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GEOPOLITICAL ASPECTS OF THE MIGRATION CRISIS IN THE SHADOW OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC – STATE AND THREATS

Abstract:

In this paper, the author analyses geopolitical aspects of the migration crisis by monitoring the state from the year of 2015 to 2020, with a special emphasis on the period during the Covid-19 pandemic. Due to mass migration, the transit countries are facing numerous security, economic, social and geopolitical challenges which have intensified since 2015 and have not abated during the Covid-19 pandemic. In the introduction, the author creates the geopolitical context within which the research problem will be analyzed. Based on this, it is possible to understand the significance of the Eurasian coastal zone marked as Rimland, as well as to locate and unmask the reasons for generating wars, poverty, social and other instabilities within this zone, especially in the Middle East and North Africa. In the second part, the author analyses demographic and geopolitical aspects of the migration crisis. The goal is to find the cause of the migration crisis, potential drivers and their intentions. Finally, the overall analysis is directed towards the state, risks and consequences in the Balkans and in Europe. The Balkan migration route, as one of the most significant transit roads, impacted the geopolitical state in the region. The author believes that the problems and potential risks of the migration crisis have been put aside during 2020, which might cause a domino effect of destabilization in the Balkans and in Europe in the future. Therefore, the main goal of this paper is to unmask the risks and threats caused by the migration crisis, which have been put aside and hidden in the shadows of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Key words: *Geopolitics, migration crisis, the Balkans, Europe, Covid-19.*

INTRODUCTION

The geopolitical situation in the part of the world marked as *Rimland* has been, for decades, more or less successfully controlled by the leading world power that seeks to maintain its primacy on the Eurasian continent and in the world. The power in question is the United States of America which, following the instructions given by the founders of geopolitics and Anglo-Saxon thalassocratic idea Alfred T. Mahan, Halford J. Mackinder, Nicholas J. Spykman and others, are directing their activities, directly or through pivot states, towards Eurasia and the key zone of *Heartland*. In order to clarify what this is about it is necessary to briefly look at the conceptual clarification and geographical location of key zones of thalassocratic and tellurocratic confrontation. First of all, the leading thalassocratic power are the United States, while the Russian Federation is the leading tellurocratic power.

The significance of *Heartland* was pointed out by Halford Mackinder (Mackinder 1904, 1919), and according to him, the control over *Heartland* would

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ensure supremacy over the World island, which is the key of global domination. By World island, Mackinder implies to Asia, Europe and Africa, which represent the largest land entity on the planet. The *Heartland* lays in the Eurasian continent and to the greatest extent includes Russia (Pivot Area), and to the lesser extent the eastern, southern and western borders of Russia, including a part of the Balkans as well. Inner or Marginal Crescent surrounds the *Heartland* and represents the border and contact zone between the Sea Power and the Land Power, that is, the Inner Crescent is the „the most mobile zone destined for the development of civilizations” (Glišin 2019, 25). Mahan and Mackinder were followed up by Nicholas J. Spykman, who believes that the significance of the *Heartland* is overrated, and that the coastal area of the Eurasian land - the*Rimland*is, geopolitically speaking, more significant. The *Rimland* surrounds the *Heartland*, representing the contact zone between the thalassocratic and tellurocratic powers. According to Spykman (Spykman 1944), the one who achieves dominance over *Rimland* will dominate over Eurasia, which is the key for ruling the world. The stated facts are significant due to the fact that the *Rimland* belt includes Europe, the Near, Middle and Far East, the Indian subcontinent and Indochina, that is, the Shatter belt and constant pressures from inland towards the periphery of the continent and *vice versa*. It is indicative that the Balkans, the Near and the Far East are the shatter zones, as well as the zones of constant confrontations of global and regional powers, which assigns them with „dynamism” (Glišin 2020) as their geopolitical trait. Geographically speaking, the mentioned regions are linked by land, thus enabling easier traffic, infrastructure and energy connection, but mass mobility of the population and overspill of consequences of geopolitical competition from one region to another as well. Specifically, in the beginning of the twenty first century, the victims of the geopolitical competition were the Near and the Far East, as well as the Northern Africa, and the crisis has been spilling over the entire Europe, especially the migration crisis, thanks to the Balkan and the Mediterranean route.

