

# Security in Times of Migration: Towards a Glocal<sup>1</sup> Definition and Practice of Security. The Case of the Syrian Refugees in Bulgaria<sup>2</sup>

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## Abstract

*In the summer of 2013, the number of Syrian refugees crossing into Bulgaria increased significantly. The preferred governmental rhetoric in this regard was characterized predominantly by the jargon of "threat to the national security". In November 2013, the Bulgarian Parliament reconfirmed its earlier decision to grant a five-year residence permit for non-EU nationals against a deposit of 1 million BGN (approx. 500,000 euros) in a Bulgarian bank.*

*The arrival of Syrian refugees was also met with a series of xenophobic attacks and patriotic marches against the "immigrants' terror". Furthermore, the plans of the government to set up ad hoc refugee camps in the vicinity of some small towns and villages provoked general anxiety, live chains and blockades of the roads. Parallel to this, a broad-based humanitarian campaign was initiated on the part of informal social groups, organizations, and universities.*

*How is the term of "security" to be defined today in times of intensive transnational movements of people? The statist parameters of the "security dilemma", outlined by John Herz in 1950, has long proved insufficient to take into account the role of the human factor in the current world developments. Moreover,*

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<sup>1</sup> In the globalization studies the term "glocal" serves to illustrate the possible forms of intertwining between local and global contexts.

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*we are observing a reductionist adaptation of its traditional theoretical and practical implications in form of social "exclusion" and "inclusion"; individual biopolitical profiling of migrants in the name of defending a territory; transnational management of personal biographies "in advance"; augmented technical and organizational cooperation among police and secret services. Nevertheless, such approaches often seem to generate a feeling of insecurity among the "normalized" local populations in the host countries as well as open tensions among them and the immigrants.*

*This paper addresses the necessity for a critical formulation of the concept of "security" today. In this sense, the uneven manifestations of the globalization with respect to different social and ethnic groups of people should be firmly brought into this investigation. A "glocal" research perspective needs to be reconfirmed. Second, a contemporary understanding of security should be constructed more in terms of rights, justice, and prosperity and be positively (embrace) instead of negatively (defence) oriented.*

**Keywords:** *migration, security, globalization, Bulgaria*

## **Introduction**

In the summer of 2013, the number of Syrian refugees crossing into Bulgaria increased considerably. The preferred governmental rhetoric in this regard was characterized predominantly by the jargon of "threat to the national security". Parallel to the rather delayed accommodation of the Syrian asylum-seekers, restrictive border-crossing and detainment measures were undertaken in order to demonstrate command of the "arising crisis". The repatriation of "illegal immigrants" of an origin other than the Syrian was intensified. In November 2013, the Bulgarian Parliament reaffirmed its earlier decision to grant a five-year residence permit for non-EU nationals against a deposit of 1 million BGN (approx. 500,000 euros) in a Bulgarian bank.

More than simply getting into the operational peculiarities of the “national security reflex” of the authorities in Sofia, the current paper will analyze the reactions of the latter to the massive arrival of people from Syria against the background of the phenomenon of global migration. In this light, the instigation of “national sentiments” on the part of the Bulgarian institutions is to be deciphered as a compensatory mobilization – not just for their initial technical and organizational difficulties in dealing with a humanitarian predicament of the sort or, for that matter, in response to sub-state political competitions – but, putting it into a broader historical context, for the ambivalent positioning of the Bulgarian state in respect of global economic, social, political, and cultural mobility.

At the same time, on a practical-political level, the article reconstructs the manifestation of “national strength” in Bulgaria in the face of Syrian refugees as a reflection of a long-term tendency towards arbitrary fortification of the external borders of the EU vis-à-vis particular groups of the world population. Thus, the behavior of the Bulgarian government in the given situation may be understood as the behavior of a future member of the Schengen area (see below). On a methodological level, the exposé looks at the traditionalist concept of international security – being tied to the power of the states, and firmly separating the social realms in internal and external ones – through the historical and conceptual lens of an emerging global society. In this way, both current deficiencies and future necessities or chances for social cohesion in a shifting (asymmetrical) global world will be addressed. The text should, therefore, be considered as making a meta-theoretical and political point for global emancipation.

