ European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations, European Commission, 28 March 2019, https://ec.europa.eu/echo/printpdf/where/europe-and-central-asia/serbia_en.

³⁰ More about EU funding see in Nidžara Ahmetašević and Gorana Mlinarević, People on the Move in Bosnia and Herzegovina in 2018, 40-46.

³¹ Nidžara Ahmetašević and Gorana Mlinarević, People on the Move in Bosnia and Herzegovina in 2018, 8.

migrants in Una-Sana Canton. IOM as leading organization has received EUR 7,342.168. The most funds were spend on shelter, containers and equipment 41%, 27% on food and 11% on clothing, footwear and hygienic items.³²

After the closure of the borders in (2016) Serbia has received the financial support from the EU, which is sufficient for the current (2019) number of migrants for their basic needs. The number of migrants in Serbia in 2019 is very similar to them in Bosnia and varies between 4.000 and 5.000. All migrants are permanently in need of humanitarian assistance.

In November 2018 some more than 4.000 spaces were available across six location in Bosnia, not including few safe accommodation made available to a limited number of particular vulnerable cases. More than 1.200 asylum seekers and migrants were accommodates in Bira TRC³³ in Bihać , ca. 550 in Miral facility in Velika Kladuša, up to 580 in Borići Dormitory in Bihać , ca. 400 in Sedra TRC in Cazin, ca. 400 in Ušivak TRC in Hadžići by Sarajevo, ca. 150 in AC Trnovo by Sarajevo, 250 in RRC Salakovac near Mostar and in an additional location in Sarajevo called House of All (HoA) are accommodated between 70 and 100 people.³⁴ Unidentified number of refugees and migrants are privately accommodated or squatting in Sarajevo and USC, as well some of them are sleeping rough in other location. According to the report “People on the Move in Bosnia” the accommodation solutions provided at the end of 2018 have been in majority of cases below any standards needed for human and dignified life.³⁵

If we compare the financial situation between Serbia and Bosnia, as well the controlled distribution of resources, Serbia’s advantage it’s obvious. Serbia has also been faced with the problem for a longer time since 2015, but on the other hand Bosnia has had enough time to prepare for the foreseeable influx of migrants and did not take or did not want to take an advantage of that.

What determines the acceptance of the migrants in Bosnia?

In recent years the migrants are not the first people from the Middle East who have come to Bosnia in larger numbers. Small countries such as Bosnia and Herzegovina saw large percentage increases in

³² Financial overview of the response to the migrant situation in Una-Sana Canton with the support from the European Union, IOM, 8 February 2019, <https://bih.iom.int/pbn/financial-overview-response-migrant-situation-una-sana-canton-support-european-union>

³³ TRC is Transit/Reception Centre, AC is Asylum Centre, RC is Reception Centre, RRC is Refugee Reception Centre, IC is Immigration Centre

³⁴ For more information about accommodation see UNHCR, Refugee and Migrant Situation Report, Bosnia and Herzegovina, 1-30 November 2018, p 2-5, 21-22, as well for Salakovac, Delijaš and IC Istočno Sarajevo see Institucija ombudsmena za ljudska prava BiH, Specijalni izvještaj o stanju u oblasti migracija u Bosni i Hercegovini, Novembar 2018, 28-34.

³⁵ Nidžara Ahmetašević and Gorana Mlinarević, People on the Move in Bosnia and Herzegovina in 2018.

tourist arrivals after the Arab Spring.³⁶ After this revolution, which destabilized many Arabic traditional holiday destinations such as Libya, Tunisia and Egypt, the Arabs discovered Bosnia.³⁷ Bosnia, where around half the population is Muslim, has become increasingly popular with Arab tourists in recent years, capitalising on its lush natural beauty and relatively low costs.³⁸ The tourists are coming to Bosnia to escape the summer heat at home, and to discover and enjoy mountainous, rivers and seas.³⁹

Since the Arab tourists, but also investors began in significant number to visit Bosnia prejudice against them joined fear and even open expression of hate speech. They spread the trend of offensive, xenophobic and stereotypical comments against them. The users of social media bother their alleged arrogance on resorts nationwide and behavior in restaurants and on the streets. In Bosnia where the people wear European-style clothing the sight of burqas and traditional Arab robes is also worrying for some. The women in Burkas are often called ninjas and the Arabs are often described as backward. "We don't want to have them in our Restaurant, because they leave the mess and they are very noisy," said women at the reception in a hip Sarajevo's restaurant.

