



Analyzing Public Opinion: The Citizens Response to the 2015 Migration Crisis in the Balkans

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Abstract

The migration crisis of 2015 brought an unprecedented number of migrants to Europe, as they fled from the political, economic, and institutional instability of the Middle East and Northern Africa. European countries have been specifically challenged by this most recent migration crisis due to their geographic location, as well as the unrelenting demands of support and assistance in restarting their lives in a more stable region of the world by hundreds of thousands of migrants. Italy and Greece have been main destinations of migration to Europe, but the entire Southern European region has been involved by the influx of migrants crossing external borders. This paper will analyze how the Balkans region, in particular, has been affected by the migration crisis, and what policies and support has been given to asylum seekers. The cases of Bulgaria, Serbia and Macedonia have been selected to show the differences in migration support in European Union member states and non-European Union member states in the Balkan region. By specifically looking at public opinion polls concerning migration in these three countries, the paper analyzes the contributing factors of European Union membership, security concerns, and populism to account for the differences in public opinion support for migration within Bulgaria, Serbia, and Macedonia.

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Introduction

In recent years, political and cultural upheavals have engendered sizeable North African and Middle Eastern migration to the continent. The political and economic instability of this region has led to a mass movement of people from this region northward towards European Union member states. This trend became particularly evident in 2015, as Europe faced a massive and unprecedented increase in the number of asylum-seekers arriving on external borders seeking asylum and citizenship to European countries. These asylum seekers often pursue citizenship in one of the twenty-eight European Union member states, but member states of Greece and Italy have been disproportionately affected by the number of migrants they receive daily due to migration routes of sea arrivals and the nation's external borders. However, the 2015 migration crisis has raised concerns specifically addressing the safety of European citizens and migrants, as well as providing adequate resources to migrants to assimilate into European society (Human Rights Watch). Therefore, the migration crisis has become a priority concern for member states in the European Union and European countries in general.

In addition to the countries of Greece and Italy that have been disproportionately affected by the migration crisis due to their geographic location in the Mediterranean Sea, the Balkans region has also been affected due to their geographic location as a transit route for migrants wanting travel to member states of the European Union. Consequently, migration policy and concerns have become a central focus of the political debate within many of the Balkan countries. The 2015 migration crisis begins as multiple Balkan states are still in the process of fully recovering from communist rule and establishing political and economic stability in their respective nations, as well as their own migration patterns of citizens leaving the Balkan countries have ceased. To take into account these concerns of how to address the migration crisis, public opinion polls have been prominent in the discussion of migration within the Balkans. This paper will specifically look at the public opinion of migration during the most recent 2015 crisis in the Balkans using case studies to analyze how migration is perceived in these countries and specific factors that have contributed to the various beliefs about migrants in this region of the world.

By examining the case studies of Bulgaria, Serbia, and the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM), this paper will examine the support and opposition for accepting migrants in these countries during the 2015 migration crisis and the specific factors that have contributed

to these evident beliefs of migrants in each case study. Through the use of public opinion polls engaging citizens across class and gender lines as evidence will help explain how certain beliefs about these migration movements have become normative. To come to these conclusions, the paper will first look at previous literature to provide a historical context and historiography of migration in the Balkan states, then transitioning to provide evidence from public opinion polls for the case studies of Bulgaria, Serbia, and FYROM. The finding discussion of this paper will specifically look at the factors of socio-economic concerns, the rise of Islamic xenophobia, and influence of the European Union. This comprehensive discussion of migration will further the understanding of how migration is perceived within the Balkans region by a multiplicity of key actors and aid in future understandings of mass movement of peoples across time and place by providing a sense of the social and cultural repercussions of mass assimilation.