As we have stated in the mere beginning, the United States have been directing their activities towards the Eurasian *Heartland*, controlling the key coastal zones and suppressing Russia deep inland, with the goal of preserving the global leadership. In the beginning of the twenty-first century, the US had their role in almost all conflicts world-wide, and often the said role reflected in inducing and managing wars and crises in order to destabilize regions in which Washington saw its geopolitical interests. There are numerous examples, from the Eastern Europe, the Balkans, Near and Middle East, all to Northern Africa. Proxy wars as a form of competition between the great powers have resulted in millions of victims and dozens of millions of displaced people, devastated states and regions. This is quite significant for our paper given that, even though the Balkans is not the conflict zone in the second decade of the twenty first century, its stability depends on the events occurring in other regions which are facing crises. Geopolitically speaking, the Middle Eastern crisis is a regional crisis caused by the competitiveness of global powers, but it still showed that regional crises have a potential of spilling over not only into the neighboring regions, but into an entire continent such as Europe.

The main hypothesis is the following: the migration crisis is a complex geopolitical problem that has potential to cause a domino effect of destabilization of the Balkans and Europe. Due to *Covid-19* pandemic, challenges and threats caused by the migration crisis are put aside, which further complicates the whole problem.

In this paper, we will use basic methods of social sciences: methods of analysis and synthesis, generalization and specialization, induction and deduction. Besides that, we will use comparative method in the part dealing with demogeopolitics, as well as hypothetical-deductive method which enables identification of factors important for the subject of research and determination of their mutual relations (Milosavljević & Radosavljević 2013), as well as geopolitical method (Stepić 2016), which demands realistic approach and abstract thinking at the same time in order to answer the research question as clearly as possible.

1. The migration crisis in the beginning of the 21st century – (demo)geopolitical aspects

Migrations are an occurrence known throughout history in different forms, caused by different causes and the cause with many consequences. Factors that cause migrations might be numerous: economic, political, geopolitical, demographic, climatic, geographic, etc. Besides the previously listed factors, one of the most common causes of migrations are wars, religious and national persecutions that cause suffering and misery. Therefore, a person's need for better, safer and happier life is the energy that drives him, and globalization has further dynamized these tendencies. In the geopolitical context, the fates of many people might be abused by global and regional powers for inciting hatred, generating conflicts, manipulation, war lies, etc., with the goal of reaching geopolitical interests. It is enough that we mention the Balkans as an example, given that, during the nineties, it was a laboratory for *in vivo* experiments.

The basic points of a migration process are the following: starting point, transit route and destination. The transition process might often last for years and decades, thus representing a security, economic, health, social and other type of challenge for the transit countries. Such challenges have a power of spilling into other countries and regions, due to which joint action of states, non-state entities (NGO) and non-state creations (the European union, for example) is necessary in order to overcome the problem.

Professor Dragan Simeunović points to three main push and pull factors that cause migrations: 1) demographic explosion; 2) wars and 3) the possibility of social engineering (Simeunović 2017, 32). We will explain each of the previously mentioned factors in order to understand the geopolitical dimension of current migrations and the syntagm „weapons of mass migrations" (Despotović & Jevtović 2019), which unmasks and explains the background of the migration crisis in Europe in a fruitful way.

1.1. Demogeopolitical and demographic explosion

In the development of geopolitics as a science, the demographic factor has been evaluated in different manners. „The ideas of population processes as crucially important drivers of increasingly intense social changes" emerge in the post-modern geopolitical thought, as a result of which demogeopolitics was especially affirmed (Stepić 2016a, 21). „While geopolitics firstly implies the processes of changes in space and the changes of space, demopolitics deals with politically conditioned processes within the population" (Knežević 2016, 105). The impact of population on international circumstances reflects in the migration crisis which was generated in the Middle East and Northern Africa, and has shaken the entire world with its effects.

The world population is rapidly enlarging, to which African and Asian countries contribute the most. According to data provided by the United Nations (UN 2019, UNFPA 2020), the world population in 1950 counted around 2,5 billion people, only to have that number amount to 6,1 billion people fifty years later, in 2000.By following the trend of population growth in the world, it is estimated that, in 2050, the world population will reach 9,7 billion of people, which is 2 billion more in comparison to 2020. Estimates show that the world population will number around 11,2 billion people in 2100 (UN 2019, PRB 2020). Population in Africa is the fastest growing population in the world. In the fifties of the previous century, around 227 million of people lived in Africa, and their number today is 1,35 billion of people. According to estimates, by the year of 2100, that number will surpass four billion (Macrotrends 2021). With the increase of number of population, social, economic, infrastructural and other needs grow as well, and if we take into consideration the fact that the largest increase of number of inhabitants is found in poor countries, and that today about 1,5 billion of people live in complete poverty, we might conclude that, in the future, more and more people will be migrating towards the richer parts of the world, which will drastically expedite the overspill of problems from poor regions into the rich ones. Due to coastal connection of Europe, Asia and Africa, the Europe is facing and will continue to face the great influx of inhabitants, which will cause numerous crises. Pronounced non-solidarity of European countries, depicted in numerous examples since 2015, reaching the zenith during the *Covid-19* pandemic, testifies to the fact that these estimates are realistic. Certain European countries will be able to withstand the pressure thanks to their size, economic development, social and health system, etc., but many smaller and weaker countries will end up being the victims of the lost balance.

