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SPECIAL UMD REPORT: Macedonia's Involvement in the Migrant Crisis

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Introduction

The migrant crisis has had a significant effect both on the economic and social climate of Europe. Macedonia and the rest of Southeast Europe have been particularly affected by the situation. While Macedonia is making every effort to address the crisis in a manner consistent with Europe's democratic and humanitarian values, the lack of adequate support from the European Union and the United States has made meeting the needs of refugees increasingly difficult. Inadequate infrastructure has led to clashes on the border between refugees and Macedonian police, and the Macedonian government has felt it necessary to impose restrictions upon who can enter Macedonia and when.

This report includes briefings on interviews, presentations, and opinion pieces from Macedonian government officials concerning the situation at hand. Data is included regarding refugee statistics and funding supplied by the European Union to aid Macedonia and other Western Balkan countries in their efforts to address the crisis in an appropriate manner. This report is intended to help readers understand the realities of the migrant crisis as it relates to Macedonia and Southeast Europe.

UMD Testimony Before the US Helsinki Commission

In their testimony submitted to the US Helsinki Commission's hearing "Europe's Refugee Crisis: How Should the US, EU, And OSCE Respond?" held on October 20, 2015, UMD President Metodija Koloski and UMD International Policy and Diplomacy Fellow Gavin Kopel gave the following figures:

- Between January and October 2015, around 264,000 migrants passed through Greece, most of them coming to Macedonia's southern border.
- The number of police needed at the border costs around \$100,000 USD per day.
- The cost to Macedonia of supplying food and water to refugees is similar to that of Serbia: approximately €20,000 per day.
- As of October, the EU had only given Macedonia \$102,645 USD.

Koloski and Kopel also gave testimony as to what Macedonia was doing to aid refugees:

- Registering and fingerprinting refugees to protect the EU's security.
- Providing food and water to refugees.
- Keeping its borders open.
- Allowing refugees 72 hours to pass through Macedonian territory.

European Parliament January 2016 Briefing: The Western Balkans-Frontline of the Migrant Crisis

A briefing released in January by the European Parliament makes an important point about Macedonia's place in the crisis that cannot be overlooked: Macedonia has hosted refugees before. This has been the case during the series of conflicts resulting from the breakup of Yugoslavia (from which Macedonia was able to secede peacefully), and during the 1999 conflict in Kosovo, when Macedonia gave refuge to more than 400,000 Kosovars fleeing the violence. The European Parliament's briefing outlines some of the actions undertaken, processes followed and decisions made by the Macedonian government in regards to the crisis. Concerning the legal aspects of the situation, Macedonia amended its law on asylum and temporary protection first in 2012, and then in June 2015 to make it easier to accommodate the large numbers of migrants. The procedure implemented a process by which migrants receive a document that grants them a 72-hour stay in the country before either formally seeking asylum or leaving the country. The document also grants migrants access to public transport and medical help within that 72-hour time frame.

According to the briefing, the Ministry of the Interior issues daily reports to keep track of migrant movements, and shares responsibilities over asylum procedures with the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy. The Section for Asylum and the Section for Border and Migration are responsible for implementing these procedures, while the Crisis Management Centre oversees action on the ground. The briefing mentions three reception centers within Macedonia: "Vinojug" in the southern border town of Gevgelija, "Tabanovce" at the border with Serbia, and "Vizbegovo" in Skopje.¹

Presentation by Macedonian Defense Minister

On February 2nd, Macedonian Defense Minister Zoran Jolevski gave a presentation at the German Marshall Fund in Washington, D.C. to shed further light on the refugee situation as it pertains to Macedonia. According to Jolevski, the number of migrants in 2015 was ten times greater than in 2014. Last summer, most migrants were males under 40, but in recent months there have been more women and children, including children traveling alone. The refugee flow decreased in January, but this was determined to be due to weather conditions. Between 7-8,000 refugee arrivals to Macedonia can be expected on average per day in the coming spring. The Macedonian government has decided to declare a crisis region at Macedonia's northern and southern borders. However, Jolevski emphasized that most refugees are only passing through Macedonia, and do not intend to stay there.

Jolevski referenced a Slovenian official, who expressed surprise that around 30% of refugees that Slovenia received were not registered by Greece. He emphasized that it was important for countries to share information and data with one another, and that a system needed to be devised to facilitate this. Jolevski also gave recognition to other European countries for sending members of their police force to aid Macedonian police.

¹ [http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2016/573949/EPRS_BRI\(2016\)573949_EN.pdf](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2016/573949/EPRS_BRI(2016)573949_EN.pdf)

Joint UMD-AJC Discussion

On Wednesday, February 24, 2016, Macedonian Ambassador to the United States Vasko Naumovski discussed the migrant crisis with American Jewish Committee's Director of Government and International Affairs Jason Isaacson at a joint UMD-AJC event at the Macedonian embassy. He stated that in the past year, some 800,000 people have passed through Macedonia. Of those 800,000 only 80 have applied for actual asylum within Macedonia. Most migrants choose to apply for asylum in Austria, Germany, or Sweden.