Although many Bosnians are sharing the same religion with the majority of the Arabs and they have very often Arabic names, they don't know more about them than average European citizen. The life in Arabic countries is much more differentiated than the medial pictures in Bosnia and Herzegovina are offering. There are any or very few texts about Arabic culture, cinema, music or literature, but there are lately a lot of newspaper articles and TV-debates about Islamic/Arabic radicalism and especially abuse of women and girls.⁴⁰ Al Arabs are in these articles equated and there is hardly to find a difference between Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Brunei, Oman, Tunis or Emirates, and ultimately also

³⁶ José L. Groizard, Mohanad Ismael, María Santana, The economic consequences of political upheavals: the case of the Arab Spring and international tourism, Working Paper, 26th April 2016, https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Mohanad_Ismael/publication/301889240_The_economic_consequences_of_political_upheavals_the_case_of_the_Arab_Spring_and_international_tourism/links/572b1f9408ae2efbfdbe84.pdf, 6-7, see also M. Arslanagić, Čime se bave arapske firme na Ilidži: Kupuju zemlju i nude svoje turističke aranžmane, Faktor, 15.1.2016, <http://www.faktor.ba/vijest/cime-se-bave-arapske-firme-na-ilidzi-kupuju-zemlju-i-nude-svoje-turisticke-aranzmane-foto-203244>.

³⁷ M. Arslanagić, Čime se bave arapske firme na Ilidži: Kupuju zemlju i nude svoje turističke aranžmane, Faktor, 15.1.2016, <http://www.faktor.ba/vijest/cime-se-bave-arapske-firme-na-ilidzi-kupuju-zemlju-i-nude-svoje-turisticke-aranzmane-foto-203244>.

³⁸ Andrew MacDowall, Middle Eastern property investments draw mixed reaction, Gulf interest has raised concerns in central and eastern Europe, Financial Times, 26.4.2017

³⁹ Interview with Deniz Ardović, Project manager in Sarajevo Resort Osenik, Osenik, 26.4.2017. For more about Arab tourists in Bosnia see Armina Galijaš, Arab tourists are (not) welcome!, in: Nerzuk Curak, Judith Brand (Hg.): Politics of building peace in the region: Burdens from the past and visions for the future. Sarajevo 2018. 371-386.

⁴⁰ Here only few examples: „Woman was beheaded because she went on to the market without her husband“, 29. December 2016, <https://www.radiosarajevo.ba/vijesti/svijet/zeni-odrubili-glavu-jer-je-otisla-na-pijacu-bez-muza/249219>; She was trapped by ISIS: They do not behave like humans!, 15. March 2016, <http://www.avaz.ba/clanak/225000/bila-zarobljena-kod-isil-a-oni-se-ne-ponasaju-kao-ljudi>; Repeatedly raped, 20. March 2016, <https://www.slobodnaevropa.org/a/idil-uz-kontracepciju-zrtve-siluje-bez-prestanka/27622074.html>, Arabs are giving \$ 160,000 for virgin Bosnian girl, 10. June 2016, <https://www.express.hr/life/arapi-za-djevicu-iz-bih-daju-160000-dolara-5542>; Women from Bosnia are increasingly becoming wives of married Arab businessmen's, 6. June 2016, <https://www.blic.rs/vesti/republika-srpska/zene-iz-bih-sve-cesce-postaju-supruge-arapskih-biznismena/mvsc5h7>. More about by Emina Žuna, Arapi u raljama zapadnih medija: Silovanje, pedofilija i javna pogubljenja, 13. January 2017, <https://analiziraj.ba/2017/01/13/arapi-u-raljama-zapadnih-medija-silovanja-pedofilija-i-javna-pogubljenja/>.

ISIS, although the Arab World in a fact consists of 22 countries. But according to the Bosnian media report there are fast all the same, bad Arab men and oppressed Arab women.⁴¹

Although investment and tourists are much needed in this country, and during the economic analysts and Arabic partners emphasize and welcoming all these investments for Bosnia⁴² the population show some kind of resistance and fear. Negative comments and xenophobic reactions against Arabs were widespread in Bosnia's news-papers, social media and internet portals. The reactions seem to be inspired by some kind of cultural racism, based on prejudices and the idea that these two cultures are fundamentally incompatible and cannot co-exist in the same society. Some Bosnians complain about a culture clash with visitors and are concerned about creeping conservatism. The predominant Muslim inhabitants of Sarajevo were restrained or openly opposed to the new-comers. Middle-aged Bosnian women sad, "They are welcome to visit us, but please let's go back where they came from".⁴³ Although the Arab investments in Serbia are much bigger and more effective than in Bosnia,⁴⁴ also many intellectuals in media are against such investments in Bosnia. Usually they are starting discussions with the words, "We don't have anything against Arabs or Arabic and other foreign inventions, but..."⁴⁵