Given that Europe will, in the future, face the decline of number of inhabitants while, on the other side, Africa, the Near and Middle East will face an enormous increase of the number of inhabitants, it is important to conduct a comparative analysis in order to recognize population trends. First of all, we will point to alarming facts according to which the total fertility rate in all European countries is below the levels required for simple population reproduction. According to data from 2018, the

fertility rate in EU-28 is 1.56 (Eurostat 2020), while the same number in the Middle Eastern countries varies from 2 to 4, and in African countries from 4 to 6. Historical information shows that the lower limit for the survival of a nation amounts to 1.9. For example, 13 countries of the Southeast Europe – Ukraine, Moldova, Romania, Hungary, Bulgaria, Serbia, Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Northern Macedonia, Albania and Greece– had a total of 120.93 million of inhabitants in 2015. At the same time, in the Middle East, six geographically most close countries – Iraq, Jordan, Palestine, Lebanon, Syria and Turkey – had 151.7 million of inhabitants, which is a 1:1.25 ratio. By 2050, this ratio will significantly change so that these 13 countries of the Southeast Europe will number 97.86 million of inhabitants, while the six Middle Eastern countries will number 241.49 million of inhabitants, thus presenting a 1:2.46 ratio. The trend of decline, that is, increase of number of inhabitants, will by 2100 result in a ratio of 71.5 million, in comparison to 324.4 million of inhabitants, that is, a 1:4.53 ratio (Proroković 2017, 183). We have the countries of the Southeast Europe, and especially the Balkan countries, which are currently facing great pressure from the influx of migrants, and such population pressure is and will be a great sociopolitical, security, economic, social and health threat in the future.

1.2. Geopolitical aspects of the migration crisis

Great number of researches dealing in demographic explosion and big migrant waves lack the analysis and unmasking of true drivers of such trends. If we say that migrations are caused by wars and poverty, it is necessary that we ask ourselves what caused these wars and poverty– especially in the Middle Eastern region. As we have already sketched in the prologue, the geopolitical significance of the *Rimland* is reflected in the several decades of conflicts of great powers with the goal of seizing control over key geostrategic zones. Global geopolitical significance of the Middle East as a central part of *Rimland* is exactly the leading reason for generating wars, poverty, instability and similar, and the consequences are political, economic, infrastructural, social and existential devastation, and therefore the flourishment of extremism and terrorism, territorial divisions and great migrations. The United States have for decades been successful in controlling their interest spheres, not only their opponents, but also their allies. Although the international order of power entered the process of transition from monopolar to multipolar in the 21st century, we can still speak of the US as a global policeman who has a role in every conflict on the planet. Samuel Huntington stresses that „the Americans want to identify the forces of good and the forces of evil in every foreign conflict, as well as to align themselves with the first group" (Huntington 2000, 321), and given that they are not threatened by a real danger, there is no doubt that the American role is of an offensive character, with the goal of eliminating numerous threats to their geopolitical interests (Glišin 2019, 95).