Hence, a critical epistemological approach to the notion of security has been adopted. Prevalent in the exposé are the normative and ontological concerns of the critical security studies (CSS), as well as the globalization studies with reference to the field of International Relations (IR). On the one hand, the article sticks to some of the principal prerequisites of the CSS: the relevance of ideas, institutions, and culture, together with material capabilities for studying international security models; the need to place the insecurity of men, women and communities, not states, on the agenda; the ability of states to generate insecurity; the demand for a construction of more organic political communities (even replacing the states); the importance of economic, environmental, and food security; the exacerbating effects of the neo-liberal economic structure; the deep connection between individual and global security; the artificiality of the distinction between “inside” and “outside”; the transformational potential for individual and global security through

emancipatory<sup>3</sup> interaction and communication (Buzan and Hansen 2009, 205-207). On the other hand, the globalization studies allow us to go deeper into the social unevenness of the process of globalization and the global migration, respectively, within the framework of the emerging global society. In addition, the rather holistic normative perspective of the equality of the paradigm of the “global society” is to forestall the addition of security to what is essentially a human rights agenda (securitization<sup>4</sup> of immigrants) and to awaken domestic and international audiences when states co-opt human rights rhetoric without changing their politics and nature (Buzan 2004 cit. *ibid.* 203).

Nonetheless, the author remains aware of the critique expressed to the post-positivism of the CSS, such as the conceptual inadequacy and the historical inapplicability of a dichotomy between an individual and a collective (in the version of a state), the insufficient elaboration on the eventual format of the institutions of emancipation, the political identity of human beings beyond the states or the vagueness of the transition from the individual to the global security level (*ibid.*, 207-208). Still, the text is to serve as a possibility for a continuation and expansion of the critical security debate. The advancement of the theoretical developments within its framework as well as the shortcomings of state policies in relation to immigration ensuing in immigrants and asylum-seekers feeling insecure due to various racist and discriminative discourses and practices and the “natives” (Europeans) feeling threatened by “the invasion of foreigners” (Bilgic 2006, 2) provides at least a minimal basis for not taking the conventional national security paradigm for granted – for the sake of those “inside”, “outside” and “in-between”. How can security be defined epistemologically and practically and who should it be for in times of global migration?

In detail, a theoretical introduction will shed light on the focal points of the traditional security dilemma formulated by John Herz in 1950 as the main, historically evolved, pattern of international security conduct in the spirit of the theory of realism in the discipline of IR. Then, some underlying assumptions of the evolving global society as well as the phenomenon of global migration for the traditionalist concept and practice of security will be

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<sup>3</sup> Following Booth (1991), the term “emancipation” refers to the ‘elimination of physical and human constraints preventing people from carrying out what they would freely choose to do’ (cit. Buzan and Hansen 2009, 206).

<sup>4</sup> Here the notion of “securitization” alludes to a presentation of an issue as posing an existential threat to a designated referent object”. (Buzan, Waever and de Wilde 1998 cit. Bilgic 2006, 5)

laid out, including the “global imperative of mobility” and the process of “discretionary re-bordering” within (Dublin II (III) regulation on examining the asylum applications in the EU country of first entry) and beyond the territory of the EU (repatriation agreements with third countries). Against this backdrop, the concrete discursive preferences, programmatic goals, and practical activities of the Bulgarian government on the occasion of the arrival of Syrian refugees in the country will be presented, supplemented (to a lesser extent) by some broader social reactions (nationalistic acts, popular humanitarian support). Chronologically, the focus will be put on the period between November 2013 and April 2014, when important groundwork was laid as far as the accomplishment of self-determined strategic security interests of the state is concerned. The Ministry of Interior designated the first three of those months as a time of “permanent migration crisis”, whereas the months of January and February were declared to have brought “positive fruits” in dealing with the “refugee crisis” (MoI 2014, 2). To the contrary, in the spring of 2014, the apprehensions of UNHCR and Human Rights Watch (HRW) about possible pushbacks of asylum-seekers from the Bulgarian-Turkish border grew.

The article presents the thesis that traditional national security concepts were automatically put into motion on state/EU level during the arrival of Syrian asylum-seekers in Bulgaria in 2013. Characteristically, these concepts were directed not towards defending a territory but towards management of human life. This, in turn, can be said to have resulted in the construction of a refugee image of a “security threat” while “normalizing” the local majority (Bigo 2006, 45) and pretending to guarantee “stability”. Instead, an emancipatory, positive, individually-based, glocal (post-national) re-orientation of the notion of security would be needed in order to meet the historical requirements for building up communities based on rights, justice, and prosperity. Interestingly, the public opinion polls conducted for Eurobarometer in the autumn of 2013 showed that 23% of the population in Bulgaria defined immigration as a problem on a national level; 1% of the population determined the terrorism as a problem on a national level. On a personal level, only 2% of the population considered the immigration as a problematic issue, and only 1% defined the terrorism as problematic issue. (Eurobarometer 80, 2013, 12-14)