Member of the Bosnian Academy of Sciences, a professor of Arabic studies at the University of Sarajevo, Esad Duraković defined in summer 2016 the selling of the Bosnian property to the Arabs as Arabic invasion and Arabic conquest of this country and he describes this as only the begin of the capture.⁴⁶ He said also at the end of interview in a very popular TV show, "I'm worried about the future of my children and my descendants!"⁴⁷ Similar as professor Duraković argues also his colleague professor Rešid Hafizović.⁴⁸

These discussions about the Arabs took place in Bosnia during the refugee crisis 2015 and 2016, when the hundred thousand of Arabs among others people from Middle East and Afghanistan went on the Balkan route to the EU, but bypassed Bosnia. But in 2018 and 2019 a lot of migrants mostly

⁴¹ Emina Žuna, Arapi u raljama zapadnih medija.

⁴² Arapi kupuju nekretnine u BiH, Al Jazeera Balkans, 23. July 2016, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rNptAf_Td6E; Interview with Hana Mešić, South European Investment Company (SEIC), Sarajevo, 25. April 2017, Deniz Ajdarević, Srajevo Resort Osenik, 26. April 2017

⁴³ Oko 600 Arapa prijavilo prebivalište u BiH, RTRS, 6.9.2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oHuTQJ1CnQU>

⁴⁴ Belgrade Waterfront has been the most high-profile Gulf real estate investment in the western Balkans. The \$3bn project on a 1m sq m site by the River Sava in the Serbian capital is backed by Abu Dhabi-based developer Eagle Hills, headed by Mohamed Alabbar. See Andrew MacDowall, Middle Eastern property investments draw mixed reaction, Gulf interest has raised concerns in central and eastern Europe, Financial Times, 26.4.2017.

⁴⁵ Politički magazin *Pošteno*, FTV, 24 October 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UnFWuL5jiv4>

⁴⁶ Pressing: Esad Duraković, N1, 30 November 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sCSHgDta8qo>

⁴⁷ Pressing: Esad Duraković, N1, 30 November 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sCSHgDta8qo>

⁴⁸ Politički magazin *Pošteno*, FTV, 24 October 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UnFWuL5jiv4>; While some argue darkly that Gulf investors' interest in the Balkans is driven by strategic or religious motives, Ivan Čakarević says for Financial Times, "It is a favorable crossroads location, a cost-competitive labour force and aspirations to EU membership make this region an attractive investment case," he believes that the underlying attraction of the Balkans is more prosaic. Andrew MacDowall, Middle Eastern property investments draw mixed reaction, Gulf interest has raised concerns in Central and Eastern Europe, Financial Times, 26 April 2017.

also from the Middle East, Afghanistan and Pakistan now try to reach the Western Europe by passing Bosnia. Unlike investors and tourists these people flee from their homes and need protection. Do these facts have influenced the acceptance of this population?

At the beginning of 2018 the empathy and helpfulness of population in Bosnia was present and the media image corresponded to this in large measure. The Bosnians could recall their war (1992-1995) experiences and they shared their compassion with the migrants⁴⁹, but the initial sympathy and kindness of the local population towards migrants declined over time. Here are three main reasons for this:

- mismanagement of the state
- various interest groups in power
- media coverage

Distrust in the state expressed a citizen of Sarajevo already in May 2018 as follows: “Citizens help as best they can and the government is nowhere to be seen. In this case, both the citizens and the refugees rely on themselves.” The migrants needed initially the help of various NGOs, as well the help of the population. When the state should take over this role and did not do it, the situation turned over. Confusing situations and conditions, absence of systematic and organized state-run support, insufficient humanitarian aid, as well shifting of responsibility between different levels of government and humanitarian organisations contributed to the change of opinion. For example, the police of USK Canton take the migrants off the train in Bosanska Otoka (50 km from Bihać) and prevent so their arrival to Bihać. Then they drive the migrants to entity border with Republika Srpska. They leave them there without water, food or medical help. The police of Republika Srpska send the migrants back to USK canton. The local USK police will not allow it.⁵⁰ That's an obvious example of transferring of responsibility between different levels of government in Bosnia. In May 2018 the media reporting was getting worse and influenced also the acceptance in the population. Since spring 2018 the migrants were described as thieves, rapists, terrorists, addicts and as a threat to the population.⁵¹ Especially the “click-oriented” media begin to dominate with sensationalist titles, but also the traditional ones. The covers of the most widely read newspapers in Bosnia appear with titles such as “Migrant tried to rape a mother of two children”⁵², “In possession of the migrants were

⁴⁹ Latić već četiri mjeseca hrani dnevno 600 migranata, N1, 28 May 2018, <http://ba.n1info.com/Vijesti/a263059/Hrani-migrante-u-restoranu-u-Kladusi.html>; Migranti u BiH: Policija nas ne tuče, a građani nas hrane!, Deutsche Well, 14 May 2018, <https://www.dw.com/hr/migranti-u-bih-policija-nas-ne-tuce-a-gradani-nas-hrane/a-43765243>

⁵⁰ Bh. pingpong sa migrantima, Deutsche Well, 9 April 2019, <https://www.dw.com/bs/bh-pingpong-sa-migrantima/av-48252654>

⁵¹ Patka - dokumentarni film o medijskom izvještavanju o migrantima u BiH, Mediacentar Sarajevo, February 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kpR1EVBfcVY>.

