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Mass influx of the Syrian asylum seekers and the European asylum crisis: dealing with the emerging challenges in Serbia

A spectre is haunting Europe — the spectre of Syrian asylum seekers

Executive summary

Tear gas, barb wires, inking numbers on people's forearms, excessive use of police force, families and children freezing at the borders have all become the trademarks of the EU asylum policy in 2015. While many EU member states exhibited lack of responsibility and complete disregard for the UN 1951 Refugee convention, Serbia has so far demonstrated an admirable degree of readiness to provide both in-country humanitarian support to asylum seekers and the safe passage to other countries. Reception centres have been set up along the way, emergency aid has been coordinated and distributed and medical assistance provided.

Nonetheless, this is only the beginning of the fast-evolving asylum crisis, the unfolding of which is hard to predict. Throughout the preparation of this brief, the situation escalated dramatically with 5,000 asylum seekers entering Serbia on a daily basis through the Presevo border crossing. On 25th of October at the EU-Balkans mini summit the EU leaders and heads of Western Balkan states adopted a 17-point action plan which envisages

that 50,000 persons should remain in the Western Balkan countries for the time-being. This decision puts enormous pressure on the capacity of Serbian authorities. Combined with the onset of winter that will slow down the transit through Serbia and make assistance to asylum seekers more difficult, it is clear that urgent and comprehensive migration management measures need to be put in place in order to avert humanitarian crisis.

This brief outlines the recommendations for dealing with the challenges ahead in Serbian asylum policy and implementation thereof. Following the overview of the government's initial response and existing measures, two central questions that are addressed are: how to deal with the additional influx and secure public support for such action. While the challenge of dealing with the daily humanitarian crisis of asylum seekers who are risking their lives to get to the EU in the midst of the EU asylum crisis is extraordinary, a set of appropriate measures adopted by the government can greatly assist in mitigating the negative consequences.

Nomen est omen: asylum seekers, refugees and (irregular) migrants

"And let me be clear about my vocabulary too: illegal migrants do not exist. People may come to the EU and might be required to use irregular ways but no human being is illegal." Cecilia Malmström, European Commissioner for Home Affairs, 29 November 2010

Events of the past few months have been dubbed as "**European refugee crisis**" and the media usually reports on Syrian refugees/migrants using the terms synonymously, though they are both inaccurate. Syrians and other nationalities fleeing war torn countries and seeking protection are in fact **asylum seekers**, a term which will be used throughout this brief. Using and understanding the right terminology is essential since these terms do not only resonate differently in the public but also belong to different legal categories and carry different entitlements to protection.

Migrant is a generic term used for all persons that are changing their place of residence, whether within the country (internal migrants), or abroad. It includes voluntary and forced migrants, temporary and permanent, immigrants and emigrants. Both the EU and the UN define immigrants as those whose stay lasts over 1 year.

Irregular migrant is a person who is unlawfully residing on another country' territory, whether because of the unauthorized entry or because he/she lawfully entered but then stayed longer than allowed, or has taken unauthorized employment. Term "illegal migrants" is also widely used although it ought to be avoided since it carries negative connotation and leads to stigmatisation of migrants.

Asylum seeker is a person who applies for asylum in a host country, seeking safety from persecution or harm in his country. He/she awaits a decision on his application for refugee status and, in case of a negative decision, he / she must leave unless he is given a permission to stay on humanitarian ground.

Refugee is a person that has been granted international protection, i.e. whose asylum request has been positively assessed. Refugee status is obtained in cases where there is a proven case of well-founded fear of persecution on one of the 5 grounds stipulated by the Convention: race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group or political opinion. (UN 1951 Refugee Convention)

Mixed migration flows is used to describe complex migratory movements where refugees, asylum-seekers, victims of trafficking, unaccompanied minors, economic migrants and other persons travel internationally, frequently in an irregular manner.

