Migration as an Instrument of Modern Political Warfare: Cases of Turkey, Morocco and Belarus

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Abstract: This paper examines the ways and conditions in which human migration becomes a tool of modern political warfare. It investigates how particular states use migration to accomplish broader political, economic, as well as military and foreign policy goals. Comparative analysis of migration policies of Turkey, Morocco, and Belarus is conducted in order to explain the process of misuse of people on the move for political purposes by state actors. The manipulation of population movements remains an actual operational and strategic tool for earning political, military and economic objectives but it is still poorly acknowledged and researched. Particular countries use refugees as a coercive instrument to induce behavioral modification and to obtain monetary and political gains from the receiving targets. Turkey has used the 2015 refugee crisis to extract extra funds and support from the EU in order to deal with a massive influx of refugees, mostly from Syria, Afghanistan and Iraq, and gain more regional political influence. Morocco also perceives the migrants as a political and economic leverage to put an additional pressure on Spain. The Moroccan authorities in position to control the movement of migrants from mostly North and West Africa who want to reach Europe from the fenced borders around Ceuta, have an opportunity to press Spain for more financial resources and political prizes. Recent escalations at the Belarus-Polish borders over the migrants who wanted to continue their journey to Europe show that the weaponization of migration is an effective process in a modern political warfare where a country in position to utilize the unfortunate situation of refugees can increase its political influence over targeted and threatened states. Weaponized migration exploits the EU`s profound political divisions, as well its anxiety over unrestrained immigration. The paper also addresses possible solutions for alleviating the crisis at the EU borders caused by opportunistic and manipulative migration policies of particular countries.

Keywords:
Weaponization of migration, coercive engineered migration, European Union, political warfare, Turkey, Morocco, Belarus

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I.   Introduction

With the rise in global mobility, international migration has become a complex and potent matter with a significant impact on countries, migrants, families and communities around the globe. Interestingly, migration has entered into the political and security realm of many receiving countries but also particular governments, which have placed human migration in the spotlight of diplomatic discords. Globalization and interconnectivity have contributed to the increase of international migration that implicates various push factors from socio-economic reasons in cases when people decide to migrate in order to improve their social and economic situation to political and security circumstances that force people to seek asylum in other safe countries due to armed conflict, political repression, wide-spread violence, or well-founded fear of persecution for reasons of race, religion, nationality, political opinion or membership in a particular social group in their country of origin.[2] [3]

However, with blooming human movements and transnationality, the clear line between conflicts and peace has become less visible and as a result migration has become one of unconventional methods of modern political warfare, as well as a tool for satisfying various goals of some state actors.[4] Refugee crises and massive influx of migrants are especially being exploited by certain governments as a perfect opportunity to intimidate and blackmail neighboring countries in order to extract resources and gain more political influence and power.

The situations in which specific hostile governments threaten to use an influx of migrants as a political weapon to overcrowd border areas and cause political discomfort have become recurring events at the European Union's external borders.[5] Some states bordering the EU are aware how mass influxes can pose serious economic costs on the member states, which can cause internal political instability and polarization, but also trigger more restrictive immigration policies within the union and thus call in question the fundamentals of liberal democratic ideology and tolerance entrenched in the core of the EU`s existence.[6] Neighboring governments that are weaker in terms of socio-economic and military standards, use the opportunity of mass migration to pressure wealthier member states and extract additional funds and political support that otherwise would be difficult to achieve.

Effectiveness of the strategy that focuses on exploiting vulnerable populations on the move is based on the expected humanitarian response from the targeted country to embrace and accept refugees. Blackmailing countries believe that the targeted countries when pressured with asylum claims and mass refugee arrivals are obliged to respond in line with their humanitarian and democratic values, which in turn creates diplomatic tensions between countries and impose serious political questions regarding immigration and liberal democratic principles in potential receiving states.

In the mainstream discourse, refugees are usually regarded solely as a subject of international humanitarian organizations but not much as a political and security issue that creates internal political divisions and rise of the far-right sentiments. However, refugee and mass migration problems have become "intensely political" due to their power to provoke domestic disputes, hostilities and tensions between nations but also undermine international security.[7] For all those reasons, researching the issue of generated migration as an instrument of political warfare is important and eye revealing since it exposes some state actors as manipulative and exploitative with an end goal of gaining more power and influence.