⁵² Dnevni avaz, 17 July 2018.

found 15,000 euros, opium and speed...”⁵³, “Dramatically in the center of Sarajevo: Migrants beat and rob”⁵⁴, “Migrant crisis: Over 20.000 illegally migrants”⁵⁵ etc. There is certainly crime among migrants, but no more than among the local population. Most studies and experience in Europe and neighboring Serbia, through which more than a million refugees have passed, show that migrants are not responsible for the increase of crime.⁵⁶ Most crimes of migrants are trivial, and injuries most occurred in fights between migrants themselves. The violence directed towards non-migrants is very rare.⁵⁷ These facts are drowned out by media coverage.

If we compare this situation with the situation in Serbia at the beginning of the crisis we can see important differences right away. The Serbian state authorities have acted strategically and have played an important role in deflecting potential protests among the population into what has been relatively good acceptance of the migrants.⁵⁸ Former prime minister and current president Aleksandar Vučić publicly denounced any protests that occurred, and has kept a firm grip through his substantially authoritarian rule⁵⁹ - there is hardly any opposition in Serbia left, respectively all voices against Vučić’s rule have been silenced. The Serbian media, closely bound to official politics, has given its backing, contrasting a praiseworthy Serbia with its recalcitrant neighbours: ‘Images of migrants in Belgrade’s parks and smiling policemen holding migrant children were juxtaposed in the media with cages in which migrants were being held in Hungary, or angry Macedonian officers beating migrants on the border.’⁶⁰ During 2015 and in the first six months of 2016, such a slant on the news was widely disseminated. It condemned Hungary and Croatia, self-styled ‘guardians of the gates to Europe’, and also Bulgaria.⁶¹ Serbia was different. Vučić proclaimed that his country would ‘never erect walls’ or restrict the movement of people seeking protection. He had a decisive influence on public opinion.⁶² The media emphasized the humanitarian side of the migration,

⁵³ Dnevni avaz, 8 May 2018.

⁵⁴ Dnevni avaz, 6 May 2018.

⁵⁵ Dnevni list, 6 November 2018.

⁵⁶ Stefan Veselinović, VICE Srbija istražuje: Koliko je izbeglička kriza uticala na kriminal, *Vice*, 2 November 2017

⁵⁷ See AbrašMedia, Više od 3.000 migranata odgovorno za devet krivičnih djela u BiH, 11 May 2018. <http://abramedia.info/vise-od-3-000-migranata-odgovorno-za-devet-krivicnih-djela-u-bih/>

⁵⁸ See Armina Galijaš, Permanently in Transit.

⁵⁹ Interview with Mirjana Milenkovski, UNHCR, Public Information Unit, Belgrade, 16 March 2018; Cf. also Serbian PM: We Acted in European Way, Neighbors Didn’t, *CNN*, 16. September 2015, <https://edition.cnn.com/videos/world/2015/09/16/amanpour-serbia-refugee-crisis-aleksandar-vucic-intv.cnn>; Vučić migrantima: Ovdje ste uvek dobrodošli, osećajte se sigurno, *Blic*, 19 August 2015, <https://www.blic.rs/vesti/drustvo/vucic-migrantima-ovdje-ste-uvek-dobrodosli-osecajte-se-sigurno/ncwms15>; Vučić: Neevropsko ponašanje mora da se zaustavi, *RTS*, 16 September 2015, <http://www.rts.rs/page/stories/sr/story/9/politika/2040446/vucic-neeuropejsko-ponasanje-mora-da-se-zaustavi.html>.

⁶⁰ Beznec / Speer / Stojić Mitrović, *Governing the Balkan Route*, 56. Cf. Zoran B. Jevtović / Predrag Đ. Bajić, Slika o migrantima u diskursu dnevne štampe Srbije, in: Lutovac / Mrđa, eds, *Savremene migracije i društveni razvoj*, 97-110.