Naumovski also noted that migrants' travel is highly organized. Many are using smartphones to locate routes and checkpoints. A large percentage of migrants possess the financial resources necessary to afford bus tickets and hotel rooms to aid their passage through Macedonia.

Concerning Greece, it was noted that the EU is having difficulties convincing Greece to accept intervention by Frontex (the EU's border monitoring agency). Therefore, Frontex personnel set up their position on the Macedonian side of the Macedonian-Greek border. However, Naumovski said that Macedonia and Greece were cooperating well in other sectors, apart from a "longstanding single issue" (the disagreement over Macedonia's name).

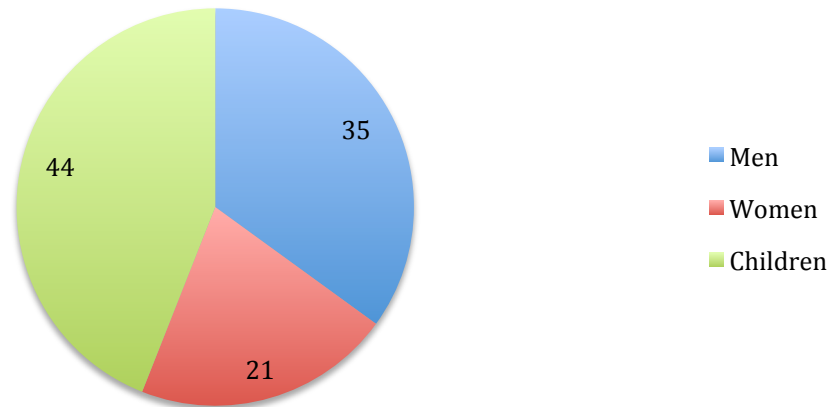
Naumovski echoed Jolevski in expressing disappointment in European states' unwillingness to share information with each other. He shared the anecdote that after 9/11, it was found that each individual involved in the attacks had been previously identified, but by different agencies who did not share the intelligence with each other. A similar lack of adequate intelligence sharing is currently underway in the migrant context.

In the discussion, Naumovski also expressed concern about the cultural aspects of the migrant crisis. He said he felt that refugees would not be able to integrate into European society, and brought up the fact that several of the participants in the November Paris attacks had been born and raised in Belgium or France. Naumovski also warned that Turkey has the ability to further facilitate migration away from its own borders through the Balkan route, thus further destabilizing an already-precarious scenario.

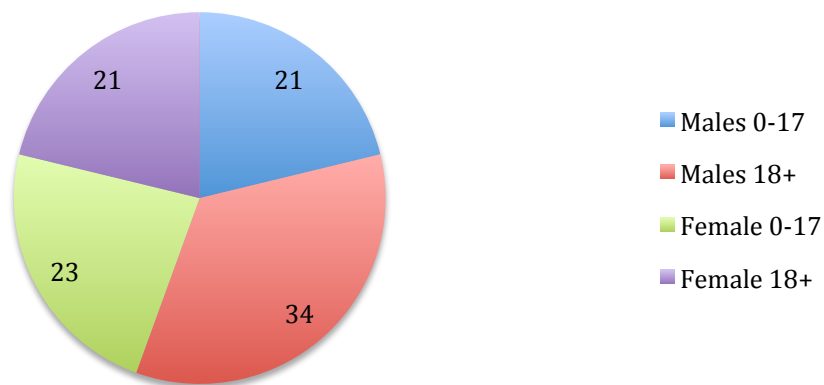
Demographics of Refugee Arrivals to Macedonia in the First Week of March 2016²:

From October 1, 2015, to March 6, 2016, the UNHCR estimates that approximately 531,000 people have arrived in or passed through Macedonia. Roughly speaking, this means about 3,300 migrants have been in Macedonia each day since October 1st, 2015.³ Increased regulation has slowed the flow; on March 7, 2016 127 migrants were received into Macedonia.⁴

Breakdown by Gender:



Breakdown by Age and Gender:



² <http://data.unhcr.org/mediterranean/download.php?id=830>

³ These figures were calculated from the “Daily Estimated Arrivals Per Country-Flows through Western Balkans Route, 6 March 2016” spreadsheet on [unhcr.org](http://data.unhcr.org), available here:

