Management of the "Syrian Refugee Crisis" – Repercussions on European Security. Impact/Measures Analysis

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Abstract: The Syrian crisis is the most complex crisis (political, social, humanitarian, security) in the world, since World War II. In regards to the 1951 „Geneva Convention on the Status of Refugees”, states have an obligation to provide refugees with a form of primary protection, which is not intended to replace asylum, but rather to provide an intermediate and immediate protection measure.

At European level, for asylum seekers and refugees, there are several programs (developed by international institutions such as "UN for refugees" and "UNHCR") for integration into the host country during the temporary stay and return to the country of origin, when there are safety conditions. If this solution is not viable, they can opt for relocation to a third country.

Effective management of the crisis created by the refugees flow requires the adoption of a common political agenda for European states to eliminate inequalities between states and focus on building viable economic strategies.

Therefore, it is necessary to develop policies or strategies designed to provide refugees with a sense of security in the host country and their social assimilation, without being forced to give up their cultural identities.

This article aims to analyse the strategies of the European states involved in this phenomenon, applied in the "Syrian refugee crisis". At the moment, the biggest part of the effort of counter-terrorism is focused on the criminal justice system. This means focusing almost exclusively on those who already intend to commit a crime and not on prevention. The legal repercussions can further encourage radicalization, which can degenerate later.

Keywords: *Syrian crisis, Refugees, Security, Terrorism.*

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1. Introduction

The year 2020 marks 9 years since the Syrian crisis started, a conflict with an important impact both to the eastern area, providing as an effect economic and social significant crises also in geographical areas that were close to the area of conflict, but also throughout Europe, with the emergence of a strong refugee crisis managed with great efforts by the authorities.

The conflict has its starting point in March 2011, with several peaceful demonstrations in southern Syria, generated by the implementation of government reforms [20].

These actions are part of the broader register of "Arab Spring", a political-social phenomenon that led to the emergence of revolutionary movements in several states both in the Middle East and the North Africa [15].

Gradually, the protests spread throughout Syria and degenerated into armed clashes between government forces and opponents, so that in 2012 the conflict met all the characteristics of a civil war [19].

The conflict has generated one of the deepest crises, generically called the "Syrian refugee crisis".

As a consequence of the „Syrian civil war”, about 6.71 million Syrians [22] became refugees and 6.2 million were forced to leave their settlements and live in makeshift dwellings (most refugee camps are located in the northern area, on the border between Syria and Turkey, Lebanon, Jordan and Cyprus) [6].

Thus, 13 million Syrians need urgent humanitarian support, aid that humanitarian organizations are unable to provide because that territory is impossible to access [16].

We can emphasize in this context that most of the data on the current situation of refugees are approximate, obtained through studies and less through field verifications.

As a result of that conflict, much of the infrastructure was affected, as were schools, water and sewerage facilities, and electricity supply systems were destroyed.

We also find a critical situation regarding the medical units in the area. In Syria about 250 [24] hospitals remain functional, less than half of the total ones in operation in 2011.

Also, from the cultural and heritage point of view, losses were recorded, several important historical landmarks being damaged.

2. Problem Statement

The impact that "Syrian refugee crisis" had on countries in the area

The countries close to Syria (Turkey, Jordan, Lebanon, Iraq and Egypt) have shown since 2011 an increased level of tolerance in relation to the issue of civil war refugees in the neighboring country [14].

They have given refugees access to their territory and allocated substantial resources to support them, as the pressure on these states is immense and has unbearable social and economic costs for host communities.

According to reports prepared by the "United Nations Development Program" (UNDP), the flow of refugees mainly targeted the urban environment, where the sudden influx created a major demographic impact in all states.

In the context in which the neighboring states of Syria failed to adapt the facilities (accommodation / housing possibilities, services and infrastructure) to the influx of migrants, their presence in that environment led to a state of latent social tension [2].

In addition, near the borders (the areas most affected by the flow of migrants) are located economically underdeveloped cities, which has made it difficult to assimilate refugees.

In Lebanon, a state with a modest economy, the impact was major, the number of people living in this state increasing by 25% from 2011 to now [9] being the state on the first position regarding the number of refugees in reports to the population [12].

Also, 55% of refugees who arrive in Lebanon do not have adequate housing and the number of people living in poverty has increased by 2/3 (Data reported by the Government of Lebanon and OCHA). Health services, education and infrastructure elements are overloaded, and in some areas the demand for electricity and water far exceeds the production possibilities [12].

In Jordan, the situation is even more dramatic, with 84% of refugees living outside official refugee camps, and 2/3 of them living on the brink of subsistence [10].