⁶¹ Dejana J. Kostić, Policing the Border, Producing the State. A Critical Discourse Analysis of Press Representation of Conflict on the Serbian-Hungarian Border During ‘Refugee Crisis’, in: Lutovac / Mrđa, eds, *Savremene migracije i društveni razvoj*, 111-121; Jevtović / Bajić, Slika o migrantima u diskursu dnevne štampe Srbije, 102.

⁶² Vučić: Srbija neće podizati zid, makar ćuskije padale s neba!, *Telegraf*, 25 October 2015, <https://www.telegraf.rs/vesti/politika/1819811-vucic-srbija-neece-podizati-zid-makar-cuskije-padale-s-neba>; Filip Avramović / Igor Jovanović, Serbia Will Take in Some Migrants, Vucic Says. *Balkan Insight*, 2 September 2015,

together with the humanity of Serbian citizens, effectively triggering empathetic attitudes. Many people became directly engaged in helping the refugees.⁶³ Vučić's approach at the time was in line with the politics of the German chancellor, Angela Merkel. He was calculating his politics carefully with an eye on EU enlargement, and he capitalized on the refugee crisis.⁶⁴ Accession to the European Union remains a strategic goal for the Republic of Serbia, but it involves compliance with European values and standards, and not least respect for human rights. A strategic legislatively and institutionally sound migration policy seemed particularly important for furthering the accession process.⁶⁵ The benchmarks had been set by the EU. In the midst of the crisis, in July 2016, Serbia formally opened Chapters 23 and 24, which deal with issues of human rights and anti-discrimination. The Serbian Ministry of the Interior has been negotiating Chapter 24 with the EU, and the action plan for its implementation covers topics such as migration, asylum, visa policy, external borders, and the Schengen regime (in which border controls are dropped).⁶⁶ On the other hand, Bosnia don't have like Serbia a similar motivation and reasonably concrete strategic goal of obtaining EU membership, and Bosnian treatment of migrants and refugees hasn't been influenced by EU conditionality. In this particular "migrant's case", it becomes apparent that the political actors do not pursue a long-term plan or policy. This corresponds to the general picture of politics in this country. We cannot say that Bosnia is a more or less democratic state than authoritarian Serbia, but Bosnia has certainly more interest groups in power than Serbia. All these different groups/political parties have control over certain media,⁶⁷ and use them for the daily political conflicts in the framework of public discourses. During in Serbia a humanitarian approach is being enforced by autocratic means in Bosnia is any clear approach missing. On the other hand if the EU loses the interest on Serbia, Serbia's pragmatic approach might also very well change.⁶⁸ In the case of Serbia we can see how an ideological persistence of the EU – which can also be seen partially as authoritarian – has a positive effect on an authoritative society, and how that can quickly turn over.

<http://www.balkaninsight.com/en/article/serbia-to-receive-certain-number-of-migrants-pm-says-09-01-2015#sthash.s7vLCdOV.dpuf>.

⁶³ There were dissenting voices: Mihalj Bimbo, mayor of the Kanjiža municipality in Vojvodina, claimed that 'foreigners do not have the basic elements of intelligence and culture'; but such outbursts were very rare. See Gojković Turunz, *The Cooperation Between the State Institutions*, 204. Cf. Jelačić, ed, *Challenges of the Migrant-Refugee Crisis*, 15; Jevtović / Bajić, *Slika o migrantima u diskursu dnevne štampe Srbije*, 109.

⁶⁴ El-Shaarawi / Razsa, *Movements upon Movements*, 8. Cf. Milan / Pirro, *Interwoven Destinies in the 'Long Migration Summer'*.

⁶⁵ For details cf. Beznec / Speer / Stojić Mitrović, *Governing the Balkan Route*, 29-60.

⁶⁶ For the action plan for Chapter 23 cf. Republika Srbija, *Pregovaračka grupa za poglavlje 23, Akcioni plan za poglavlje 23*, April 2016, —http://www.bezbednost.org/upload/document/akcioni_plan_23.pdf; for Chapter 24 cf. Republika Srbija, *Pregovaračka grupa za poglavlje 24, Akcioni plan za poglavlje 24*. *Pravda, sloboda, bezbednost*. 1 March 2016, http://www.bezbednost.org/upload/document/akcioni_plan_pg_24.pdf; Cf. Sonja Tošković, *The Human Rights*, 50-51; Stojić Mitrović, *Serbian Migration Policy*, 1115-1116.

⁶⁷ *Media freedom in Bosnia and Herzegovina*, European Parliament, 14 November 2018, http://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/E-8-2018-005784_EN.html.

⁶⁸ Armina Galijaš, *Permanently in Transit*, 105.

How to stay in or how to leave Bosnia?