<http://data.unhcr.org/mediterranean/download.php?id=827>

⁴ <http://data.unhcr.org/mediterranean/country.php?id=502>

Space Available to Host Migrants

Country	Expected Space Availability
Macedonia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Has planned to increase space to 2,000 places
Greece	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Plans for 27,000 reception places • 20,000 residential places through UNHCR-awarded contracts • Funding for 7,000 first reception places • Reception capacity should reach 35,000 by early Jan. 2016
Serbia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Committed to increasing to 6,000 places by end of 2015 • Possibility of a further 6,000 places depending on ongoing political deliberations
Croatia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 5,000 places, no political will to increase this
Slovenia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 7,000 temporary places, trying to add 2,000 winter places
Albania	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 300 places • Not significantly affected by the migrant flow
Bulgaria	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 5,130 permanent places • Additional 800 if needed • Not significantly affected by the migrant flow
Romania	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1,200 permanent • 550 temp. in emergencies • Not significantly affected by the migrant flow
Hungary	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 980 Permanent Places • Not significantly affected by the migrant flow since closing border with Croatia in October 2015

http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/home-affairs/what-we-do/policies/securing-eu-borders/legal-documents/docs/report_western_balkans_en.pdf

Funding to the Western Balkans and Turkey for Migration Related Activities as of 6 October, 2015⁵

These figures include both previous and planned funding from the Instrument for Pre-Accession, comprising IPA I (2007-2013) and IPA II (2014-2020).

Country	Funding from European Commission
Serbia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Overall Funding (past and planned): €54 million • €45.6 million since 2007 for Serbian Home Affairs, including upgrades of border post equipment and asylum facilities • €240,000 from EU delegation from IPA II for infrastructural needs such as water and sanitation • €8.2 million set aside for migrant-related projects to be started within the next year
Macedonia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Overall Funding (past and planned): €24 million • €12 million under IPA I for renovation of border police stations, strengthening of police capabilities to monitor the border, and combatting human trafficking • €12 million under IPA II for 2016 towards helping the Macedonian government improve infrastructure, equipment, and IT support, improving police stations, strengthening visa policy, combatting human trafficking and aiding victims of trafficking
Bosnia and Herzegovina	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Overall Funding (past and planned): €16.8 million • €4 million has gone towards technical aspects of managing migration and asylum • €3.5 million for equipment supply • €1 million for construction of a migrant reception facility • €6.3 million from IPA I towards infrastructure and capacity improvement • €2 million from IPA II towards supporting BiH border police
Montenegro	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Overall funding (past and planned): €22.6 million • €2.63 million committed under IPA I between 2008-2013 to ensure fair treatment of migrants and to support the adoption of the Schengen agreement • €20 million planned under IPA II to support “Integrated Border Management”
Albania	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Overall funding (past and planned): €4.5 million • €3 million under IPA I in 2012 for reconstruction of border crossing points • €1.5 million planned for 2015 under IPA II to build the capacity of Albanian law enforcement agencies, specifically in terms of encouraging compliance with EU policies regarding border security
Kosovo	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Overall funding (past and planned): €7.1 million • €4.6 million in IPA I funding since 2007 • €2.5 million planned under IPA II for the improvement of Kosovo’s ability to manage migration

⁵ http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_MEMO-15-5535_en.htm

Turkey	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Overall funding (past and planned): €469 million • €130 million in IPA I funding between 2011 and 2013 • €245 million for 2014-2016 • €94 million in IPA II funds have been allotted to Turkey to assist with aiding Syrian migrants (as part of a total of €175 million in EU aid to Turkey for this purpose)
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Recent Developments

Macedonia made the decision to refuse entry to Afghan migrants on the weekend of February 20-21, 2016 classifying them as economic migrants and therefore ineligible for asylum. This decision came after countries further along the refugee route, including Austria, Croatia, and Serbia announced that Afghan migrants would not be allowed to pass through their borders. Croatia made the determination that Afghan migrants were not refugees but economic migrants, and forced hundreds of Afghans to return to Serbia, who in turn moved them back to Macedonia. Austria has further imposed a total daily limit of 3,200 entries and 80 asylum applications. The result of these restrictions was a series of clashes between asylum seekers and Greek police on February 23, 2016. With Afghans making up around one-third of all migrants, their inability to go north of the Greek border poses a serious threat of overcrowding in Greek migrant camps.⁶

These decisions by Macedonia and other European nations have raised concern with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). The commission fears that the new restrictions could lead to a humanitarian crisis along the Western Balkans route. According to UNHCR, nearly 700 Afghans have been barred from entering Serbia from Macedonia, creating a buildup of refugees and migrants both in Macedonia and Greece. As such, the UNHCR has been urging Macedonia and other countries to ensure that adequate accommodations, food, and access to asylum procedures are available. The UNHCR is further concerned that so many European countries are more interested in keeping refugees out than in doing their fair share to address the crisis correctly.⁷

Ambassador Naumovski also spoke on the cultural and security issues related to the crisis. The large influx of migrants could potentially have a destabilizing effect on Europe. Naumovski believes that refugees and migrants are not successfully integrating into European society. He argued that evidence of this failed integration can be seen in the Paris attacks and the Cologne incident.