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[2] Nathan D. Steger, 'The Weaponization of Migration: Examining Migration as a 21st Century Tool of Political Warfare' (2006) Calhoun: The NPS Institutional Archive DSpace Repository <https://calhoun.nps.edu/bitstream/handle/10945/56815/17Dec_Steger_Nathan.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y> accessed 24 March 2022.

[3] 'What is a Refugee' (*USA for UNHCR*, 2022) <https://www.unrefugees.org/refugee-facts/what-is-a-refugee/> accessed 26 March 2022.

[4] Steger (n 2)

[5] Blanca Garcés Mascareñas, 'Ceuta: The weaponisation of migration' CIDOB (Barcelona, May 2021) <https://www.cidob.org/en/publications/publication_series/opinion/2021/ceuta_the_weaponisation_of_migration> accessed 26 March 2022.

[6] Gil Loescher, *Refugee Movements and International Security*, (London: International Institute for Strategic Studies 1992) 4.
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[7] Ibid, 5.

Phenomenon of the instrumental manipulation of population movements remains insufficiently acknowledged despite some attempts within the international relations study to draw attention to this very important modern foreign policy instrument.[8] Turkish demand for more funding from the EU, the Moroccan government`s financial and political pressure on Spain to solve illegal border crossings, and most recently Belarusian behavior that included artificially generated refugee crisis in the border areas with some EU member states require better understanding of this recurring and vicious political phenomenon.

A specific kind of engineered migration that can address particular diplomatic strife over migration issues between the EU and some of its neighboring states is the coercive type. According to Kelly Greenhill, coercive engineered migration exploits real or threatened outflows in order to achieve political and/or economic pay-offs.[9] Political outcomes of successful coercion that can be achieved by deterrence or compellence are observed in changed political behavior of a target state or states toward coercers. Economic gains are observed in monetary side-payments that coercers receive after pressuring and threatening targeted countries with a generated crisis such as refugee outflows.

For weaker coercers, threats and blackmail with migration outflows are a perfect tool for manipulating stronger targets. Some countries in the absence of adequate military power use other available means to extract gains that otherwise would be impossible or less likely to receive. Weaker challengers can generate migration crises and force powerful states to yield demanded concessions. This strategy is effective because weak actors that manufacture crises can concurrently propose how to resolve them if the targeted actors agree to the financial or political payments, which consequently increases negotiating power of the former.[10]

II.   Case of Turkey

Ever since the 2015 Syrian refugee crisis, Turkey has been manipulating the refugee outflows to extract financial resources from the EU but also to achieve certain military and political goals in the war-torn Syria. Since 2014 Turkey has been the largest refugee-hosting country in the world.[11] The UNHCR agency estimated that in 2021 Turkey had 3.6 million Syrians under temporary protection and over 330,000 refugees and asylum seekers under international protection.[12] Such an overpowering number of refugees has definitely caused a serious economic and political crisis in the host country. Concurrently, the Turkish authorities have started to perceive this number as an opportunity to blackmail and threaten the EU in order to yield financial and political concessions.

The weaponization of migration has equipped Turkey to act as provocateur and coercer in a negotiation process with the EU over provision of funds for the resolution of the migration influx crisis as well as for gaining tacit approval for its military interventions in northern Syria. Turkey has realized how refugees can become a powerful tool in achieving foreign policy goals that would otherwise be hard to accomplish.

Each time Turkey assesses the need to obtain either economic or political concessions it can encourage Syrian refugees to move to Europe and thus pressure the union to act according to its demands.[13] Signing a deal between the EU and Turkey in 2016 was the product of successfully applied coercive engineered refugee crisis. This deal

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[8] See: Gil Loescher, *Refugee Movements and International Security*, (London: International Institute for Strategic Studies 1992) and Kelly M. Greenhill, *Weapons of Mass Migration: Forced Displacement, Coercion, and Foreign Policy* (Cornell Studies in Security Affairs 2016).