Temporary protection can be granted in cases of mass influx of displaced persons, when due to the large number of people it is impossible to carry out individual asylum procedures, so the country offers one year protection on humanitarian grounds. The EU Protection Directive, adopted in 2001, creates a legal framework for such situations.

1.1 Background: escalation of the Western Balkans route as a main migration route

Summer of 2015 will be remembered for the migration crisis on an unprecedented level, the largest since the Second World war, and the EU's inability to cope with it. More than 710,000 of people have arrived by sea to the EU's borders in 2015, according to the IOM data. In the second quarter of the year, from April to June, 213,200 people applied for asylum, and by November 2015 half a million lodged an asylum claim in an EU country.

The Western Balkans migratory route (Turkey-Greece-Macedonia-Serbia-Hungary) became prominent in 2012 as the fastest route for asylum seekers that were going from Greece to the nearest Schengen country – Hungary.

In mid June 2015, Hungary's decision to build a wall and seal its border triggered the uncontrolled influx of the asylum seekers across the Western Balkans route. Faced with thousands of people at its doorstep, Macedonia amended its Asylum law, allowing facilitated transit through its territory. Whereas before migrants had been detained after the illegal crossing of the border, now they were given 72 hours for transit in which they could either seek asylum or leave Macedonia. Additionally, they were given access to public transport (trains), making the journey from Greece to Serbia much faster.

These policy changes resulted in the Balkan countries becoming the major transit area on the way to the EU. Over 400,000 people have crossed the Balkan corridor during summer, traveling in dangerously overcrowded trains and causing the crackdown of national migration

systems. Shocking images from Macedonian/Greek border and Gevgelija where police fired stun grenades to disperse asylum seekers toured the world, only to be replaced by even more disturbing images from Hungarian border and Czech Republic. Erection of the wall along Hungarian/Serbian border on 15th of September changed the usual route and asylum seekers shifted their transit to Croatia, Slovenia and Austria, experiencing new hardships along the way.

The pressure is now enormous on all borders, resulting in poor migration management and occasional shut down of borders. During August and September the number of detections at the EU's external borders increased to around 180,000. Throughout October, an average of 9,000 people per day had been crossing into Greece. In Serbia, the average number of crossings was 5,000 but on 18th of October, the police registered 10,000 crossings in Presevo in just 24 hours (ECRE, 2015), while Slovenia reported 15,000 arrivals at its border in one day. Since many of the migrants go unregistered, the actual numbers are much higher than reported. In the upcoming winter months, the Balkan corridor is expected to be used more frequently than the sea route, putting an additional burden on Serbia and all countries involved.

1.2 The EU mitigation strategy: absence of a coherent response

Events at the Western Balkans route must be examined in the wider framework of the EU's approach to the ongoing crisis. Due to the length and scope of this brief, this section will only summarize the main characteristics of the EU response and its weaknesses and will not analyse the underlining reasons or roots of the crisis.

The current setting reflects not only the deep crisis of the EU asylum system, but also the crisis of the EU itself. Since the emergence of Common European Asylum system in early 2000, the EU has never witnessed such fragmented and polarizing response and collective failure to adhere to the common asylum procedures as this summer. Lack of commitment of member states is clearly exhibited in the fact that in late September the European Commission initiated an infringement procedure towards 19 Member States for failing to comply with the EU acquis in the area of migration and asylum (ECRE, 2015b)

Contribution of the EU summits and common measures to policy resolution

Six major EU summits were held since April 2015. The first summit was prompted by the tragic shipwreck in the Mediterranean when 900 people drowned and it resulted in set of measures aiming to prevent the human tragedies and tackle the root causes of migration. The last was Valletta Summit organized with African heads of

state on 12th of November, where the EU offered \$1.93 billion to African leaders to reduce the flow of migrants, in return for effective return policies. In between April and November, a series of formal and informal meetings of the EU heads of state and government took place. Proposals were drafted and rejected, often causing strong disagreements and harsh public criticism leaving the impression that the Union is in disarray.