On February 29, 2016 peaceful protests erupted into violence at the Greek-Macedonian border as asylum seekers attempted to break through a razor wire fence. At that time, an estimated 7,000 migrants were amassed on the Greek side of the border. Macedonian police responded to this with tear gas to restore order to the border.

In the aftermath of this incident, Macedonian Foreign Minister Nikola Poposki was interviewed by CNN on March 3, 2016. Poposki said that part of the problem was that destination countries for migrants (Austria, Germany, etc.) had imposed new restrictions, limiting their absorption

⁶ http://www.nytimes.com/2016/02/24/world/europe/macedonia-afghan-migrant-crisis.html?_r=0

⁷ <http://www.unhcr.org/56cc521c6.html>

capacity. The number of migrants that Western Europe is willing to receive determines the number of migrants that Macedonia can allow to pass through. Macedonia has made the decision to ramp up its efforts to stop illegal migration and ensure that those who do come up from Greece are registered. He also emphasized the need to distinguish between migrants fleeing violent conflict and economic migrants.⁸

On the Greek side, Apostolos Tzitzikostas, governor of the Central Macedonia region, called for a state of emergency to be declared. Some 20,000 migrants are currently encamped in the region. Governor Tzitzikostas called on Macedonia to open its border, stating that it “is unacceptable what [the Macedonians] are doing.” He also claimed that the European Union should take action against countries that close their borders, regardless of “whether they are members of the European Union or candidate members.”⁹

In an article posted on the Telegraph, Macedonian President Gjorge Ivanov argued, “united Europe has more walls than divided Europe had during the Cold War,” and suggested that Macedonia is bearing the full force of the crisis. Problems in Macedonia created by the crisis include illegal entries into Macedonian territory, damage to public and private property, and attacks against security forces. The crisis that Macedonia faces emanates from Greece, an EU country, and poses a threat to other EU nations. In this way, Macedonia is being forced to protect the EU from itself. The EU has forgotten that the Balkans play an important role in European security. They act as a buffer between northern and western Europe and the Middle East and North Africa. Ivanov also emphasized that it is important to remember that not every migrant is a humanitarian case, nor are they all terrorists or security threats.¹⁰

On Wednesday, March 9, 2016 Macedonia closed its border with Greece completely. This was done in response to Austria, Slovenia, Serbia, and Croatia announcing further restrictions on who would be allowed to cross their borders. Approximately 14,000 migrants are now stranded at the Idomeni camp on the Greek side of the Greece-Macedonia border. Many migrants are becoming desperate as conditions in the camp become increasingly squalid.

German Chancellor Angela Merkel condemned the countries that have tightened restrictions on or closed their borders. She lamented that although fewer refugees would arrive in Germany, Greece has now been put in a much more difficult position. She also expressed the wish that decisions related to borders be made by the whole EU.

The EU and Turkey are also in talks to reach an agreement on migration. The current proposal includes a process in which all migrants without proper documentation will be returned to Turkey. For each migrant that is returned to Turkey, one refugee currently staying in Turkey will be resettled in the EU. There is also the possibility of speeding up the planned €3 billion aid

⁸ <http://www.cnn.com/videos/world/2016/03/03/macedonia-migrant-crisis-nikola-poposki-intv-wrn.cnn>

⁹ <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-35734917>

¹⁰ <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/europe/macedonia/12185464/Macedonia-is-defending-Europe-from-itself.html>

payment planned in October to help Turkey manage the crisis, as well as a renewal of talks regarding Turkish accession to the EU.¹¹

Conclusion

Ultimately, Macedonia is doing its best to handle an almost completely unprecedented situation. In regards to border closings and conflicts between migrants and police, it is important to remember that Macedonia has little choice but to act in accordance with the decisions of countries farther down the migration route. If the EU expects Macedonia to step up its efforts to adequately handle the crisis, then the EU must provide more aid. The recent-tensions at the Greek-Macedonian border only highlight the need for better cross-country cooperation and communication.

Criticisms of how Macedonia has handled the situation by Greece or any other European country are largely unfair. As the first internal border to Europe, Macedonia has played a special role in the crisis, and is the first to be affected by decisions within the EU. As such, EU member states should make considerations as to how changes in their migrant policy will influence the situation on the ground at the Greek-Macedonian border.

It is unjust for the leaders in the EU, especially Chancellor Merkel, to argue that decisions regarding increased border controls and closings should be made at the EU level, which by definition leaves Macedonia out of this decision making process. Macedonia's steadfast commitment to acting in accordance with EU values in the face of this crisis is further evidence that it is ready to be a fully participating member. As migrants continue to arrive into the spring and summer in what are predicted to be increasingly large numbers, Macedonia fully intends to show itself as worthy of EU membership.

¹¹ <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-35772206>