### **Traditional security dilemma**

After the end of the Second World War both the historical circumstances and the epistemological climate in the domain of IR favored the realist vision of security. It was John Herz who gave a special impetus to this line of thought for several decades thereafter. In his well-known article “Idealist Internationalism and the Security Dilemma” (1950) Herz stipulated the main features of the international security subsuming them under the term “security dilemma” – though not with the intention of reconfirming their logic but of opening space for a well informed search for liberal alternatives to the realist order. In his account, states had established themselves as the leading political actor, nurturing the overpowering impact of the security factor as well as ensuing power-political, oligarchic, and authoritarian trends on the world scene (Herz 1950, 158). The details of their “security dilemma” Herz defines as follows:

a dilemma with which human societies have had to grapple since the dawn of history (non-historical); where groups live alongside each other without being organized into a higher unity (anarchy-based); a constellation in which groups or individuals are concerned about being attacked, subjected, dominated, or annihilated by other groups and individuals (negative, defensive); a constellation in which states are prone to acquire more and more power in order to escape the impact of the power of others and can never feel entirely secure (conservative); where cooperation and solidarity convert to elements in a conflict situation (teleological) (ibid., 157-163).

In fact, Herz notes that “no later nationalism in the major nation-states became allied with ideas of national or racial inequality and superiority than the universalist ideology of humanity was taken out of nationalism and the nationalities, respectively, became competing units and established themselves as nation-states” (ibid., 163). Faced with a growing interdependence but also with the security dilemma, states remained tempted to expand their individual power, economically (in order to be self-sufficient in war), strategically (in order to safeguard their defense requirements) etc. (ibid., 173).

The effect of Herz's observations turned out to be: the prevalence of the positivist mindset in the research and arrangement of international life, with the consequence of little meta-theoretical or philosophical discussions; the prioritization of statism and nationalism (as a particularistic ideology of (homogeneous) commonality) in formulating security risks and strategies, to the detriment of the security of the humankind, or of the individual or of groups within or across state boundaries; the cementing of the distinction between the national and international realm; the sacralization of the territory as a natural national asset while providing justifications for the political center to nationalize; the ability of the military-political security policy to subordinate all other interests to those of the nation; the narrowness of the material focus of the traditional security patterns (Buzan and Hansen 2009, 21-35). A significant outcome of the appearance of this methodological and practical nationalism (Beck 2003), with regard to the subject of the present exposé, seems to be the general acceptance of the implicitness of a situation where states can determine how and when a community of security is to be defined and what the criteria for communal belonging are supposed to be, being as ambiguous as they are in the case of the EU member states.

### **The challenge of global mobility for the traditional concept and practice of security**

#### *The formation of the global society of mobility*

Although not unanimous in their understanding of the theoretical and practical specifics of the notion of the "global/world society" a noticeable number of theorists of the globalization have come to the conclusion that currently human beings on our planet are experiencing a level of transnational influences and realizing a degree of cross-border intercourses unprecedented in the world history (Shaw 2000; Held 2004; Appadurai 2006; Castells 2004, 2006; Sassen 2011). In a most general manner, the concept of the "global society" can be summarized as a transformative phase in the interconnectedness of human existence predestined by the process of (capitalist) globalization in the last 30 to 40 years.

Historically speaking, the world society is an emanation from the global processes of economic expansion, cultural diffusion, and convergence within the state system (Shaw 2000). Normatively, following Linklater (1990 cit. Griffiths 1999, 140) as one of the first critical theorists of universal moral

and political allegiances beyond the nation-state within the discipline of IR, it is to be conceived as an embodiment of a cosmo-politic ethical community of justice and equality incorporating a possibility of overcoming the particularism of national societies, estranged from one another, and consolidating the backbone of the (universal) human society. As an empirical enterprise, the global society has amounted to a conglomerate of relations characterized by disparities, and, correspondingly, political potential of various kinds – divisions of income, wealth, and class; of knowledge and power; of gender and lifestyle; of instrumentalization of cultural, national, racial, and ethnical differences (Beck 2013, 174; Linklater 2001, 631-632). We are observing a complex world societal evolution marked by variable dialectics between globalization and segmentation and expected political impulses for change.

Distinctively, the integrative, disintegrative, and transformative tendencies and capacities in the global society are strongly affected by the normative imperative of mobility (Bigo 2006, 6). The discourses of free circulation of goods, capital, information, services, and persons are central for the legitimization of (national, regional, global) governance (ibid., 35) today and its critique, respectively. It is on the path of mobility that a number of supra- and sub-national actors, and individuals themselves, enter the (global) realm of political power struggles shaking or trying to reassert the traditional foundations of the cultural hegemony of the nation-states. According to Bauman (1998, 2), mobility climbs to the rank of the uppermost among the coveted values in global capitalism, and the freedom to move, perpetually a scarce and unequally distributed commodity, has quickly become the main stratifying factor of our times. In the particular case of migrating persons, the talk is about bolstering or frustrating a possible cross-linking of an individual development with the plurality of local or regional functional contexts (Stichweh 1997, 606).