1.2.1. *Weapons of mass migration* as a means of achieving geopolitical goals

Current mass migrations from Asia and Africa towards Europe were to the greatest extent caused by the Arab Spring and war destruction. In geopolitical perspective, the Arab Spring represents destabilization of the Near and Middle East as the middle part of *Rimland*, which is another in a series of events depicting the clash of thalassocratic and tellurocratic forces. Therefore, war conflicts and proxy wars as consequences and means of political conflict of great powers must be taken into consideration as the first group of „social conflicts linked with the migration crisis" (Šljukić & Šljukić 2017, 198). The peak of the Arab Spring is the war in Syria, that is, the Syrian conflict which began in 2011, starting a wave of millions of migrants. According to current estimates, of the total number of displaced persons from Syria, 5.6 million of them represent international migrants (UNHCR 2020; Reid 2020). Mass population movements have, to that extent, a potential to change demographic, health, security and geopolitical picture of transit and final destination countries. Generally speaking, the percentage of migrants world-wide is growing rapidly and even surpasses expectations of all relevant organizations monitoring the migration trends. According to the UN Report on international migration (UN DESA), the number of international migrants reached 272 million in 2019, which represents an increase of 51 million since 2010.If we compare this number to 153 million of migrants world-wide in 1990, it is noticeable that, in less than three decades, the number increased by119 million (UN DESA 2019).Even though those 272 million of migrants world-wide represent only 3.5% of the world population, it in fact surpasses certain projections for the year of 2050 (World Economic Forum 2020) and points to the fact that we are speaking of a continuously growing trend which carries along numerous challenges and risks. Regarding this, Myron Weiner states that „if there is a law of migration, it consists of the fact that, once migration flow starts, it encourages itself" (Hantington 2000, 221).

Migrations towards Europe are traced via the following eight routes: the Mediterranean route (via its western, central and eastern route), West African route, the Balkan route, a route through Apulia and Calabria, as well as a route leading across the eastern borders. The most important are certainly the Mediterranean and the Balkan routes, which have so far faced millions of migrants. In 2015 alone, 764,033 illegal crossings were recorded on the Balkan route, while that number on the Mediterranean route, including the crossings through Apulia and Calabria, amounted to 1,046,336 illegal crossings (Frontex 2021). The number dropped sharply in March 2016, when the EU and Turkey signed the Refugee Agreement. Still, even that year, around 130,325 migrants passed through the Balkan route, while about 373,643 migrants passed through the Mediterranean route (Frontex 2021), which is not a negligible number.

Numerous indications point that the West, led by the United States, is behind the destabilization of the Near and Middle East, as well as the North Africa, which was

conducted in order to overthrow hostile and disobedient regimes and set up others that would allow them to exploit natural and mineral resources, install military bases and intelligence centers, as well as occupy key geostrategic zones. „The strategy of contemporary imperialism in the Great Middle East region is not directed towards establishing any form of „democracy", but towards destroying countries and societies by giving support to the so-called Islamic regimes that guaranteeing the continuation of „lumpen development", that is the process of continuous destruction" (Savin 2013, 188). However, besides destabilization of the region directly hit by war, we believe that the United States projected the consequences which spilled into other regions as well which would, as a final result, turn out to be a full set of political interests. We believe that, nowadays, the strategy is aimed at causing a domino effect in order to achieve a more far-reaching and comprehensive goal with the use of as little military, economic and infrastructural capacities as possible. Therefore, we arrive to the third factor causing migrations – social engineering or artificial induction of migrations. This might „cause the wished foreign or domestic policy effect, fulfill significant political, economic, territorial and military benefit, or inflict great economic damage to the enemy" (Simeunović 2017, 35). It is evident that migrants have expressed good organization and familiarity when moving through transit countries. Moreover, they were financially supported by the Gulf states „which, at the beginning, supported the uprising which destroyed their country of origin" and then „did not show any interest in accepting and registering the refugees", even though they belong to the circle of the wealthiest petro-dollar states (Gajić 2016, 88). Therefore, the doubts of the part of the intellectual public that believes that the migrant crisis is in service of the far-reaching interests of the United States is definitely justified. Those doubts continue increasing if we pay attention to the statement of Harvard professor and leading American theoretician of globalization, Joseph Nye, who „responded to the increasingly frequent remarks and question about whether America is behind the mass migrations that befell Europe with a letter to Brussels, published in its entirety, confirming that America does indeed stand behind the migration towards Europe, but not in order to weaken Europe, but to strengthen it. Europe is a continent that, unlike the United States, has not yet emerged from the economic crisis, states Joseph Nye in that letter, and thus America is doing Europe a favor by bringing the cheapest labor to its feet. America strives towards economic and military strengthening of Europe, because the European Union is the only big and worthy partner of the US, and without Europe, America would soon cease to mean to the world what it means today in the political, military and economic sense. Joseph Nye continues by stating that, in Europe, it would soon be that every third man will be older than 65, which is not good for the Europe's military profile and potential. Because of that, according to Nye, a great influx of migrants, of which many would be ready to serve as professional soldiers in order to remain in Europe, is the only solution for seriously revitalizing the European continent and rapidly increasing its military potential, which extremely suits America as its potential partner" (Simeunović 2018, 45). It is a fact that the United States do not care about the religiousness of Europe, nor about the clash of civilizations and the „bloody borders of Islam" of which Samuel Huntington