The European Commission (EC) adopted the European Agenda on Migration in May 2015 with the aim was to provide a comprehensive approach to migration. The Agenda outlined immediate actions that need to be pursued: saving lives at sea, enhanced border management, targeting and dismantling criminal smuggling networks, relocation as emergency response system and common approach to granting protection to displaced persons in need of protection.

Policies that address security concerns such as the strengthening of the EU's external borders, prevention of illegal migration and combating the smuggling of migrants were policies that all member states agreed on. As a result, a certain progress has been made in this area. Funding for increased border patrol operations in the Mediterranean has been increased, more border guards were deployed, joint action plan was made with Turkey in order to reduce the pressure on the EU's borders, Frontex started its operations on the Western Balkan and Mediterranean route and return and readmission policies are being further developed.

Relocation as a key test for the common asylum system

Set of measures from the Agenda for Migration that incorporated human rights principles- relocation and joint quota system and particularly common approach to granting protection turned out to be a stumbling block for member states.

The relocation plan has been on the table since the late May when the EC put forward the first package of implementing measures from the Agenda for Migration (European Commission, 2015a), proposing to activate the emergency response mechanism and set up a relocation scheme. In July, the European Council adopted a resolution on relocating 40,000 people from Greece and Italy, but this decision had to wait its formal approval until September. The relocation plan was finally voted on during the extraordinary Justice and Home Affairs Council meeting on the 23rd of September. In addition to previously agreed relocation of 40,000 people interior ministries agreed on relocating 120,000 people from Greece, Italy and other member states affected by the crisis. The scheme was met with fierce opposition of Czech Republic, Slovakia, Romania and Hungary who

Results of relocation measures between member states effective as of 6th of November¹

Adopted proposal to relocate in 2015/2016 total of **160.000 people** in need of protection (of which 54.000 will be decided at a later stage)

From **Italy** – out of **39.600** total of **117** people have been relocated to Sweden, Finland, France and Spain

From **Greece** – out of **66.400** total of **30** people have been relocated to Luxembourg

Relocation places across the member states:

Out of **160.000** so far there are **3.496** available offers for short term relocation across the EU

voted against, signaling a deep split in the Union over how the problem should be addressed.

Whereas the adoption of the relocation scheme seemed first tangible outcome towards adhering to the joint asylum policy and human rights standards, the figures on its implementation show that in two months the entire EU relocated less than 150 people, casting serious doubt on the efficiency and further implementation pace of the process

So far, the prevailing feature of the EU policy making was the absence of unity, leaving it to member state to fend off for themselves, causing strong polarization across the continent. In practice, different approaches range from Germany's open door policy, UK's opting out method to reinstatement of borders practiced by Hungary, Czech Republic, Slovenia and potentially Austria. The latter type of behaviour is invoking serious discussions that Schengen is on the brink of breakdown. Rifts have emerged between countries willing to accept asylum seekers and others trying to discourage their arrival. Meanwhile, thousands of asylum seekers are transiting from one member state to another with no proper shelter and protection.

All the eyes are now on Germany, which is either applauded for defending the core EU values by agreeing to host large numbers of asylum seekers, or heavily criticized for imposing burden on other member states with such decision. The overall impression that the EU institutions have no power or capacity to deal with the asylum crisis is further affirmed by the European Council president, Donald Tusk who recently said: "whether Europe survives as a continent of freedom, the rule of law, respect of an individual, and the security of its inhabitants will depend to a great extent on Germans"

1 Data are taken from the European Commission's presentation: State of implementation of commitments and operational decisions taken on the refugee crisis since September 2015 that has been presented at the Valleta summit on 12th of November

1.3 Serbia's initial policy response: overview of activities from June to November

Serbia faced with the current circumstances provided a remarkable example, compared to other countries in the region as well as the EU member states², in reacting promptly to mass influx. Faced with a sharp surge in numbers, the Government established an inter-Ministerial Working Group for Mixed Migration Flows, comprising all relevant state authorities³ in order to provide a coordinated response. The first meeting of the group was attended by six Ministers in late June, and in July first centre for admission, processing and accommodation of migrants was established in the southern border town of Presevo, operating under the one stop shop principle. Since the numbers were far larger than the authorities could manage to register, feed and assist, support came from a wide range of international and domestic organizations: UNHCR, Doctors without Borders, Red Cross, various NGOs etc.