#### *Traditional security politics in a world of global mobility*

In an asymmetrical world of mobility, traditional concepts and practices of security, based on nation-state security performance, tend to be both challenged and reconfirmed. At their core, trends like this are to be attributed to the equivocal stance of nation-states in relation to the process of globalization, in general, and the evolution of the global economy in particular, which has been created by the interaction between governments,



markets, and international financial institutions (Castells 2004, 137). In a global capitalist constellation, states have been promoting certain aspects of trans-border exchanges, such as financial, production, and labor competitiveness, restrictively avoiding others, such as social justice, and jealously controlling other developments, such as demographic and civilizational plurality. In this way, “a national-security-driven approach to immigration and asylum not only obfuscates complex and ambiguous realities of human mobility, where persecution, victimhood, suffering, and voluntary versus forced departure are all relative and contested matters. It is also a harbinger of new politics of segregation” (Follis 2012, 119).

As a result, states are meticulously, although arbitrary and in contradiction with the ethical prescriptions of the paradigm of “global society,” administering a number of legal categories of life between the extremes of “nationally wanted” and “nationally unwanted” immigration: “documented migrant”, “economic migrant”, “irregular migrant”, “skilled migrant”, “temporary migrant worker”, “asylum-seeker” etc. (IOM 2011). This remains valid even where conditions for granting citizenship and materializing civil and political rights of “recognized” foreign residents have been re-articulated and partially eased in a number of countries (Benhabib 2002, 165-168). States are further “selectively liberalizing borders, on the one hand, and devoting unprecedented funds, energies, and technologies to border fortification, on the other” (Brown 2010, 8). Strikingly, these new barriers are not built as defenses against potential attacks by other sovereigns, but as a reaction to and, not seldom, in parallel to or to the benefit of persistent, transnational, in many cases informal or subterranean powers (migration, smuggling, crime, terror, and even political purposes, not incited by national interests) (ibid., 21). Last but not least, new transnational mechanisms for policing have been put in place by state governments (in Europe), a development characterized by Carolina Follis (2012, 12) as “re-bordering”. The emergence of professionalized cross-border bureaucracies and operation units running all-encompassing biometric databases and sophisticated border-control equipment have reduced security, “conceptually and practically, to technologies of surveillance, extraction of information, coercion acting against societal and state vulnerabilities, disconnecting it from human, legal and social guarantees and protection of individuals, to the detriment of the poorest foreigners” (Bigo 2006, 8). In sum, what we are witnessing, simultaneously or apart, are processes of re-nationalization and, in the same self-defensive tone, transnationalization (regionalization) of politics of security – in opposition to the pressures of globalization threatening to blur the (ideological)

inside/outside, economic, political, and cultural distinctions in the Westphalian world.

### **EU border/immigration policy ramifications**

When Syrian refugees started entering Bulgaria in large numbers in the summer of 2013, some constitutive elements of an EU-wide security architecture regarding global migration and frontiers had already been installed in the country. The idea was that traditional (national) and European (regional) security aspirations should be mutually boosted and advanced. More precisely, the “National Strategy in the Area of Migration, Asylum, and Integration (2011-2020)”, one of the fundamental documents in the field, proclaims the phenomenon of migration to be a necessary resource for the national and EU economy and demography, as well as a potential threat for the social unity and the security of the state and the Union. Being an external European border, the strategy continues, obliges the country to work for the implementation of a long-standing and unified policy for the protection of the common European border and to fight “illegal immigration”, smuggling, and human trafficking (CoM 2011, 3).

For the purposes of the present article, it should be noted that the security requirements set out in this and other official papers on the subject and, subsequently put into effect, are primarily one-sidedly, tailored in synchronization with the pragmatic interests of competitiveness, cultural homogeneity (prioritizing of previously emigrated Bulgarian citizens or persons of Bulgarian origin abroad) and domination of the Bulgarian and the remaining European states. In return, universal, international legal or otherwise philosophical humanitarianistic, considerations have been allotted a dubious declaratory function. In practice, they have been significantly pushed into the background (see below) and immigrants not fitting into the utilitarian expectations of either the EU or the state have been ascribed with negative and even criminal intentions in advance (profiling). According to the National Institute of Statistics, Bulgaria is to be classified as a country of emigration all the years of its membership in the EU (NIS 2014).

In legal terms, the National Strategy one-dimensionally relies on different, (otherwise hard to dissociate in economic, political and social respect) and partly unsubstantiated categorizations of migrating persons, such as “illegal immigrant”, “highly qualified immigrant”, “refugee”, “illegally

residing persons”, “Bulgarians outside Bulgaria” etc. (CoM 2011, 6-7). As the highest objective of the Bulgarian immigration and asylum policy the Strategy, the “Multi-Year National Program for the Use of the European Return Fund (2008-2013)” (MoI 2008) and the “Strategic Program for an Integral Management of the Return (2011-2013)” (MoI 2011) stipulate the “effective” and “long-lasting” return of the asylum-seekers. Discursively, the National Strategy contemplates countering “illegal immigration” as one of the leading priorities of the security policy in Bulgaria (ibid., 15). It further establishes an imaginary link between immigration and terrorism, automatically coupling two different phenomena (Bilgic 2006, 15). The “Multi-Year National Program for the Use of the European Return Fund (2008-2013)” likewise puts immigration on a par with “risk” (alarm or threat) for the collective European security, and the common immigration measures of the EU with a “guarantee for stability” (MoI 2008, 9).