Literature Review

Over the last several decades, European migration has received significant scholarly attention as a means to analyze how the recent mass movement of people impacts demographics, means of transportation, migration flows, and the overall receptiveness of countries to accept migrants. Historically, mass migration from North Africa and the Middle East to Europe is not a new phenomenon. Mass migration in this region began in 711 in the Reconquista of Iberia that lasted until 1492 (Bailey 2008, 12). This mass movement of people and migration has caused cultural tension, failure on part of European countries to accept the difference, and elements of cultural, social, and racial blending (Bailey 200, 12). The 2015 migration crisis still poses multiple similar issues as with past mass migration movements, but the present migration crisis has presented the unique problem of an unprecedented number of migrants in a concentrated area. Therefore, there is still an ongoing investigation of the migration crisis of the change that has brought to this region with the institution of the current migration crisis.

The onset of the European migration crisis in 2015 has led to significant implications for the Balkans region that is still struggling with their own political and economical developments. Author Neza Kogovseck Salamon, author of “Asylum Countries in the Western Balkans Countries: Current Issues,” discusses the institutional developments in the Balkans. The countries of this region have seen drastic improvements since the 1990s, as people were leaving this region as migrants to now overcoming these structural issues that has allowed these

countries to accept migrants from Northern Africa and the Middle East (Salamon 2016, 151). The prospect for membership to the European Union of multiple Balkans nations has also been a result of these drastic changes within the region (Salamon 2016, 151). However, problems with the most recent migration crisis still persist in the Balkans due to previous asylum and migration policies set by the “Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia in the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees” (Salamon 2016, 152). As the Balkan countries have been under previous communist rule, it has contributed to a significantly different viewpoint in addressing migration in contrast to Western Europe. The Balkan countries previously under communist rule have shaped the various views of migration on the region, as the collapse of communist brought a mass migration movement of their own throughout the 1990s. This has contributed to many individuals accepting migrants in their own country in the Balkans, but the recovery of multiple countries from communist rule in political and economic terms have led to other citizens believing they must help themselves before they help others. However, Salamon explains the evidence of the poor implementation of their asylum law based on statements from the political leaders of these nations and the overall lack of interest “in maintaining the asylum system and providing international protection in line with European Union laws” (2016, 153). Therefore, the way in which the Balkans address migration is reflective on their progress on membership to the European Union. The migration crisis has allowed the Balkans to show their progress in adopting European Union law in preparations for membership, though some countries have had significantly different implications in their cooperation with migration policy.

In continuation, Visar Malaj and Stefano de Rubertis discuss migration trends in their work, “Determinants of Migration and the Gravity Model of Migration and Application on Western Balkan and Emigration Flows.” Specifically in regards to the migration in the Western Balkans, the authors discuss that the increased wealth disparity within the region has contributed to issues pertaining to the migration crisis (Malaj and Rubertis 2017, 205). The lack of significant economic growth in the Balkans has been a repercussion of the transition from a communist country (Salamon 2016, 152). The authors explain why many migrants want to migrate to Western Europe and, more specifically, Germany. This is due to the positive economic trends that are associated with wealthier countries that experience higher level of immigration volumes (Malaj and Rubertis 2017, 206). The Balkans nations are not at the same level of economic wealth as other European countries such as Germany, France, and the United

Kingdom. These wealthier nations are the destinations that migrants want to inhabit due to higher standards of living, education capabilities, and employment opportunities. Although the Balkan nations are not the desired destinations for migrants, the geographic location still provides an important gateway for migrants to enter Europe. Most Balkan nations are not yet members of the European Union but their geographic location for the Balkans route of migration has become an important aspect for migrants in their journey.

In addition, the authors of “A Crisis of Protection and Safe Passage: Violence Experienced by Migrants and Refugees Travelling Along the Western Balkan Corridor to Northern Europe” discuss the Balkans route of migration and the effects of the closure of this route in 2016. As Malaj and Rubertis discuss that the lack of wealth in the Balkans allows migrants to look further North in Europe, this work specifically focuses on how migrants use the Balkans to reach their destinations (2017, 206). The study of this work specifically focuses on Serbia, particularly their geographic location that makes Serbia the main route that migrants take in order to reach northern and Western Europe (Arsenijević et. al 2017, 5). Over twenty-seven percent of migrants arriving in Serbia have experienced “violent events in their journey,” but the number of migrants arriving in Serbia has dropped significantly” (Arsenijević et. al 2017, 8). However, the number of violent events increased despite this drop in migrants arriving in Serbia (Arsenijević et. al 2017, 8). Therefore, the authors conclude that the closure of the Balkans route did not decrease the violent events that migrants experience, only decreasing the number of migrants that are arriving in Europe. This has led to an increase in migrants arriving in hotspots in Italy and Greece, but also a potential increase in illegal migration that both member states of the European Union and third countries need to collectively address.