In the following months, centres for emergency assistance were opened in Miratovac, next to the border with Macedonia, in Kanjiza and Subotica, close to the northern border with Hungary, and in Sid, close to Croatian border. This required massive engagement and efforts of the local authorities prompting the Government to adopt the Conclusion on 24th of August which provides additional state budget funds to local self-government units hosting an increased number of migrants on their territory. On the 4th of September, the Government adopted the Operative plan, which contains the Contingency plan for a mass influx of asylum seekers and the Needs assessment. Needs assessment that had been carried out by state authorities concludes that situation is by far exceeding national capacities

2 Macedonia declared a state of emergency in August and closed its border twice, leaving thousands of migrants stranded overnight waiting to cross from Greece. On 1st of September Hungarian police sealed off its main railway terminal in Budapest to stop the asylum seekers from traveling through the EU, leaving hundreds of them stranded outside of major railway station. On 18th of September, Croatia closed seven of its eight border crossings with Serbia due to increased pressure.

3 Commissariat for Refugees, Ministry of Interior, Ministry of Labour, Employment, Veteran and Social Affairs, Ministry of health

Financial response overview:

- Until October 90% of all costs pertaining to the provision of care for asylum seekers were covered from the state budget.
- UNHCR donated EUR 2 million and launched appeal for further financing. IOM also launched an appeal, and it is expected that their response will be coordinated with the wider EU response.
- Based on the Serbian needs assessment, the EU approved EUR 17 million on 8th of October to help Serbia deal with the mass influx of asylum seekers.
- A grant agreement for improving conditions in reception centres in the value of EUR 2.3 million has been signed with the Council of Europe Development Bank on 30th of October
- In the beginning of November Serbia signed contracts with the EU Delegation for EUR 7 million. The funds will be earmarked for the reconstruction of facilities for admission and transit, covering elementary costs, such as electricity, water and heating, but also for increasing operational capacities of the main institutions in charge. EU Directorate for Humanitarian Aid and Civil Protection will allocate additional EUR 8 million. The first deliveries are expected later this year.

so the government is asking for substantial funds for humanitarian assistance and support of the international community in addressing all the issues related to the asylum seekers' needs: water, medicine, transportation, enhancement of reception capacities, access to public health and social services and technical advice (UNHCR, 2015). The first funds for dealing with the crisis have been allocated in November. With the escalating situation, new centres are being opened throughout Serbia, close to Bulgarian, Croatian and Macedonian borders, so the first week of November commenced with the total of 19 transit centres established.

Until now, the focus has been on providing humanitarian aid along the way and providing appropriate technical support in the area of reception arrangements. While this will continue even on a larger scale with winter approaching, the long term approach would involve integration as well.

1.4 Public opinion on asylum seekers in Serbia

Since the beginning of the mass influx, there is an overwhelming feeling of public support towards asylum seekers.⁴ Across the country, volunteer groups were formed that would either help in donations or go to the field to assist the refugees directly. Asylum seekers have been staying in the park in the centre of Belgrade for months with no incidents reported. Media reported professionally, without sensationalism, embracing the narrative of empathy towards asylum seekers.