In the course of the practical adoption of the Brussels’ prerogatives in the sphere of immigration and asylum, in general, and the preparation for Bulgaria joining the Schengen agreement in particular, the local authorities commenced supplying the Eurodac biometric database with fingerprints of “illegal immigrants” and “asylum-seekers”. They took part in the mission “Poseidon” of FRONTEX, the EU external borders management agency, along the Greek-Turkish water and land border, and allowed the deployment of FRONTEX representatives directly at the Bulgarian-Turkish border since 2011. 160 million euros, mainly EU financial payments, were invested in sophisticated border control technologies, including more surveillance towers, thermovisual equipment, night vision devices, off-road vehicles etc. A new detention center with a closed regime was built with a capacity for 350 people in Lyubimetz, close to the Bulgarian-Turkish border. In the beginning of 2011 the number of visa denials for persons from countries of “intensified immigration risk”, such as Algeria, Afghanistan, Iraq, and Syria, had already been augmented. According to the National Strategy for Migration, an increase of 30 to 40% was observed at that moment (CoM 2011, 20).

### **The arrival of Syrian refugees**

#### *Security discourses*

The hitherto outlined strategic rhetorical (and ideational) propensity of the Bulgarian state to treat “undesired” immigrants as an a priori collective

security threat and/or emergency (securitization) came even more to the fore when Syrian refugees started arriving by the thousands in August and September 2013. To give a few examples, when asked about their situation in October 2013, the Minister of Defence, Angel Naydenov, stated for the Bulgarian National Television: “We cannot afford to underestimate the dangers for the national security. That is why all the efforts of the state and its government in this moment are concentrated on not allowing the crisis to turn into a catastrophe. ... We should nevertheless show at least a minimal amount of compassion and humanity” (dnes.bg 11.10.2013). Later in the same month the Minister of the Interior, Tzvetlin Yovchev, to whose ministry the coordination of activities concerning Syrian and other refugees was delegated, said in an interview for the same television show, “We have not been faced with a bigger challenge for the national security in recent years. ... The refugee wave from Syria to Bulgaria is threatening the whole nation” (bnt.bg 19.10.2013). In November, the Consultative Council for National Security, the highest political format for dealing with security issues in the country, was especially convened to deliberate on “the processes provoked by the crisis in the Middle East and North Africa and the related increased migration pressure to the country” (president.bg 20.11.2013). Besides, in the eleven-page-long final “Report on the Activities Undertaken by the Institutions of the State Power Regarding the Management of the Crisis Evolving from the Increased Migration Pressure”, prepared by the Minister of the Interior in February 2014, the word “risk” (*риск*) was used 10 times, the word “crisis” (*криза*) 14 times, the word “security” (*сигурност*) 14 times, the word combination “migration or refugee pressure” (*миграционен/бежански натиск*) 19 times, the words “threat” (*заплаха*) and “refugee wave” (*бежанска вълна*) each 5 times, and the “illegality” of immigrants was equalized with crossing the border (of a *de jure* state party to the Geneva Convention relating to the Status of the Refugees (1951)) without permission (MoI 2014).

At the same time, the discursive implication of “endangerment” on the occasion of Syrian refugees has been supplemented by a declaratory pro-realist rhetoric of “exercising control over the circumstances”. In the report from February 2014 the word “countermeasure” (*противодействие*) appeared 4 times, the word “overcome/arrange” (*справяне*) 8 times, the word “action” (*действия*), in different combinations, 22 times. While the exhibition of “strength” and dynamism by the Bulgarian state can be interpreted as an instrument of the Bulgarian administration for countervailing internal political opposition or conciliating extreme nationalist moods (see below), it is also to be seen as a pretension for becoming a member of the Schengen security club (deutschlandfunk.de 05.07.2014). In the latter perspective, it is a manifestation

of a claim to reconfirm its political potency without being responsive to a dynamic and diverse, but discriminative global environment.