For Syrian refugees from Iraq and Egypt, tensions in the security environment as well as those in the political landscape have negatively affected the lives of refugees. In the context of intensifying armed conflicts, both in Syria and also in Iraq, the situation of the Syrians in Iraq has deteriorated.

An equally difficult situation is also encountered in Egypt, where despite the government's initial commitments to provide refugees access to public facilities on an equal term with the Egyptian population, the promise was not fulfilled as a result of the changing political environment. Moreover, in 2013 the Egyptian government introduced the need to obtain visas for Syrians, which made it difficult for them to enter that state [5].

In Turkey, tensions have only arisen in neighboring cities because of the new Syrian population, but the Turkish government, with financial support from the European Union, provides more accommodation facilities in refugee camps than the rest of the states [7]. Although the financial resources allocated are significant, many Syrians didn't have provided the basic needs [11].

Image 1. „Total number of Syrian refugees (reference date March 19, 2020)”
Source: [21]

Image 2. „Evolution of the number of Syrian refugees (reference date 19 March 2020)” Source: [21]

Image 3. „Demographic elements of Syrian refugees” **Source:** [21]

Image 4. „Evolution of the number of Syrian refugees in refugee camps (reference date 19 March 2020)” **Source:** [21]

Note: At the used reference date in the charts above, the statistics relates 288, 220 refugees in the camps.

Image 5. „Evolution of the number of Syrians registered as refugees outside the camps (reference date 19 March 2020)” **Source:** [21]

Note: At the reference date, the number of refugees in the camps was 5,275,379.

Image 6. „Demographics of Syrian citizens registered as refugees outside the camps” **Source:** [21]

The impact the refugee crisis had on European countries

General aspects considered

The effect that the wave of refugees has had on the European space has been significant, calling on EU states on several levels and jeopardizing existing international agreements (including the Schengen conceptual agreement).

After 2015, the year that marks the maximum flow of Syrian refugees to the EU, several European states have strengthened border control and security measures.

Germany, Belgium, France, Slovenia and the Nordic countries have adopted those measures for specific periods, focusing on increasing the flow control component [13].

Other European states (for example Hungary, Bulgaria, Slovenia and Austria), considered more exposed due to geographical factors or deficiencies in the security of the suppliers, have taken extreme defensive measures (for example, the construction of barbed wire fences) [8].

We emphasize here the extremely restrictive strategy followed by Hungary, which initially built defensive fences on the borders with Serbia, Slovenia and Croatia (on a well-established refugee route), and later, after Romania [17] announced the assumption of a number of 6200 Syrian refugees, in the period 2016-2017, decided to build new fences on the border with our country.

That approach generated a series of tensions, not only between Romania and Hungary but also within the EU. Intra-Community tensions are also rising with the establishment of new refugee quotas for European countries to integrate.

The measure was reluctantly received by Eastern European countries, including Romania, which were not prepared for the safe implementation of the measure [17].

The impact that refugees had on the economies of the host states differs from case to case. It was found that refugees do not necessarily take into account the original society that assumed their integration, most leaving that state, often illegally, to settle in Western countries. In this context, most destination countries favorize the entry in the work field of highly skilled workers, meanwhile the low-skilled workers are restricted.

Another impact that refugees have is demographic one. The great influx of followers of the Muslim cult entered Europe and established in non-Muslim states, has produced demographic changes in some European areas (an aspect that grows as a consequence and due to the fact that most refugees have formed true "enclaves", not wishing to integrate into the host state).

That demographic change, in addition with the impact of refugees in illegal activities (common law/terrorism) resulted in the emergence of two currents among the population: "Anti-immigration rhetoric" and "Islamophobia", both politically exploited by nationalist/populist groups far-right assets in every state [4].

Image 7. „Study on the number of followers of the Muslim cult in 2050 in Europe” **Source:** [18]

3. Research Questions/Aims of the research

The article aims to analyze the strategies of European states, applied in the "Syrian refugee crisis", to highlight whether the measures implemented have been sufficient to reduce the impact that the flow of migrants has had for Europe.

The research hypothesis aims to show that the measures applied by European states aren't able to ensure optimal integration of Syrian migrants into European territories, results based on analyzing the data that the states involved in this process provided and on the analysis of the currently applicable legislation and strategies.

4. Findings

The impact that Syrian refugee crisis had on European security

The intensification of religiously motivated terrorist activities, along with the exponential increase in asylum seekers of Syrian citizens arriving

from the conflict zone, in European countries has caused much concern in "European Union" [3].

The European authorities with competence in the area of counter-terrorism, are trying to clarify the connection between the arrival of refugees and the terrorist phenomenon.