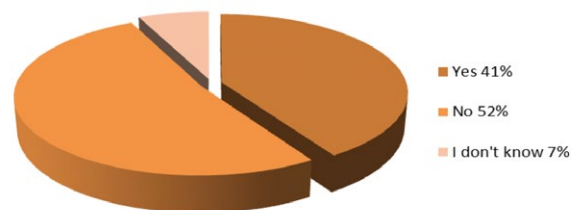
Current public support comes as a sharp contrast compared to previous years. Since 2011, citizens in local communities of Banja Koviljaca, Bogovadja, Obrenovac continuously protested against the asylum seekers. Residents of Lajkovac, village of Mala Vrbica had been protesting for years blocking the possibility to establish

⁴ Though occasional dissenting voices have been prominent, such as the protests of Mayor of Kanjiza, one of the municipalities that provided shelter

the asylum centre in their community. In 2012, a survey showed that 41% of people were bothered by the presence of asylum seekers in their community and the interesting finding was that resistance was the strongest in places where residents had never encountered an asylum seeker (Ninamedia, 2012).

Ninamedia survey, question -are you bothered by the (potential) presence of asylum seekers in your town?

What makes the situation different this time around is the predominating opinion, backed up both by facts and the official statements that asylum seekers are only transiting, so they are not perceived as threat in any sense. However, once the public becomes aware that asylum seekers might be staying in Serbia because they are unwanted in the EU, there is a strong possibility that negative reactions will follow. Making the local community receptive to the asylum seekers and establishment of new centres will be a hard sell to citizens and it will require a unified and clear platform as well as concerted efforts of the government and civil society, and a serious public awareness campaign.



1.5 Challenges ahead following the 17-point action plan

The government is faced with a grave test of its migration management system and it is prompted by three 'crises' happening at the same time. First is the daily humanitarian crisis affecting all asylum seekers who are risking their lives to reach the EU. Second is the crisis of the EU asylum system which, in spite of its Common

European Asylum Policy enshrined in 4 directives⁵, did not manage to deliver a solution in 5 months. Third is the crisis of the EU itself where different member states have opposing views on how the problem should be resolved, causing a large rift within the Union.

As already stated, Serbian immediate policy response up to now has been well managed. However, the major factor that cannot be overlooked is that the policy efforts were guided towards facilitating asylum seekers to transit the Serbian territory.

The situation dramatically changes with 17-point action plan that envisages that 50,000 persons stay in the countries along the Western Balkan route. For the moment, the distribution across the countries is still unknown, though it was suggested that Serbia will take in 3,000 people, a number which will certainly rise in the future.

The enormous challenge that lies ahead of Serbia is twofold. First is the operational nature of how and where to build/refurbish series of centres for asylum seekers, providing them with necessary protection. Second, arguably even more complex, is how to secure the public support for long term stay of refugees, and pave the way for their integration.

1. Operational challenge – averting the humanitarian crisis/ surviving the winter

With severe weather conditions around the corner, state authorities will have to provide accommodation and medical support for additional thousands of people. This includes series of activities of finding the appropriate centres, providing supplies, financing the refurbishment of these centres and the cost of accommodation and meals of each asylum seeker - all in an extremely limited timeframe.

This challenge can only be overcome through a systemic response, which means several underlying challenges have to be addressed:

- **Coordination with local authorities** – Adequate functioning of the asylum system relies on the engagement of local stakeholders in municipalities where the centres are established. Municipality representatives, trustees for refugees, centres for social work, policy officers, that are all members of local migration councils must all be involved and well-coordinated in their work. The local migration councils that were established by the Law on

migration management in 2012 will now be in charge for the reception. Since this is a new task for most of them, and many municipalities are understaffed, they will require significant capacity building and support from the NGOs and international community. Portion of the awaiting donor assistance should be earmarked towards increasing the operational capacities of the municipalities through a series of trainings for employees working in affected municipalities.