According to the journalist and activist Nidžara Ahmetašević some migrants are tired of the journey and are willing to stay in Bosnia, but, as she emphasized, it is almost impossible to get an overview of the complicated bureaucracy in this respect and to complete an asylum application.⁶⁹ Flyers made for the migrants with the aim of explaining their rights and further steps confirm Ahmetašević's statement. The concrete steps, rights and possibilities are explained imprecisely and after repeated and thorough reading they remained unclear.⁷⁰ There are several factors which hinder fair and efficient access to asylum like: a number of circumstances within which the Service for Foreigners' Affairs (SFA) do not re-issue attestations on intention to seek asylum; the migrants with no registered address cannot schedule an interview by SFA; the SA has limited capacity to register and process asylum claims and has been slow to schedule registration procedures; the need to pay a BAM 10.00 administrative fee for Certificates of Residence (charged by the SFA); a lack of interpretation, translation and explanation.⁷¹ All these reasons are again directly or indirectly connected to Bosnia dysfunctionality and the number of involved actors. As presented in "Bihać case" responsibility is often pushed back and forth from one government unit or level to another.

There is also discrepancy between praxis and law. The limited access as well as slowness in issuing asylum seeker cards prevent access to the rights provided by the Law on Asylum. Some migrants are waiting for hours to express their intention for seeking asylum.⁷² Sometimes previously issued cards have also been allowed to expire, despite timely requests for their extension. Further problem is that a lot of the main actors don't possess basic information on how to deal with the new situation. E.g. Service for Foreigners' Affairs in Bosnia stated that they have not received uniform guidelines for handling migrants and refugees in vulnerable situations.⁷³ Health and social care is unevenly provided, and depends on the location and the type of assistance needed, as well on human and financial capacities, which are very often insufficient. The current response is comprised of a patchwork of

⁶⁹ Interview with Nidžara Ahmetašević, 15 February 2019. See also Nidžara Ahmetašević and Gorana Mlinarević, *People on the Move in Bosnia and Herzegovina in 2018*, 13-17.

⁷⁰ The most information is written in Bosnian/Croatian/Serbian language and not easily available in English or some mother tongue of the migrants. The procedure between "expression of intention to seek asylum" and "asylum application" described and issued even by for migrants very important NGO like the Legal Aid Network "Vasa prava" is not clear and not well described. See *Azil u Bosni i Hercegovini*, http://www.vasaprava.org/wp-content/uploads/downloads/2011/04/Azil-brosura_2010.pdf. The description issued by the Ministry of Security of Bosnia and Herzegovina contains more details, but not more clarity and the information are available only in b/c/s language. See *Rulebook on asylum in Bosnia and Herzegovina*, <http://msb.gov.ba/Zakoni/akti/default.aspx?id=1741&langTag=en-US>

⁷¹ UNHCR, *Refugee and Migrant Situation Report, Bosnia and Herzegovina, 1-30 November 2018*, to lack of administration see *Institucija ombudsmena za ljudska prava BiH, Specijalni izvještaj o stanju u oblasti migracija u Bosni i Hercegovini, Novembar 2018*, p 29.

⁷² Uprkos problemima, mnoge izbjeglice žele ostati u BiH, Al Jazeera Balkans, 14 April 2018, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Fx6D5G4vk7E>.

⁷³ OSCE, *Assessment: Migrant and refugee Situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Overview of the intervention of key actors in the field*, 25 September 2018.

more systematic and ad hoc healthcare provision solutions.⁷⁴ There is also a lack of clear protocols or standard operating procedures where roles and responsibilities are defined, as well of coordination between different levels of government, and between government agencies and organizations.⁷⁵

As already in Serbia so is now in Bosnia the role of numerous NGOs and CSOs very important. These organizations are an important support during the crisis and an important partner in migration issues.⁷⁶ NGOs are currently in Bosnia some of the main providers of direct humanitarian assistance to migrants. This is recognized by stakeholders such as the SFA, police bodies and international organizations, which consistently refer migrants to NGOs. NGOs, CSOs and associations as *pomozi.ba*, *Are You Syrious?* or *Red Cross* are engaged countrywide, in reception centres as well as in those locations with the highest number of migrants.⁷⁷ Also small local organisations like *Solidarnost* or *Žene sa Une* were the first to respond in Bihać. They provided basic help, food and NFI (Non-food items).⁷⁸ The mayor of Bihać Šuhret Fazlić stressed: “Without NGOs and IOM we would be completely alone in solving of all problems related to the migrant population.”⁷⁹ It is also certain that no-one of the migrants would never have been able alone to access the asylum system without the support and representation of NGOs or volunteers.

The state alone doesn't offer any serious perspective or possibility to the migrants to stay in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Although some families had managed to become asylum in Bosnia, but they are an exception that confirms the rule.