*Programmatic goals*

The national security apprehensions of the Bulgarian government were basically enunciated in three types of potential “dangers” that can be traced back in the above cited report of the Ministry of Interior: terrorism and criminal activity; financial and social costs; epidemiological risks (MoI 2014). However, such wording came at cross-purposes with the actual needs of the Syrian people or the conflicts that have driven them out of their places of origin and failed to explain why they are a risk and for whom (Bilgic 2006, 27). According to one of the lawyers of the human rights organization Bulgarian Helsinki Committee (BHC): “Instead of trying to meet these people’s basic needs, they opted to create a hostile image of asylum seekers and refugees in order to excuse the poor treatment” (Batha 2014). In the end, rhetorical choices like this seem to serve well as a justification for the overall goals of the Bulgarian state to regulate (global) migration in harmony with its pragmatic (neo-liberal), social and political interests, thus cementing the inside/outside approaches in world politics.

Against this background, the ultimate programmatic aspirations of the Bulgarian government with regard to the Syrian refugees were formulated on November 7, 2013, this time differentiating between the “Syrians with a granted status”, potential Syrian asylum-seekers, and the rest of the immigrants. The “Plan for the Management of the Crisis Situation Occurring as a Result of the Heightened Migration Pressure on the Territory of the Republic of Bulgaria” pointed out the following priorities in descending order of importance:

1. decreasing the number of “illegal” immigrants on the territory of the country – preventing persons entering Bulgaria, as well as deporting those already inside the country;
2. providing for the security of Bulgarian citizens by curbing the risks which stem from the stay of “illegal” migrants, asylum-seekers, and persons under protection on the territory of the state, such as terrorism and radical extremism, pandemics and epidemics, ethnic, religious and political

conflicts, and criminal activity; 3. guaranteeing order, security, and humane living conditions in the reception centers; 4. decreasing the number of asylum-seekers in Bulgaria; 4. accelerating the integration of the persons with humanitarian and refugee status and enabling their contribution to the social systems in the country; 5. supplying additional external financing for the solution of the refugee problem; 6. effective communication with the Bulgarian society (CoM 2013, 2).

In addition, the plan formulates three indicators for its successful realization:

1. a trifold decrease in the number of foreign persons “illegally” entering the country by 31st March 2014, from 3000 to less than 1000 per month; 2. an expansion of the administrative capacity of the State Agency for Refugees (SAF), allowing 150 people to apply for refugee or humanitarian status to be registered per day till 31st March 2014; 3. a twofold increase in the number of expulsions of persons “illegally” residing in the country by 31st March 2014 (CoM 2013, 36).

As a whole, the intention was to turn Bulgaria into a place “not attractive for illegal immigrants” (ibid, 28). On the other hand, in November 2013, the Bulgarian Parliament restated its earlier agreement that non-EU citizens could be allowed a five-year residence in Bulgaria if they invest 1 million BGN (approx. 500,000 euros) in a Bulgarian bank.

#### *Practical activities*

In conjunction with the general programmatic orientation of the Bulgarian government, the accommodation of the Syrian asylum-seekers who had arrived in the country between August and November 2013 was paralleled by rigorous steps for limiting the access to the territory of the state by nationals of third countries outside of the EU. Soon after the announcement of

the new “contingency” measures, around 1500 police officers and 140 units of border technique were sent to the Bulgarian-Turkish border for the purpose of “enabling 100% inspection of the most vulnerable parts of the frontier” (MoI 2014, 6). Whereas 6 million euros were urgently transferred by the European Commission in order to alleviate the cost of sheltering the Syrians in Bulgaria, and a 30km border fence was built by the local authorities at the cost of about 10 million BGN (approx. 5 million euros) along the same land border (dnevnik.bg 20.02.2014).

In the meantime, UNHCR raised its concerns about the intentions of the government to increase the use of closed facilities for asylum-seekers, particularly single men, and urged the local institutions to find alternatives to detention (UNHCR 06.12.2013). The government had also been planning to build a new detention center for immigrants (MoI 2014, 28). Two Wall Street Journal on-the-ground investigations in Greece and Bulgaria in 2013 shed light on the systematic detention of Syrian refugees in poor conditions and with limited access to a proper asylum-application process (Stevis 2014).

The cooperation with international partners was also intensified. Among others, a contingent of guest guards from other EU member states was stationed in the border area with Turkey through FRONTEX. Some of them were directly engaged in interviewing new-comers and “recognizing the dangerous persons for the society among them” (MoI 2014, 8). Owing to the heightened contacts with Turkish counter-parts during the same period, the presence of Turkish police and army contingents on their side of the frontier was enhanced. The communication was further improved through the sending of a Turkish liaison-officer. On 24 October 2013, on Bulgarian initiative, a meeting took place between the Ministers of Interior of Greece and Bulgaria, so that the Greek experience with immigrants, which was very much criticized by human rights organization, could be drawn on (ibid., 10-11). At the same time, Sofia increased its concerted efforts to energize the exchange with the diplomatic representations of the countries of origin of “illegally” residing persons on the territory of Bulgaria, including Afghanistan, Tunisia, Algeria, Morocco, Sudan, Iran, Iraq, Pakistan, Eritrea etc., in order to facilitate the identification of these persons, the issuance of travel documents and their repatriation in a more expedient manner. Moreover, concrete steps were taken to restore the working conditions of the Bulgarian diplomatic representatives in states with a “high migration risk”, such as Syria and Iraq. The networks of the International Organization for Migration (IOM) were activated in cases where countries of origin refused to provide assistance. It was planned that 250 persons of non-Syrian nationality would leave Bulgaria from 1st January