wrote. He stresses in the end of his book „The clash of civilizations" (358) that in the clash of civilizations, Europe and America will stand either together or apart, and we rightfully ask ourselves whether America in the end chose the third way by deciding to help the potential clash of civilizations in Europe? This question is justified for many reasons, and Huntington stressed as the most significant that „the demographic explosion in Muslim societies and availability of a great number of unemployed men aged from fifteen to thirty is a natural source of instability and violence within Islam and against non-Muslims" (Hantington 2000, 294). The said further explains the previously stated fact that the global geopolitical significance of the Middle East as the inner part of *Rimland* is the leading reason for generating wars, poverty and instability, and that the demographic factor gained its clear purpose, as a natural source of instability and violence within Islam and against non-Muslims. If we examine current migrations within this context, we will be able to understand the syntagm „weapons of mass migration" which points to destructive potential of the demographic surplus that erupted from the Middle Eastern „big crack". „Weapons of migration have respectable potentials of offensive asymmetric means, which is being used through processes of mass migrant infiltration into Western societies" (Despotović & Jevtović 2019, 135). Therefore, by inducing a conflict in the Middle East and in West Africa, the leading power of Atlanticism, the United States, moved the migrant mass using it as a population weapon in order to meet several geopolitical goals. Professors Ljubiša Despotović and Radoslav Gaćinović clearly mark geopolitical goals. First of all, the need for redefining geopolitical order of power in the marked zones and suppressing geopolitical competitors. Secondly, disintegration and territorial recompositing of certain Arab states in order to ensure easier control over them. Third, affirmation and instrumentalization of interest of this part of the Islamic factor which is inclined to them. Fourth, „pressure, punishment and better control over the alleged European partners of Washington within the increasingly dysfunctional framework of EU and NATO" (Despotović & Gaćinović 2018, 17).

There are numerous reasons for the answer to the question „Why did Washington choose Islamism as a strategic partner on the global stage?". As we have previously explained, the geopolitical position of Islamic countries within the *Rimland* zone is quite significant for controlling the key zones in the crossroads of Europe, Asia and Africa. The second reason are energy riches, given that alliances enable preferential terms of trade. The third reason is demographic, as we have shown in the previous part of the paper. The fourth reason is religious and reflects in the possibility of easy radicalization to the most extreme forms. Besides that, professor Marija Đorić mentions a few reasons why migrants go towards Europe. First of all, it is easier to come to Europe due to the coastal connection and territorial closeness than to America, across the ocean. Secondly, Europe has a more attractive social program than America. „And as the third reason we might state the fact that America manages migrations by intentionally (for economic reasons) directing them towards Europe" (Đorić 2018, 43). On the other hand, professor Despotović, having in mind the demographic trends in a broader and more complex context, points to the

„need of the Islamic world to constitute itself as a new autonomous geopolitical pole of global power and to, with that, become a subject and global actor of the new geopolitical recompositing of the world, instead of holding the current position of a geopolitical instrument of the global power of the Empire" (Despotović 2016, 25). If we stress that the Islamic radicalism is partly an instrument and collaborator of the Atlantistic structures, it is not difficult to conclude that one of the geopolitical interests of the United States, as the leading Atlantistic power, is to deploy radical elements throughout Europe in order to control and/or punish their European allies. The following observation by Samuel Huntington and Stanley Hoffmann confirm that there is room for fear, control and/or punishment: „The Westerners are more and more afraid that, nowadays, they are not under the invasion of the armies and tanks, but migrants who speak other languages, pray to other gods and belong to other cultures and who, as they fear, will take their jobs, occupy their land, enjoy their welfare system and endanger their way of living". We are speaking of phobias that are „rooted in relative demographic decline, based on true cultural conflicts and the fear for the national identity" (Hantington 2000, 222).