[9] Kelly M. Greenhill, 'Strategic Engineered Migration as a Weapon of War' (2008) 10(1) Civil Wars <https://doi.org/10.1080/13698240701835425> accessed 29 March 2022.

[10] Mark Habeeb, *Power and Tactics in International Negotiation: How Weak Nations Bargain with Strong Nations* (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins UP 1988).

[11] 'UNHCR Turkey - Fact Sheet September 2021' (ReliefWeb, 17 September 2021) <https://reliefweb.int/report/turkey/unhcr-turkey-fact-sheet-september-2021-entr> accessed 30 March 2022.

[12] Ibid.

[13] Seth J. Frantzman, 'Turkey weaponizes refugees against Europe' (*The Hill*, 3 October 2020) <https://thehill.com/opinion/international/486291-turkey-weaponizes-refugees-against-europe/> accessed 30 March 2022.

proposed that all new irregular migrants crossing from Turkey on Greek islands would be returned to Turkey.[14] The agreement, indeed, was very successful in reducing the number of asylum-seekers heading to other European countries. However, it created other repercussions such as overburdening the Greek asylum system due to the huge number of asylum applications submitted in order to avoid deportation. Moreover, this deal was harshly criticized as inhumane due to its support to the unfair and unnecessary containment policy leaving many in impoverished and miserable conditions.[15] From a broader perspective, the deal provided Turkey with a tried-and-tested method to impose its interests and gain concessions from the EU by utilizing the fear of a new refugee influx that deeply concerns many member states.

European Union countries felt relieved after signing the deal in 2016 that prevented many refugees and migrants from reaching their territories. However, the European Commission had to promise billions of euros in financial assistance to Turkish officials in order to force many refugees to stay and get international protection in Turkey.[16] Ever since the refugee crisis in 2015, the leaders of EU nations have been anxious over the large migration influx that has been causing internal quarrels and divisions. Even though all EU member states are signatories of the 1951 Refugee Convention and the 1967 Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees that specify a state's commitments and responsibilities in protecting vulnerable refugees on their soil[17], the majority of members are still eager to contain the migration crisis as far as possible from their borders.

The wide-spread feeling of discomfort toward the migration crisis within the EU is based on the very costly economic and political outcome of hosting a considerable number of refugees. Accommodating Syrian refugees has turned into an "economically taxing and politically polarizing" issue for many EU nations.[18] Furthermore, recent terrorist attacks in several European cities have implanted a daunting idea that potential terrorists might penetrate the EU territory using the migration influx.[19] Such domestic issues have forced many political officials in the EU to impose conservative immigration policies and become a subject of external blackmailing instead of following international humanitarian obligations to protect and host refugees.

Furthermore, the Turkish government has been using refugees to suppress EU`s criticism regarding Turkey`s foreign policy objectives and military interventions in Syria. In 2019, Turkey initiated 'Operation Peace Spring', which was the third major Turkish military intervention in northeastern Syria since 2016 that continued extending Turkish efforts to handle the PKK terrorist threat as well as the internal crisis over Syrian refugees.[20] Turkey considers its military interventions in Syria as a tool to tackle its internal crisis that has remained present since the failed military coup in 2016 but also because of ever-increasing refugee presence that has caused elevated social tensions within the society. The Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan wanted to ease social pressure by proposing to create a 'safe zone' in the Kurdish Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria where Syrian refugees could resettle from Turkey. However, such an idea seems unfeasible especially due to the unstable and unsafe environment, which makes the region prone to installing new refugee crises rather than an attractive place for refugees to return.

The EU–Turkey disagreements will continue to grow especially because of the opposite stance on the Turkish offensive in northern Syria. After criticizing the latest Peace Spring operation, Europe once again put itself in a

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[14] 'EU-Turkey statement, 18 March 2016' (*European Council*. 18 March 2016) <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2016/03/18/eu-turkey-statement/>accessed 31 March 2022.

[15] Elena Becatoros, '3 years on, what's become of the EU-Turkey migration deal?' (*AP News*, 20 March 2019) <https://apnews.com/article/2eb94ba9aee14272bd99909be2325e2b> accessed 31 March 2022.