till 31st December 2014 through the IOM program “Voluntary return”. The number of persons who left the country in 2013 in the framework of this program amounted to 149. Last but not least, Bulgarian authorities made diligent use of flights for the return of “illegal” immigrants organized and coordinated by other EU member states and co-financed by FRONTEX. From the beginning of 2013 till 14th December 2013, the Directorate “Migration” of the Bulgarian Ministry of Interior took part in fifteen joint flights, which led to the expulsion of thirty-six Nigerian citizens, five citizens from Pakistan, two citizens from Georgia, and one from Ecuador. In comparison, three such joint flights were realized with Bulgarian participation and five persons sent back. On 27th November 2013, fifty-four Iraqi citizens, forty-six from Bulgaria and eight from Greece, were extradited on a charter flight to Iraq. (CoM 2014, 8-12).

As a result of all of these initiatives, 1,025 foreign persons were deported in 2013 and 111 in January 2014 (MoI 2014, 9). In his report from February 2014 on the measures undertaken in relation to the Syrian refugees, the Minister of Interior stated that as of 31st January 2014 the “influx of illegal immigrants” had stopped. In comparison, from August to November 2013 approximately 2 000 asylum-seekers, mostly Syrians, were crossing the border into Bulgaria each month (MoI 2014, 3). In the first five weeks of 2014, their number fell to 99 (HRW 2014). These developments caused the European Commission, the UNHCR and the BHC to raise serious doubts that, in reality, many potential (Syrian) asylum-seekers were pushed back from the border with Turkey and their right to asylum was neglected.

In the end of April 2014, HRW presented a report called “Containment Plan: Bulgaria’s Pushbacks and Detention of Syrian and other Asylum-Seekers and Migrants”. The HRW research was based on a visit of their representatives to Bulgaria in December 2013 and interviews with 177 immigrants in various locations in both Bulgaria and Turkey. Of these, 41 gave detailed accounts of 44 incidents involving at least 519 people in which Bulgarian border police apprehended and returned them to Turkey, in some instances using violence. The organization spoke of a systematic and deliberate practice of preventing undocumented asylum-seekers from entering Bulgaria to lodge claims for international protection. The report was also critical of the fact that the Bulgarian authorities provided little or no support to asylum-seekers once they had been granted status or had left reception centers, while at the same time the EU and national laws made it difficult for recognized refugees and beneficiaries of subsidiary protection to work in another EU state, or to adjust their status once there (HRW 2014).



Publications like *The Guardian* also reported the possible push-backs having been observed on the Bulgarian-Turkish border (Grant and Domokos 2014).

#### *Non-official social reactions*

In resonance with the inner/outer securitization approach of the official institutions in Bulgaria, directly involved in the admission of Syrian and other refugees, a series of physical xenophobic attacks were carried out against foreign citizens in November 2013, some were against women, and some took place in broad daylight. At the same time, organized political events were convened to protest the arrival of Syrian refugees. For example, the supporters of the parliamentary represented, openly racist and xenophobic party "Ataka" organized a procession in Sofia against the "strangers", as they preferred to call the persons of foreign origin in the country. Other nationalist formations like the "IMRO – Bulgarian National Movement" and the neo-nazi movement "National Resistance" initiated a march through the main streets of Sofia against the "immigrants' terror". The deputies of the party "Ataka" submitted a proposal to the Bulgarian Parliament for a complete closure of the border with Turkey and non-admission of asylum-seekers from the Middle East and Africa. In the end of September 2013, the party IMRO (acronym: Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization) was at the lead of a "heroic march" to the biggest check point on the Bulgarian-Turkish border, "Kapitan Andreevo", and a partial blockade of the same border.

Furthermore, the accommodation of some tens of Syrian refugees in two of the suburbs of the capital Sofia, "Vrazhdebna" and "Voenna rampa", was received with discontent and suspicion. The plans of the government to build ad hoc refugee camps in smaller places, such as Kazanlak in Southern Bulgaria and Telish in Northern Bulgaria, provoked anxiety, life chains, blockades of the roads, and threats with self-combustion among their residents.