1.2.2. Re-Islamization of the Balkans and radical Islamization of Europe as a geopolitical goal

Besides the demographic pressure that has potential to economically and politically destabilize Europe, there is a significant problem regarding the security aspect and infiltration of radical elements into migrant masses. If we take into careful consideration the previously mentioned and numerous other data on demographic projections as well, we will see that the number of Muslims and Christians will be equal by 2050, and that in 2070, Islam will take over the role of the leading religion. Besides that, the number of Muslims will see a 73% increase by 2050 and will thus represent one third of the world population. „Diffusion of military capabilities is an important element of the geopolitical security, whereby the pendulum of global equilibrium is sliding towards the dominance of Muslim communities" (Jevtović & Aracki 2015, 231). This is certainly a very significant indicator, given that Samuel Huntington set a „consistent demogeopolitical concept of transformation of the world order based on antagonism of world civilizations" (Stepić 2016a, 21) in the end of the previous century. Colleague Milomir Stepić points towards the possibility of replacing the „formula" *The West and the Rest* with „*The Islam and the Rest*, or with a conflict form *The Islam versus the Rest*, which, in Huntington's blunt interpretation, gains a catastrophic dimension of the bloody borders of Islam" (Stepić 2016a, 29).

Islamists see mass migrations as a good chance for spreading their influence onto the European continent, and logistical and organizational structure that has been present in these regions for decades significantly eases the coordination of radical elements and spread of „flammable" ideas. „The basic infrastructure of Islamic radicalism in the Balkans serves as a springboard and logistics for Islamic centers in Europe, such as, for example, Vienna. The activity of radical Islam is not only a

threat to the security of the Balkans, but also of Europe itself, given the fact that Islamic radicalism operates on at least two levels of realization of its goals: in the Balkans, it is partly an instrument and collaborator of the Atlantistic structures, as well as a threat, given the plans for islamization of the Europe itself" (Despotović & Gajić 2015, 75).

The so-called „sleepers" who move along the migrant flow and in such way succeed, in arriving to EU countries, most often undisturbed, are a big security challenge. German intelligence agencies were right to raise concerns regarding the issue of uncontrolled influx of migrants and the easy perception of the „Islamic State" as a phenomenon (Reuters Staff 2016). The story of four migrants, published by Washington Post in 2016, is quite an illustrative example. Namely, they have started their journey towards Europe mixed with a mass of refugees, with the goal of conducting a terrorist task. With the use of false documents, they have reached Europe via Greece, and their presence was also recorded in the refugee camp in Preševo, in the territory of the Republic of Serbia. Their tasks were far away from Serbia, and two of the four fulfilled their missions by conducting the worst attack on the French territory since the World War Two (Faiola & Mekhennet 2016). Without a doubt, „the terrorist attacks that took place during 2015 and 2016 in France, Germany, Belgium, the Great Britain and other European countries were predominantly organized or inspired by the ideology of the „Islamic State" (Đorić 2017, 47). Europe is facing a complex problem depicted in the fact that „the fight against the Islamic State is not only a fight against a terrorist organization, but something much more – it is a fight against a flammable idea" (Đorić 2017, 47).All these events are at the same time the causes and effects, and „the intensified actions of Islamist extremists, due to the mass movement of population from the Middle East and North Africa, resulted in a response in the form of the extreme right" (Đorić 2017, 46). This in fact speaks of the fact that the migration crisis generated not only Islamist, but also right-wing extremism, which professor Marija Đorić proved on the examples of Germany (Đorić 2017a) and France (Đorić 2018).

Therefore, we must be aware that the Islamic State is indeed defeated, but not destroyed as well. This is a sentence that should be present in the heads of individuals in charge of the security of citizens and states throughout Europe and the world. It is almost impossible to defeat an organization to which spirituality is above material things. The idea is the driving, untouchable force. It needs followers who, according to their own understanding or based on interpretations of religious authorities, conduct their acts for a greater purpose. Therefore, first and the basic warning states that the citizens are living in an illusion regarding the non-existence of the Islamic State, religious extremism, terrorism and jihad. For decades, propaganda on the „acceptability of European Islam and its alleged difference from extremism and fundamentalism of radical Islam" has been forced on the European society, with the goal of filling the empty Christian space with the „contents of non-Christian origin" (Despotović & Kuzmanović 2017, 31).Within the first warning lays a