- **Strong inter-institutional coordination and division of responsibilities** – the state Commissariat for Refugees and Migration is the institution designated by the Law on Asylum to provide accommodation for asylum seekers. However, as seen from the work of the Working group of Mixed Migration trends, asylum is a multifaceted issue and requires substantial engagement of a number of different line ministries - Ministry of Interior, Ministry of Health, Ministry of Labour, Employment, Veteran and Social Affairs. In 2009 Coordination body for Monitoring and Management of Migration was established as an inter-ministerial state organ, consisting of 9 line Ministries. However, the Coordination body did not meet since 2011. A sustainable and durable coordination mechanism has to be established that would be invoked every time when there is a migration crisis, as oppose to resorting to ad hoc arrangements.
- **Increasing number of staff both at central and municipal levels.** The Commissariat for Refugees and Migration, the institution mandated to set up asylum centre and respond to plights of thousands of asylum seekers, has 70 employees. In comparison, its counterpart in Sweden - Swedish Migration Board has 4,000 employees. Local migration councils are usually comprised of 5-7 members from different municipal authorities, clearly insufficient for mass influx situation. New systematizations both on central and local level need to be adopted to increase the number of staff in relevant sectors that will be dealing with the asylum seekers.

2. Long term challenge – ensuring public support for asylum policy

Creating positive media atmosphere and ensuring public support are essential for the implementation of asylum policy in Serbia. However, securing sympathetic and non-conflicting reactions from local community has always presented a challenge in any immigrants/refugees receiving country. Over the last decade, elections were won or lost in many EU countries based on parties' stance toward migration. Currently, Germany and Sweden are fighting a battle of explaining to their respective domestic public why they should co-exist with asylum seekers, while some EU countries have refused to take them in.

⁵ Reception Conditions Directive, Asylum Procedures Directive Qualifications Directive and Temporary Protection Directive adopted between 2000 and 2005 signaled a first phase in the development of Common European Asylum System and development of unified legislation in the asylum area

At the same time, the EU is strongly criticized of shifting its responsibility for taking in the asylum seekers to its pre-accession neighbours, meaning that transit countries have to share the burden and Serbia could become a quarantine for refugees. While this argument might be true, it will create an atmosphere in public which can be a ticking bomb, shaping a very unfavourable environment for implementation of the asylum policy.

Additional danger is that other countries on the route are following in Hungary's footsteps. Slovenia started construction of fence and if Croatia decides also to seal its border, asylum seekers will be stranded in Serbia, thus creating human bottlenecks. State authorities will have a hard task in explaining this issue to public, and it will require extensive, carefully tailored awareness campaign to mitigate negative reactions and the rise of xenophobic discourse.

However, as unfortunate as the scenario might be, the Government must be prepared for it. The only way to avoid galvanization of public opinion is by emphasizing the human rights dimension of the problem. Serbia is

not taking in refugees because it has to, but because it is its state responsibility to act in accordance with its international obligations, humanitarian and human rights principles as well as its Constitution, which Article 57 guarantees the right to asylum. The core idea behind asylum policy is that it must offer protection to those fleeing war, violence and prosecution, a message that needs to be constantly present. The government needs to make clear that regardless of the EU or behaviour of some other countries, Serbia as a country that ratified the Geneva Convention has a responsibility to take in asylum seekers and treat them in line with human right standards.

1.6 Recommendations

Serbia's response ought to remain in line with its international obligations and human rights standards in assisting to people seeking international protection. In practice this implies that the political will for dealing with this crisis, expressed over the past few months, has to remain high on the agenda, and that the following two sets of recommendations have to be realized:

Coherent migration management system has to be in place in order to efficiently conduct series of activities for providing accommodation for asylum seekers in Serbia and addressing their needs	
✓	Establish (or enforce the existing) inter-ministerial coordination body that would comprise relevant line ministries and be in charge for implementing migration related measures
✓	Commissariat for Refugees and Migration needs to strengthen capacities and knowledge of local migration councils through training provision on humanitarian aspects of migration from the upcoming donor funds and projects.
✓	UNHCR should organize minimum training on basic psycho-social aid to persons that are working directly with the asylum seekers
✓	In line with the Article 12 of the Law on Migration Management, local self-government units should extend the composition of local migration councils to include representatives of sectors and services important for protection of asylum seekers (health, education, Red Cross), in municipalities experiencing large influx
✓	Adopt new systematizations that will envisage increase of number of employees in state/local authorities that are experiencing a need for large number staff to cope with the new operational challenges and increased number of beneficiaries (Commissariat for Refugees and Migration, local centres for social work)