Onward travel through Croatia is becoming also more and more difficult. Migrants have frequently been stopped at the state borders and forcibly turned back, often with excessive use of force, accompanied by violence and serious injury. Asylum-seekers have reported that they were hit, deprived of their belongings, and threatened with guns. They have also been denied access to asylum procedures after crossing the border.⁸⁰ Nevertheless, many migrants manage to cross Croatia. The volunteers say that, there are the days when everyone comes through. As if there is an unofficial

⁷⁴ UNHCR, Refugee and Migrant Situation Report, Bosnia and Herzegovina, 1-30 November 2018, 9.

⁷⁵ OSCE, Assessment: Migrant and refuge Situation in Bosna and Herzegovina.

⁷⁶ Armina Galijaš, Permanently in Transit.

⁷⁷ OSCE, Assessment: Migrant and refuge Situation in Bosna and Herzegovina, 7.

⁷⁸ Nidžara Ahmetašević and Gorana Mlinarević, People on the Move in Bosnia and Herzegovina in 2018, 23.

⁷⁹ Migranti u Bihaću smješteni u zgradu bez prozora i vrata, Aljazeera Balkans, 28 April 2018,

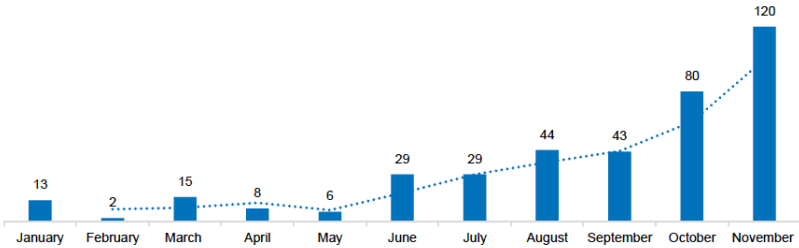
<http://balkans.aljazeera.net/video/migranti-u-bihacu-smjesteni-u-nedovrsenu-zgradu>.

⁸⁰ European Council on Refugees and Exiles (ECRE), Push Backs and Police Violence on the Rise at Croatian Border, Report Finds, 9 March 2018, <https://www.ecre.org/push-backs-and-police-violence-on-the-rise-at-croatian-border-report-finds/>. Cf. Centar za mirovne studije, Izveštaj o nezakonitim i nasilnim protjerivanjima izbjeglica iz Republike Hrvatske, 28 February 2018,

https://www.cms.hr/system/article_document/doc/501/IZVJE_TAJ_O_NEZAKONITIM_I_NASILNIM_PROTJERIVANJIMA_IZBJEGLICA_IZ_REPUBLIKE_HRVATSKE.pdf; Alarmantno u Krajini. Ljudi se boje, nema dovoljno hrane, *Fokus*, 27 July 2018, <https://www.fokus.ba/vijesti/bih/alarmantno-u-krajini-ljudi-se-boje-nema-dovoljno-hrane-foto/1178674/>; Christian Jakob, Kroatien ist so rabiät wie Ungarn, *die Tageszeitung*, 8 August 2018, <http://www.taz.de/!5521293/>; Shaun Walker, Refugees Crossing from Bosnia 'Beaten and Robbed by Croatian Police', *The Guardian*, 15 August 2018, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/aug/15/refugees-crossing-from-bosnia-beaten-and-robbed-by-croatian-police>.

agreement that let through certain number of people.⁸¹ The migrants are prevented from traveling by force and severity of the Croatian border police, but on the other hand, they get the information that is somehow still possible to get through. This is also confirmed by the numbers of migrants who go in and out. From 25.000 registered migrants in 2018, at the moment are 4-5.000 in Bosnia, and new one are still coming in. Since refugees and other migrants cannot legally get to Western Europe, they have been also increasingly dependent on traffickers. Transit migration has been recriminalized, and refugees and migrants are in a state of extreme vulnerability. Yet, even though it has decreased, and even though transit has become more dangerous and financially more costly, the flow of migrants has not stopped. The smugglers' prices are enormous, and according to some journalists' reports the price to cross the Balkan Route costs up to 10.000 euros.⁸² According to "People on the Move" smugglers were asking 4,500 euro from Sarajevo to Trieste.⁸³ Many of the migrants have become victims of trafficking on their journeys, or are potential victims of slavery because it is unimaginable that all of them can afford the smugglers' prices.⁸⁴ Also "unaccompanied minors are recruited as 'agents' for smugglers with the task to find 'customers', and in return they get free rides to the EU after certain number of customers, and up to 200 euros per person they bring to their bosses."⁸⁵

There is also increase in the number of migrants interested to return to their countries of origin through IOM's Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration programmes⁸⁶.