[16] Ibid.

[17] UNHCR 'States Parties to the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and the 1967 Protocol' <http://www.unhcr.org/protect/PROTECTION/3b73b0d63.pdf.> accessed 2 April 2022

[18] Steger (n 2)

[19] Ibid.

[20] Branislav Stanicek, 'Turkey's military operation in Syria and its impact on relations with the EU' (*European Parliamentary Research Service,* November 2019) <chrome-extension://efaidnbmnnnibpcajpcglclefindmkaj/https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/ATAG/2019/642284/EPRS_ATA(2019)642 284_EN.pdf> accessed 5 April 2022.

vulnerable position susceptible to Turkey's coercive migration policy. President Recep Tayyip Erdogan responded to the criticism with the following words: "Hey EU, wake up! I say it again; if you try to frame our operation there as an invasion, our task is simple: we will open the doors and send 3.6 million migrants to you."[21]

The EU's stance on the migration crisis in Turkey remains cautious for various reasons. First of all, the Syrian war still produces a serious refugee crisis which consequently has been consistently increasing the number of refugees in Turkey. In 2016, Turkey had 2.5 million Syrian refugees, however, that number has risen over the years reaching 3.6 million Syrian refugees and additional 400,000 refugees mostly from Afghanistan, Libya and Iran.[22] Despite all this, there are positive tendencies coming from both sides to reinvigorate EU-Turkey relations.

Negotiations related to the reinforcement of Turkey's accession process, which includes strengthening official political channels of communication between Turkey and the EU, encouraging visa liberalization for Turkish citizens, bolstering collaboration and coordination in the fields of irregular migration and asylum-seekers management, as well as the terrorism related issues are all aimed at creating a prosperous bilateral relationship.[23]

The EU is interested in helping Turkey to alleviate its refugee crisis especially due to the present danger of a new massive refugee influx for which the union might not be well prepared. However, Erdogan has recently stated that the EU has not provided meaningful support to Turkey in tackling the migration crisis and that the 2016 agreement requires revision.[24] Even though the deal might need an update, there is also the possibility that Turkey could once again threaten with coercive measures and put forward its agenda to the negotiating table with the EU during the next round of talks regarding revision of the agreement.

III.   Case of Morocco

Due to its favorable geographic position as an important connection between North Africa and Europe, Morocco remains both a destination and transit country for international migrants.[25] Many migrants and refugees who travel from Sub-Saharan Africa to Morocco want to cross and start anew in Europe. However, such a considerable number of people seeking for international protection or better economic conditions in the European continent provides Morocco with a powerful bargaining tool for extracting financial and political concessions from the EU, especially from Spain with which it shares a direct land border in Ceuta and Melilla - the two tiny Spanish enclaves. The Spanish-Moroccan border in Ceuta plays an important role in migratory flows from Africa to Europe and as such represents a contested point in Madrid-Rabat relations because of political pressure on the border that the Moroccan authorities can create for purposes of gaining political or economic benefits from Spain.

In the context of coercive engineered migration, Morocco has proved to be a consistent coercer that is capable of using migration as a weapon in political warfare by controlling the immigration valve according to its interests.[26] The Moroccan state continues to threaten with migration pressure on the border in Ceuta in order to force Spain to act according to its demands and interests that are not solely financial but recently more political as well. The coronavirus pandemic has surely affected both countries creating more tensions over migration issues while economies have been struggling to recover. The EU has been financially supporting Morocco for many years in exchange for tightly controlled fenced borders. It is estimated that between 2007 and 2021 the Moroccan state received around 13 billion