Securing public support: Utilizing the current prevalence tolerance and building on the momentum will be crucial to maintain the positive attitude towards asylum seekers and not slip into anti-immigrant sentiment. The Government should immediately start with the following activities:



Conduct a **public opinion poll** on sentiments towards asylum seekers that will serve to develop more informed Communication strategy and media campaign that will address the main problems of perception of the asylum seekers



Working group on mixed migration flows should draft the **Communication strategy** with clear objectives and activities in collaboration with all the relevant stakeholders, that will assess into account arising challenges and ensure coordinated communication response



Government needs to conduct **targeted media campaign** sensitizing the population on the plight of asylum-seekers and their rights. Continuously through all the communication challenges deliver **key messages** such as:

1. Serbia has a moral and legal responsibility to assist the asylum seekers and respect the 1951 Geneva Convention and international human right standards
2. Asylum seekers are fleeing war and atrocities in their home countries and additionally experience hardship on their journey, so they should be assisted in any way possible
3. Serbia has shown an admirable degree of solidarity and compassion towards asylum seekers and should continue with this good practice
4. Asylum seekers do not pose safety risk to public – they have been present in Serbia since 2008 and did not cause any incidents
5. Asylum seekers do not pose public health risk– they undergo detailed medical check-ups upon arrival



Increase the number of public events (seminars, lectures, workshops, exhibitions) where representatives of state authorities and civil society organizations can **directly communicate to wider audience on necessity to address the plights of asylum seekers**. This will enhance the dissemination of information and help in creation of joint platform when communicating with the public



Local migration council should **intensify cooperation with local media through coordinated outreach activities** (roundtables attended by journalists, guest speakers at TV and radio shows) that will ensure impact in communities that are hosting asylum seekers

1.7 Conclusion

The upsetting context of the migration crisis on European continent is more alarming with each passing day. With the latest terrorist attacks in Paris and announcements on building more border fences in different member states the humanitarian space for asylum protection is shrinking. Taking a comprehensive migration approach in such circumstances is an outstanding task. However, in order to avoid a humanitarian crisis on its territory and remain committed to Geneva Convention and human rights, Serbia has to remain firm on that track.

Swift adoption of the proposed measures will facilitate the Government's response to emerging challenges. The problem of funding has been resolved so far. Increased coordination on the central and local level and strengthening of the capacities of authorities in charge will directly assist the asylum seekers, enabling a more efficient response. In addition, coordinated public campaign will aim to prevent the public opinion from turning hostile, thus providing a suitable environment for enacting the humane asylum policy.

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Western Balkans Route at a glance: Facts and Figures



Over **710,000** of migrants entered the EU in 2015 (compared to total of 282,000 in 2014)

500,000 applied for asylum in the EU countries

Approximately **400,000** transited through the Western Balkans route during summer

Serbia registered **309,000** asylum seekers until the end of October

5,000 of asylum seekers entered Presevo on a daily basis in October and **8,000** in November

Important developments following the summer influx

09.09.	In his State of the Union address EC President Juncker admits that “policy makers have been neglecting Balkan route” In October, EU gives first financial injection to Serbia
15.09.	Hungary built a 175 km razor-wire fence wall , taking itself off the route. New route is through Croatia, Slovenia and Austria
25.10.	EU - Balkans mini summit was held to increase coordination and cooperation of countries across the WB Route. 17-points action plan adopted - includes decision that countries across the Western Balkans Route should take in 50,000 people