Number of Assisted Voluntary Returns, January-November 2018

Until the end of November 2018 IOM assisted return of 389 persons. Responding on the growing demand, IOM appointing two AVRR focal points in Sarajevo Canton and additional three in USC.⁸⁷

⁸¹ Interview with Nidžara Ahmetašević, 15 February 2019.
⁸² Hans von der Brelie / Jad Salfiti, 'Western Balkan route' for migrants, refugees stuck at borders, Deutsche Welle, 30 November 2018, <https://www.euronews.com/2018/11/30/western-balkan-route-for-migrants-refugees-stuck-at-borders>.
⁸³ Nidžara Ahmetašević and Gorana Mlinarević, People on the Move in Bosnia and Herzegovina in 2018, 25.
⁸⁴ Nidžara Ahmetašević and Gorana Mlinarević, People on the Move in Bosnia and Herzegovina in 2018, 25.
⁸⁵ Nidžara Ahmetašević and Gorana Mlinarević, People on the Move in Bosnia and Herzegovina in 2018, 25.
⁸⁶ Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration, IOM UN Migration, <https://www.iom.int/assisted-voluntary-return-and-reintegration>.

Conclusion

After the closer of the EU borders in March 2016 and increased control of the borders between Serbia and the EU the migrants were “redirected” to Bosnia. Compared to the year 2017, the number of migrants has increased more than a hundredfold. While the largest population continues to arrive from Serbia, the others come from Montenegro. They are heading mostly directly to Una-Sana Canton (USC) in North-Western Bosnia from where is the shortest distance to Slovenia, which is a part of Schengen zone. The public, as well the state and international organizations and institutions in Bosnia, perceive the migrant population as a temporary issue and once they go through the issue will be resolved. The fact is, a lot of this people are going through, but the new ones are still coming and nobody can create the forecasts and say with certainty for how long this migration route in same or similar extent will be used. On average, there are constantly 4-5.000 migrants in Bosnia.

At the beginning of 2018 the empathy and helpfulness of population in Bosnia was present and the media image corresponded to this in large measure, but the initial sympathy and kindness of the local population towards migrants declined over time. Here are three main reasons for this:

- Mismanagement of the state
- Various interest groups in power
- Media coverage

The current response of the Bosnian state to the migrant’s situation is comprised of a patchwork of ad hoc provision solutions. If we compare this situation with the situation in Serbia at the beginning of the crisis we can see important differences right away. The Serbian state authorities have acted strategically and have played an important role in deflecting potential protests. The Serbian media, closely bound to official politics emphasized the humanitarian side of the migration, together with the humanity of Serbian citizens, effectively triggering empathetic attitudes. Vučić’s approach at the time was in line with the politics of the German chancellor, Angela Merkel. He was calculating his politics carefully with an eye on EU enlargement, and he capitalized on the refugee crisis. Accession to the European Union remains a strategic goal for the Republic of Serbia. On the other hand, Bosnia don’t have like Serbia a similar motivation and reasonably concrete strategic goal of obtaining EU membership, and Bosnian treatment of migrants and refugees hasn’t been influenced by EU conditionality. In this particular “migrant’s case”, it becomes apparent that the political actors do not pursue a long-term plan or policy. This corresponds to the general picture of politics in this country. We cannot say that Bosnia is a more or less democratic state than authoritarian Serbia, but Bosnia

⁸⁷ UNHCR, Refugee and Migrant Situation Report, Bosnia and Herzegovina, 1-30 November 2018, 15.

has certainly more interest groups in power than Serbia. All these different groups/political parties have control over certain media, and use them for the daily political conflicts in the framework of public discourses. In May 2018 also the media reporting was getting worse and influenced so the acceptance in the population. During in Serbia a humanitarian approach is being enforced by autocratic means in Bosnia is any clear approach missing.

The migrant's facilities are in Bosnia far below EU standards needed for human and dignified life, and health care and protection are insufficient. Bosnian deficient asylum system and the limited institutional and infrastructural capacities do not provide any security for the migrants. On the basis of available and examined sources for this paper is difficult to say, is this part of the political tactic to keep the migrants off of this route, is the problem only in the inefficiency of the Bosnian state and its institutions, or is it both of them.

The increased number of migrants interested to return to their countries of origin indicates us among others how difficult is to stay in Bosnia or respectively to continue a journey towards Western Europe. According to the testimony of migrants and monitoring groups, the Croatian police force has since 2018 engaged in a systematic campaign of violence and theft against migrants. Although some migrants continue to use this route, the journey is becoming more and more difficult, dangerous and expensive.

There are no indicators suggesting that Bosnia could become a new hot spot for migrants.