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[21] See in: Arthur Jennequin, `TURKEY AND THE WEAPONIZATION OF SYRIAN REFUGEES` (*Brussels International Center*, January 2020) <https://www.bic-rhr.com/sites/default/files/inline-files/ME%20Policy%20Report%20-%20Turkey%20and%20the%20Weaponization%20of%20Syrian%20Refugees%20-%20Jan%202020.pdf> accessed 5 April 2022.
[22] Ibrahim Kalin, 'An updated migration deal can revitalise Turkey-EU relations' (*ECFR Council,* 19 March 2021) <https://ecfr.eu/article/an-updated-migration-deal-can-revitalise-turkey-eu-relations/> accessed 8 April 2022.
[23] Ibid.
[24] `Erdogan tells EU envoys bloc ignored Turkey's efforts to improve ties` (*Reuters*, 13 January 2022) <https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/erdogan-tells-eu-envoys-bloc-ignored-turkeys-efforts-improve-ties-2022-01-13/> accessed 13 April 2022.
[25] 'Country Profiles: Morocco' (*Migrants & Refugees*, 2020) <https://migrants-refugees.va/country-profile/morocco/> accessed 22 April 2022.
[26] José Ignacio Torreblanca, 'This time is different: Spain, Morocco, and weaponised migration' *ECFR.EU* (26 May 2021) <https://ecfr.eu/article/this-time-is-different-spain-morocco-and-weaponised-migration/> accessed 21 April 2022.

euros in development funds from the EU as compensation for heavily guarded borders.[27] Morocco is a weaker state in comparison to Spain and the EU, which, in the context of asymmetrical leverage, has at its disposal non-traditional means of warfare such as migrants and refugees.

In addition to monetary goals, the Moroccan government has been using migrants and refugees as an instrument for extracting political concessions from the EU especially in terms of political and diplomatic support over its complex foreign policy goals. Morocco also perceives the migration crisis as a leverage and powerful tool particularly in diplomatic rows with Spain. Recent surge of thousands of people in Ceuta followed the news that a Spanish hospital had accommodated the Polisario Front's leader, Brahim Ghali, for covid-19 treatment. Such an abrupt influx of migrants and refugees in this small Spanish African enclave was a result of an increasing diplomatic tension between Madrid and Rabat over the question concerning Western Sahara status.[28] Moroccan officials were irritated by the Spanish decision to hospitalize the leader of a rebel group fighting for the independence of Western Sahara from Morocco and responded with opening fences to the Spanish enclave.

Morocco`s foreign policy efforts are mainly focused on gathering support for its claims to Western Sahara territory. In December 2020, then-president of the US, Donald Trump, officially recognized Moroccan sovereignty over Western Sahara, which was an astonishing achievement for Moroccan diplomacy. However, the recognition required a counter favor, the Moroccan state had to establish diplomatic relations with Israel. Recent developments have shown that Spain and Morocco have been settling their diplomatic rows over Western Sahara. The diplomatic tensions between Madrid and Rabat that erupted in April 2021 when Spain permitted Western Sahara's independence leader Brahim Ghali to be treated for Covid-19 at a Spanish hospital and following migration crisis in Ceuta have seemingly diminished. The Spanish government officially supported the North African kingdom's plan for Western Sahara as a territory with limited autonomy under Moroccan sovereignty.[29] Such newly developed events depict a new phase in Madrid-Rabat relations that might have resulted from Morocco`s successfully applied coercive engineered migration.

Weaponization of migration in Ceuta is a method of warfare that Morocco has been installing rather successfully against Spain and the EU but also as a reminder that the Moroccan state has a powerful mean to create chaotic and alarming environment at and beyond its borders in order to coerce or force its neighbors to act according to its interests.[30] There is also a unique feature of the Moroccan strategic use of migration, unlike Turkey that has been using refugees from other countries mostly those fleeing the Syrian war, Morocco, beside migrants in transit, uses its own citizens who are in a desperate situation and additionally impoverished by the pandemic willing to risk their lives to cross the border. In addition to the readiness of thousands of people to endanger their lives and migrate to the other side, Morocco has frightened neighbors that are still quick to respond to any threat concerning possible migration influx.

The Moroccan authorities are well aware that any significant migration crisis especially if it includes a considerable number of unaccompanied minors can provoke a rise of radical right-wing parties and movements in Spain and across the EU but also the feeling of anxiety among Spanish citizens that in return can only create more internal political crisis.[31] In case of migration in Ceuta, many underaged migrants who are being allowed to cross the border are in a very vulnerable situation and the Spanish government is obliged to provide them protection which makes the

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[27] Nicholas Casey and José Bautista, ``Come On In, Boys': A Wave of the Hand Sets Off Spain-Morocco Migrant Fight' *The New York Times* (New York City, 2 June 2021) <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/06/02/world/europe/spain-ceuta-migrants-morocco.html> accessed 22 April 2022.