significant fact that to this illusion contribute, to a great extent, the ones that should be taking care of the security of citizens that represent the targets of extremists. The complicity of European elites has contributed to citizens in Europe living in constant danger from terrorist attacks, and this weakness will become more and more frequent in the years to come. In fact, we live in the times of the clash of civilizations, doomed to failure in advance. The reason for such, not pessimistic but realistic opinion, is the weakness of the Christian civilization, which has, only in the last hundred years, experienced terrible devastation of its essence, precisely due to the creations of its members. One of the current examples is the process of de-Christianization and omittance of the part regarding the Christian cultural code of the Europe from the Maastricht Treaty, which directly exposes the European majority civilization. The rapid penetration of Islam was made possible by the growing number of traditional Christians in Europe. „Islam only follows its principle to spread like water, unstoppably, in every space emptied of faith and hope" (Simeunović 2018, 36-37). Besides that, „Islamists see the democratic system as a weakness of the European man that should be used for coming to power when demographic explosion and intensive immigration (mechanical influx) creates a critical mass that can be used for misusing democracy against civilizations, societies and citizens who created it" (Despotović 2017, 176). Hiding behind the phrase *human rights*, the Islamic factor is „in these contemporary conditions, more and more using the so-called 'offensive asymmetrical means' such as: infiltration into the Western society structures, organization of terrorist actions within them, covering up various forms of activities of civil associations of Islamic character which are allegedly intended to preserve cultural traditions and peculiarities in non-Islamic societies, mobilization of supporters and sympathizers and their inclusion in activities of radical Islamic structures, putting them in the function of reaching radical interests of the pan-Islamic movement, etc." (Despotović & Jevtović 2019, 137). Special form of danger lays in the fact that the destructive potential of weapons of migration is expressed through terrorist attacks, but also through „internal network organization and skillful use of forms of civil organizations and initiatives" (Despotović & Jevtović 2019, 135). There will be voices who think that it is „essentially" irrelevant if we have strong economy, infrastructure, etc. However, real events deny them, since the winner in the contemporary clash of civilization can be the one who essentially wins, and Europe is being deprived of the essence right before our eyes. Did technology, military and police, modern European states and organizations succeed in stopping the migration wave that has overflooded Europe, within which ranks exist hundreds of radical elements? Did technology and all other previously mentioned elements succeed in preventing a terrorist attack in which a few attackers frighten hundreds of thousands of people? Has the demographic decline been offset by new trends? Does Europe understand the religious man? There are numerous questions, and the answer is only one – NO. We are facing the challenges which cannot be overcome in one click or one move. We are facing some far-reaching problems which further depict our weakness, alienation, non-solidarity

and fear. This is just the beginning, and we, growing weaker and weaker, are awaiting the big clash of civilizations which could, in the following decades, put us on the margins of Europe.

2. Migration crisis in the dark shadows of the *Covid-19* pandemic

The *Covid-19* pandemic, which started in the beginning of 2020, has shaken the entire world and has diverted attention from all other problems and threats we are currently facing. It is inevitable that the geopolitical and geostrategic implications of a pandemic will destabilize economic, political, health and other systems of states, but it is necessary to continue to take into account the security and geopolitical challenges we have been facing for a much longer period of time. There are reasons for worries. First of all, the potential of coronavirus to reshape global order is not insignificant, given that „global orders have a tendency of changing themselves gradually in the beginning, and then at once" (Campbell & Doshi 2020). Secondly, numerous problems remained in the shadows of the *Covid-19* pandemic and are almost unspoken of. Third, countries have, during the pandemic, confirmed all doubts regarding solidarity, unity and the European idea of a „union". Mutual capacities are quite significant for overcoming this, but also many other problems that have been present for many years, such as the migration crisis. Fourth, political leaders, above all in the West, have set in motion a dangerous game of denial and covering up the reality, and thus, in this way, they have done very little in order to stop the spread of the pandemic, which cost many citizens their lives. This raises doubts whether leadership is one of the greatest victims of the coronavirus. Henry Kissinger, one of the most influential American theoreticians, noticed that the leaders are fighting this crisis predominantly on a national level, not understanding that the socially destructive effects of the virus do not know of borders. Kissinger warns that not one state, and not even the United States, cannot overcome the virus by strictly national engagement. Resolving the needs of the current moment must in the end be combined with the global vision and cooperation programme. If we cannot do both in parallel, we will experience the worst consequences on both levels (Kissinger 2020).

All before mentioned points to the geopolitical earthquakes caused by the *Covid-19* pandemic, which is in fact a new problem, but inseparable from other problems, especially from the migrant crisis. During 2020, the number of illegal crossings of migrants through external borders of the EU has dropped by 13%, which is about 124,000 in total. However, this is not a small number if we take into consideration that states closed off their borders and introduced stricter monitoring measures, and that in 2018 that number amounted to about 143,000 of illegal crossings. The number of illegal crossings on the Central Mediterranean route during 2020 amounted to 35,600, while the Balkan route recorded about 27,000 of them. In comparison to 2019, the number of illegal crossings on the Balkan route has doubled, while in comparison to 2018, it is almost fivefold. According to data provided by Frontex, male migrants consisted a quite more significant percentage of the total number of illegal crossings, while women are

presented in the 1:10 ratio. Moreover, the percentage of minors declined significantly as well, and thus, during 2020, one in ten migrants was younger than 18, while in 2019, minors represented 23% of the total number (Frontex 2021). Borut Erzen, official of the International Center for Migration Politics Development (ICMPD) stated in the panel „Illegal migrations" during the Erden conference organized by the Regional Cooperation Council, that there is „a possibility that the migrants will remain stranded in the Western Balkans for a longer period of time, in inadequate conditions" (Beta 2019).