The flow of refugees was the "perfect cover" for some of the fighters associated to Islamic State group in order to access territories in the European Union (EU).

Fears that they will act in Europe, already having military training, access to explosives and weapons and a level of radicalization sufficient to commit terrorist incidents, are increasingly being probed in expert communities.

So far, the history of the attacks in Europe has only slightly reflected Syrian refugees, former ISIS militants, as a real threat. However, Syrian refugees, in general, can pose a threat to European security based on the fact that they are a social category receptive to the processes of "loss of identity" and "radicalization". They can be an easy target for Islamic radicalization and recruitment by terrorist organizations.

Their past took place in a conflict zone, which determined difficulties of adaptation / integration in the new society and the existence of some followers of radical Islam in the vicinity, determines radical reactions in the future.

A key aspect in this process is "identity". For young jihadists, the act of violence in the name of religion is difficult to define. They look for: identity, meaning, belonging and respect [3].

Therefore, the origin of jihadists is social disconnection, a feeling of alienation, resentment and isolation from society, which is due to the fact that they have already rejected culture, ideas and social norms in trying to find a better alternative in regards to their perspective about the world. Identity issues have long been recognized as stages in the radicalization process [1].

Radicalization has its origins in three contexts:

- "local": events and conflicts in the country of origin;
- "global": global jihad against the enemies of Islam;
- "diaspora context": dissatisfaction with being resident in Europe.

As motivations for jihadist militants in Europe, the combination of "diaspora" and "global motivations" was more important than "local motivations".

There are many factors that can undermine social cohesion, including social and economic isolation, as well as discrimination. Refugees

arriving in host countries are often unable to speak the language of that country and have limited access to resources. Social isolation often leads to economic isolation, which leads to a precarious financial level in a short time. Moreover, the discrimination faced by marginalized communities can further undermine social cohesion.

5. Conclusions

In order to be able to consider as effective the way that refugee crisis was managed, it requires the adoption of a common political agenda for European states that eliminates inequalities between states and focuses on building viable economic strategies.

All at once, the reduction of the burden of refugees on Syria's neighbouring states must be pursued through a fair distribution of the flow of Syrians.

In an equitable manner, the sharing of the costs generated by the flow of migrants must also be achieved between European states.

There is currently a significant discrepancy in the level of taking on the costs generated by the refugee crisis between developed countries, which can lead to diplomatic tensions.

Countries such as Germany and Sweden have provided a relatively high level of protection for Syrians, while many others, such as the United Kingdom, do not have similar policies. In general, developed European countries have not contributed enough resources to reduce the flow of Syrian refugees. Neighbouring countries continue to bear the costs of supporting and housing the refugee population.

In order to protect refugees and limit possible connections with groups of illegal migrants, it is recommended to implement a system that allows Syrian refugees to seek protection (asylum) from developed European states, through embassies in Syria's neighbouring countries (not just inside the future host countries, as it currently stands).

It is difficult for Syrian refugees to obtain protection outside Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey, resulting in a relatively small number of people relocated outside the region. One of the major impediments is the transit to Europe, the journey to the western states being extremely difficult and dangerous [23].

It must be acknowledged that terrorist used the refugees as a cover, therefore the presence of refugees in the conflict areas and also in other affected regions shouldn't be perceived aggressive, because refugees are also victims of terrorism and they should not be, in any manner stigmatized as potential terrorists.

At the same time, it is necessary for the strategy of the European states to prioritize the specific actions in order to prevent terrorism in the European states, the fight against the phenomenon being necessary to remain as a subsequent solution after the prevention efforts have been exhausted.

Currently, an important part of counter-terrorism efforts are focused on the criminal justice system. This means focusing almost exclusively on those who already intend to commit a crime and not on prevention. The legal repercussions can further encourage radicalization, which can degenerate later.

The measures specific to the area of radicalization prevention must ensure a balance between the national security of each European state and respect for fundamental rights, also for the refugees, just like for any European citizen, taking into account that the social category is made up of people exposed to radicalization or in the process of radicalization.

Also, in the field of radicalization prevention, it is necessary to develop policies or strategies designed to ensure refugees a sense of security in the host country and their social assimilation without being forced to give up their own cultural identities.

At the same time, it must be taken into account that radicalization is a multidimensional "transversal" phenomenon in different fields of expertise. Anti-radicalization strategies must include local families/communities and be designed by teams with multidisciplinary capabilities, including sociologists, psychologists and religious leaders.

The European strategy on the "Syrian crisis" has achieved its objectives in the plan of "National Security" refugees not being a factor favoured by the terrorist phenomenon being rather its victims.

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