[28] Elian Peltier, 'Spain Sends Troops to African Enclave After Migrant Crossings Jump' *The New York Times* (New York City, 18 May 2021) <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/05/18/world/europe/spain-migrants-ceuta-morocco.html> accessed 22 April 2022.

[29] 'Spain's Sanchez visits Morocco, marking 'new phase' after Western Sahara reversal' *France24* (Paris, 7 April 2022) <https://www.france24.com/en/africa/20220407-spain-s-sanchez-on-historic-morocco-visit-after-western-sahara-reversal> accessed 23 April 2022.

[30] Mascareñas (n 5)

[31] Torreblanca (n 26)

migration influx from Morocco even more controversial and nerve wracking for Spain. This altogether provides the Moroccan state with a perfect staging environment for successful execution of the coercive engineered migration.

IV.   Case of Belarus

Belarus` recent role in incitement of an unprecedented influx of migrants in the neighboring Latvia, Lithuania, and Poland can be attributed to the spread of weaponized migration on European soil.[32] The case of Belarus shows that migration has become a newly developed, effective tool in the EU`s neighborhood for coercive politics that is designed for obtaining political concessions. Social unrests that followed the 2020 fraudulent presidential elections in Belarus were met with regime`s violent suppression of peaceful demonstrations, detainment and persecutions of political opponents. Such harsh regime`s response provoked the EU to impose a package of restrictive measures against particular individuals and entities in Belarus.[33] Despite foreign sanctions, criticism over serious abuse of human rights and constant suppression of civil freedoms in Belarus, Alexander Lukashenko`s regime has been finding ways to continue crushing domestic opposition as well as coercing and blackmailing its neighbors with creative methods of political warfare. After an unprecedented event that included forced landing of a Vilnius-bound flight in Minsk, in order to arrest a dissident journalist who was among the passengers, the EU decided to impose another set of sanctions that angered and provoked a long-term Belarusian strongman, Alexander Lukashenko, to exploit a humanitarian crisis in a perverted way.

The Belarus` regime fabricated quite efficiently a migration crisis by easing the entry policy procedures for Middle Eastern migrants to arrive in Belarus and then managing their journey to the borders it shares with some EU member states.[34] In a short period, Latvian, Lithuanian, and Polish areas bordering Belarus were overwhelmed with a significant number of illegal crossings of mostly migrants from the Middle East. The EU was unprepared for such a vicious game where displaced people were used as pawns in a coercive geopolitical strategy. The Belarusian tactic of artificially created migration routes has shown how people on the move can be exploited for installing crisis and instability in the neighboring countries.

Alexander Lukashenko has an excellent understanding of internal fragility that the EU has faced, especially concerning border controls and accommodating asylum seekers and refugees. Even though the Belarus President has refused to admit that Belarus has used displaced people to blackmail and threaten Europe, his words that the country has reacted to foreign pressure   "according to its capabilities" are a clear sign that the weaponization of migration has been included in the country`s foreign policy agenda.[35] Countries such as Latvia, Lithuania, and Poland facing Belarus` migration backlash have reacted by declaring a state of emergency, placing razor-wire fences and deploying army forces on the borders to prevent illegal crossings.

Even though immigration is perceived as a controversial and complex matter in many regions, the EU has an additional level of complexity which makes it more susceptible to exploitation and political pressure on the issue of migration influxes.[36] Member states at their national level can effectively control external borders, however, since the EU imposes free and borderless travel within its territory it is very difficult to control migration inside the bloc or take responsibilities for such internal flows. Due to the lack of institutionalized procedures for administering

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[32] Tamara Šuša, 'How is Migration Weaponised? The Case of Belarus' European Policy Centre (Belgrade, 20 September 2021) <https://cep.org.rs/en/blogs/how-is-migration-weaponised/> accessed 25 April 2022.