Contrary to these non-official conservative manifestations, a broad-based civil campaign to collect clothes, donate food or money, deliver Bulgarian language courses and help with registration and accommodation unfolded during the first months of the Syrian presence. The work of tens of volunteers organized through the Internet platform "Friends of the Refugees", the "Council of Refugee Women in Bulgaria" and the humanitarian activities supported by the New Bulgarian University are to be mentioned. Human

rights organizations, such as the Bulgarian Helsinki Committee and the Office of the UNHCR in Sofia, urged the government to abide by international and regional humanitarian practices and norms and to treat the Syrian asylum-seekers accordingly. In February 2014, open protest against xenophobia and discrimination took place, the first of its scale in Bulgaria. At this protest the role of the state and the political parties in treating the whole issue of the Syrian refugees was partly put into question.

Similarly, Syrian refugees themselves, on the basis of their personal (individual and collective) experience, have also shown the inadequacy of the traditional national security approaches. There have been a couple of blockades of the international route E-80 to Turkey with the demand of accelerating the processing of their asylum applications and, later, of being permitted to travel to other European countries which the EU asylum-system does not automatically allow, even for persons with a humanitarian or refugee status granted in Bulgaria (Dublin II, III regulation). During a visit of the EU Commissioner for Home Affairs to one ad hoc refugee camp close to the Bulgarian-Turkish border, a refugee woman from Syria had tried to set herself on fire (Yankov 2014). On 9th April 2014, Syrian refugees with similar demands gathered to protest in front of the representation office of the European Commission in Sofia (novanews.bg 09.04.2014).

### **Conclusion**

The arrival of Syrian refugees in Bulgaria in the end of 2013 and the beginning of 2014 was met to a great extent as a “national security threat” by the official Bulgarian representatives – notwithstanding their appeals against openly hostile rhetoric and activities with regards to (admitted) “foreign residents” in the country notwithstanding. Respective discursive identifications, programmatic intentions, and practical undertakings were manifested under the banner of “taking all precautionary measures against any eventual risk for the nation”. The ensuing outcome found its final expression in an abrupt decrease of Syrian and other asylum-seekers at the end of January 2014, an increase of criticism by UNHCR, HRW, BHC, and media publications regarding possible push-backs of refugees. Consequently, a complex public debate about the asymmetrical influences of the process of globalization on the local communities in Bulgaria and elsewhere in the world was postponed for the indefinite future.

Beyond being presented as an “issue of national emergency” by the Bulgarian government, it is the view of the author of this article that the reactions of the Bulgarian institutions concerning Syrian and other immigrants during the discussed period could be substantively realized only when situated in the broader analytical framework of the global society of mobility. They are to be conceived as a prolongation of the previous EU policy of regional and trans-regional “re-bordering” in connection to global migration. In its ambiguity, ultimately resulting in discretionary fortification of frontiers and keeping out economically “unreliable” and/or culturally “alien” immigrants, this policy is reproducing the traditional national security dilemma of states. Thus, the pressing demands of a considerable part of migrating and accommodating world populations remain neglected and indeed segregated.

Against this background, cases like Bulgaria’s treatment of Syrian refugees need to be subjected to a deeper ontological and epistemological inquiry. The statist parameters of the realist “security dilemma”, outlined by John Herz in the 1950s, has long proved insufficient to take into account the role of the human factor in the current world developments. Moreover, we are observing a reductionist adaptation of its traditional theoretical and practical implications in form of social “exclusion” and “inclusion”; individual biopolitical profiling of migrants in the name of defending a territory (or asserting the state influence); transnational management of personal biographies “in advance”; augmented technical and organizational cooperation among police and secret services. Nevertheless, such an approach often seems to generate a feeling of insecurity among the “normalized” local populations in the host countries as well as discriminative practices towards immigrants.

For that matter, the present exposé further addresses the necessity for a *critical* formulation of the concept of “security” nowadays taking into account the prerequisites of CSS and global studies in the common framework of IR. In this sense, the uneven manifestations of the globalization with respect to different social and/or ethnic groups of people should be firmly brought into its investigation. A “glocal” research perspective needs to be reconfirmed – to the advantage of blurring the self/other distinction and intertwining of local and global discriminatory contexts. Second, a contemporary understanding of security should be constructed more in terms of rights, justice, and prosperity of individuals and communities and be positively (embracement) instead of negatively (defence) oriented. In a global society of mobility an immigrant should be considered a subject of security as much as a local resident – in a reciprocal process of emancipation and constructing a society beyond its national status.

To be sure, the broader societal humanitarian efforts, the local/international legal critique and the protest mobilizations on the part of the Syrian refugees in the Bulgarian case show that there are clear signs of social and normative potential in the local society for thinking “security” beyond the nation, the borders and the securitization of human needs. Obviously, the politicization of those potentials and resistance to world cultural, economic and political models, respectively, seem rather difficult “because nation-states are formally committed, as a matter of identity, to such self-evident goals as socioeconomic development, citizen rights, individual self-development, and civil international relations” (Meyer et al., 160).

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