During the *Covid-19* pandemic, besides demographic trends, only a handful of researchers followed the activities of the Islamic State, which might be a potential threat. *Deutsche Welle* reported that the Islamic State used to be a defeated terrorist organization, but that it now sees an opportunity to rise again from the chaos which has possessed Syria and Iraq due to *Covid-19* pandemic. British researcher Aymenn Jawad Al-Tamimi concludes that the Islamic State sees the pandemic as a chance and wants to use it (Deutsche Welle 2020). Besides that, the spread of coronavirus in refugee camps in Syria might lead to awakening of the Islamic State and new escalation of violence (Bulgarianmilitary.com 2020). John Demers, Head of the National Security Department of the US Department of Justice, said that the pandemic might encourage terrorists to accelerate their attack plans, with which agreed Joshua Geltzer, terrorism expert from Georgetown Law (Swan 2020). Colin P. Clarke, researcher at the Soufan Center, points to the fact that the pandemic has taken up the attention and resources, and thus, the fight against the Islamic State will not be in the focus (Deutsche Welle 2020). In the times of the pandemic, the dangers that exist in Syria from the awakening of the so-called sleepers of the Islamic State might shake the entire region. Several members of the Islamic State succeeded in escaping from the Syrian prison, which points to the fact that they have understood that this crisis is suitable for such actions (Yeung et al. 2020). Franz Klintsevich, member of the Federation Council, prognoses that the results will be disappointing, not only for Syria, but for all the countries ravaged by war, warning that „their inhabitants will have to face not only terrorists, but the catastrophic pandemic as well" (Bulgarianmilitary.com 2020). „There is a high risk (…) that terrorists will try to exploit the vulnerability of states (…) by distributing the disease through infected people who will blend in with the supposedly enemy populations" (Boussel 2020, 9).

However, the Islamic State has embraced the security approach to the pandemic and advised its members not to travel to Europe. Of this testifies the last edition of *al-Naba'*, calling their followers to keep distance from the epidemic. Usually, editors of the said journal tend to persuade their followers to conduct attacks against the West. It is also stated that the ones that believe to be infected must keep away from ISIS in order to preserve the health of others (Hernandez-Morales 2020). As reported by *Deutsche Welle*, the Islamic State said the following: The West is „on the edge of one of the biggest economic catastrophes since it has restricted movement, the markets have just collapsed and public life is paused. We praise Allah to increase their suffering and to save the believers from it" (Deutsche Welle 2020).

Therefore, the danger exists and is increasing due to *Covid-19* pandemic. The data depict a broader geopolitical context, but the entire paper points to the fact that regional issues have a power of overspilling to other regions and continents. The stress zones of *Rimland* are active, and current circumstances show that instabilities will flood the European continent.

CONCLUSION

Observing the migration crisis as a complex geopolitical problem, we conclude that its effects are multiple, as it has been shown in the years behind as, but as well that the domino effect of destabilization of the Balkans and Europe will be truly felt in its full capacity only in the future. In the beginning, we have presented three push and pull factors that cause migrations and we have confirmed that all three of them are present as one geopolitical set in the current migration crisis. Therefore, the syntagm *weapons of mass migration* in a fruitful way unmasks the geopolitical dimension of this colossal problem. The *Covid-19* pandemic further complicates the already existing problems which have been pushed aside as if they do not exist anymore. The problems did not disappear only because they are not present in the media. To the contrary, it is indicative that the problems are enlarging, to which additionally contributed the current pandemic, and the consequences will be felt in the future.

There is a justified reason for worry, given that political, security, economic, infrastructural, military, social health and transport, that is, all capacities of states, are currently under strong pressure. On the other hand, what is lacking is unity and solidarity of European countries, which is once again shown by the *Covid-19* pandemic or closure of borders of the European Union for migrants, adding additional pressure on already weak peripheral states, especially the Balkan countries.

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