[33] 'Belarus: Alexander Lukashenko and 14 other officials sanctioned over ongoing repression' (Council of the EU, 6 November 2020) <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2020/11/06/belarus-alexandr-lukashenko-and-14-other-officials-sanctioned-over-ongoing-repression/> accessed 25 April 2022.

[34] Ben Hall, Sam Fleming and James Shotter, 'How migration became a weapon in a 'hybrid war'' Financial Times (London, 5 December 2021) <https://www.ft.com/content/83ece7e4-cc71-45b5-8db7-766066215612> accessed 26 April 2022.

[35] Jon Henley, Andrew Roth and Jennifer Rankin, 'Latvia and Lithuania act to counter migrants crossing Belarus border' *The Guardian* (London, 10 August 2021) <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/aug/10/latvia-and-lithuania-act-to-counter-migrants-crossing-belarus-border> accessed 27 April 2022.

[36] Hall, Fleming and Shotter (n 34)

migration movements within the union and ineffective system of sharing responsibility for asylum seekers, the EU encounters a deep crisis every time it experiences a considerable and abrupt migration influx.

Moreover, particular member states are more vulnerable to migration crises than others. For instance, those states that are the first country of arrival or desired destinations have more difficulties to resolve domestic disputes over immigration policy and accommodate a significant number of displaced people. Such issues lead to more divisions and distancing among member states, which consequently makes the bloc politically vulnerable to external coercive strategies.

The Belarusian regime deliberately weaponizes migration as a way to retaliate for the EU sanctions against Belarus but also to test neighboring systems of defense and exploit law binding principles of non-refoulement. European states are bind by international refugee law and European Court of Human Rights rulings concerning migration, which restrain them from returning refugees to a country where they would face torture, cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or where their lives would be put at serious risk.[37] As a consequence, many migrants have been stuck at the border areas in Central European forests living in inhuman conditions facing almost impregnable obstacles and hostile border guards. Although Lukashenko has risked engineering mass migration movements that once triggered can be difficult to control, such a political move has shown an enormous potential for coercing and threatening the neighbors.

V.   How to Alleviate the Effects of Coercive Engineered Migration?

The EU has become a target through the weaponization of a migration "crisis" created by its close neighbors that want to coerce and extract additional financial resources as well as political support for their foreign policy goals. It is important to acknowledge that the issue of using vulnerable displaced people as a tool in an engineered migration represents a serious and dangerous, but also powerful tactic employed by particular states. Countries such as Turkey, Morocco, and Belarus have been instigating coercive generated migration at the bloc`s borders in order to obtain economic and political payments. Even though Ankara and Rabat have gained a considerable financial aid from the union in order to alleviate migration inflows they have also incorporated their political agendas into an exploitative strategy which implies receiving political support from target countries or restraining them from conducting certain diplomatic actions. In the case of Belarus, coercive generated migration was predominantly political-oriented since the Belarus regime wanted to punish the EU for previously imposed sanctions and concurrently discourage them from further sanctioning.

Even though the methods for alleviating coercive generated migration at the EU`s doorstep are limited and with unpredictable outcomes, the issue is serious enough to demand extensive deliberation about problem solving mechanisms. Policy solutions for the state-level exploitation of migration flows require better comprehension of past examples of weaponized migration. Such understanding of the issue can help targeted states to engage themselves in the preemptive negotiations with would-be weaponizers to prevent further escalations.[38] More openness toward the potential weaponizing states and less self-oriented diplomacy can reduce future crises and hostilities.

Another approach to dealing with the issue of weaponized migration, even though it might be the least attractive option for the EU, concerns developing policies aimed at accommodating and integrating the migrants. The outcome of simply receiving and processing displaced people can alleviate the threat of a generated migration crisis and

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[37] Jill Goldenziel, 'Belarus Is Weaponizing Migrants Using Putin's Playbook. Europe Must Legally Fight Back' Forbes (New Jersey, 10 November 2021) <https://www.forbes.com/sites/jillgoldenziel/2021/11/10/belarus-is-weaponizing-migrants-using-putins-playbook-europe-must-legally-fight-back/?sh=6eeeb58c1e2a> accessed 27 April 2022.
[38] Kelly M. Greenhill, 'When Migrants Become Weapons: The Long History and Worrying Future of a Coercive Tactic' Foreign Affairs (Washington D.C., March/April 2022) <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/europe/2022-02-22/when-migrants-become-weapons> accessed 28 April 2022.

diminish coercers` leverage over targeted countries.[39] Migration crises can be perceived as a window of opportunity for the EU to continue developing more effective asylum and integration systems rather than an occasion to waste resources on border fortifying and detention systems that lead to dehumanization of migrants and tackling only the symptoms of the crisis.[40] Member states have to relocate more resources to asylum proceedings in order to establish effective asylum management that implies efficient scheduling of asylum hearings and further focusing on the integration process of those who are granted asylum and disregarding those without valid asylum claims.[41]

Deeply rooted fear of future migration crisis that the EU officials have openly manifested is not really caused by the number of people who seek for better life in Europe but the electorate's anxiety concerning migration and its xenophobic sentiments, as well as the governments' worry of the division and chaos that a migration crisis causes within the bloc and the member states individually, which makes any threat with migration influx highly successful.[42] Indeed, the Belarusian engineered crisis included around several thousand people, which is an insignificant fraction of overall EU asylum statistics, however, the distress effect that migration influx has on communities within the bloc presents a bigger issue than the figures themselves.

The distribution of wealth and the level of vulnerability differs across the EU. Wealthier countries and those that are not directly exposed to the migration influx are often reluctant to help other, more vulnerable member states to deal with the security and political issues caused by the inflow of displaced people. The 2015-2016 migration crisis has revealed the EU`s inability to enforce a more comprehensive relocation scheme that would relieve migration and asylum pressure on first-entry and destination member states and thus establish a solidarity mechanism at the union`s level. Moreover, the EU missed the opportunity to discuss possible integration solutions and the ways of accepting and employing refugees in order to fulfill its labor shortages.[43] Experience has shown that the EU`s border policy by building and fortifying fences and walls on the outer frontiers only addresses the symptoms of a much bigger problem but fails to resolve its vulnerability to the external threats of coercive engineered migration.

VI.   Conclusions

State engineered migration as an instrument of coercive state management is much more common than is generally supposed. For instance, such non-traditional coercion strategy has been used more than eighty times since the adoption of the 1951 Refugee Convention with a successful outcome in over half the time.[44] When it comes to the coercers, usually weaker, economically and militarily inferior states with authoritarian tendencies have been more prone to use displaced people as a unique weapon for gaining political and financial ends against more developed and wealthier liberal democratic countries.[45] States that apply the concept of weaponized migration resort to this kind of warfare strategy due to its effectiveness and potency but also because of its availability and cost-effective nature compared to other methods of coercion and warfare.

The EU has experienced serious internal crises as a result of coercive engineered migration instigated by certain neighboring countries. Regimes in Turkey, Morocco, and Belarus have found a powerful tool to coerce and blackmail the bloc in order to satisfy their own political and economic objectives. Such a potent instrument that requires a state-led strategy of generated migration crisis possesses manipulative and exploitative characteristics. In order to alleviate or prevent future coercions, the EU has to act to protect its values and ideas which focus on respect of the international

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[39] Ibid.

[40] Evgenia Kouniaki, 'Weaponizing Refugees at the Land Borders of Evros: Constructing the Other Through Fear and Danger' University of Oxford: Faculty of Law (Oxford, 3 June 2021) <https://www.law.ox.ac.uk/research-subject-groups/centre-criminology/centreborder-criminologies/blog/2021/06/weaponizing> accessed 1 May 2022.

[41] Goldenziel (n 37)

[42] Mascareñas (n 5)

[43] Hall, Fleming and Shotter (n 34)

[44] Greenhill (n 38)

[45] Ibid.

rule of law, human rights, and protection of vulnerable refugees. Furthermore, the union has to enforce more efficient methods of collective security and measures for sharing responsibilities especially in the field of asylum procedures and refugees` integration. Only a united and proactive EU can prevail in the struggle against its exploitative neighbors, which requires constant improvement of existing diplomacy and negotiation systems as well as internal reforms for better coordination in the political and economic areas at both national and union level.

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