In specifically discussing the role of the public opinion on the recent migration crisis in Europe, author Joana Kosho discusses the trends observed in Europe towards migration. One of the most significant threats that Europeans perceive from migrants is the concern for “unfair competition from immigrants in the labor market and their potential negative impacts on public finances (Kosho 2016, 86). These economic effects of immigration have significantly impacted how citizens of certain states view migration (Kosho 2016, 86). Kosho makes the argument that “managing these sources of social tension presents a serious challenge to governments of developed countries” (2016, 87). However, public opinion of migration continues to change rapidly as more desperate people arrive in Europe everyday from the significant unrest of the

Middle East and northern Africa. Kosho states that the pictures of children dead on the shorelines of Turkey significantly affect how people perceive the threat of migrants, as public opinion is considerably affected from what is seen in the media (2016, 87). The emotional appeal that these pictures affects people's perceptions of migrants in a more humane perspective that these people are simply looking to escape the peril that persists in their homeland to save their families from this danger.

Research Method

For the purpose of analyzing public opinion of migration in the Balkans region, this paper employs three representative case studies. The case studies of Bulgaria, Serbia, and FYROM were selected to account for political, economical, societal, and geographical differences at the onset of the migration crisis in 2015. Although all three nations exist within the same region, these differences have had drastically different implications for the receptiveness of migrants in the respective regions.

One specific difference for the justification of why these case studies were selected is the difference in European Union membership. Bulgaria is a member of the European Union that was granted accession in 2007, whereas Serbia and FYROM are both candidate countries for membership to the European Union. Serbia has opened negotiation proceedings, where FYROM has yet to do so. Therefore, these three countries have different statuses in European Union integration that may have an effect on public opinion of migration. The selection of these case studies will account for this significant difference in the regions in terms of membership to the European Union.

The main source used to support this this paper is public opinion polls. Sources used for public opinion polls include recent articles published in academic journals, research institutes, and public opinion institutes throughout the world. Although the questions of the public opinion polls ask participants to respond to different questions, the purpose of the public opinion polls still remains relevant in analyzing the different factors that each country perceives as a reason to either support or oppose migration in their respective states. Additionally, the public opinion polls selected surveyed a wide segment of the population and the large sample size represents a plethora of perspectives without regard to gender, class, or race. Although the question responses

vary for each case study, the information will still be able to be extrapolated to provide answers to the anticipated differences in public opinion within the region.

Findings and Analysis

Bulgaria

As the only case study in this paper that is a member of the European Union, Bulgaria has had a different approach to migration as compared to the countries of Serbia and FYROM. Bulgaria is obliged to conform to the rule of law in the European Union concerning migration. Similar to other Balkan states, it serves as a main route of migration for asylum seekers to reach northern and Western Europe through the Western Balkans route (Kyuchukov 2016, 2). Bulgaria is considered a transit country that will allow migrants to pass through the country to reach northern European states. Although the Western Balkans route has since been “shut down,” Bulgaria is still significant in the discussion of migration because the country shares a border with Greece and Turkey. Greece and Turkey are two key countries that are highly influential in the migration crisis. Greece receives a disproportionate number of migrants due to their geographical location, leading to significant issues pertaining overcrowding in hotspot locations. Turkey is also influential due to the arrangements between Turkey and the European Union to migrant returns. Therefore, Bulgaria has placed more restrictions on migration to prevent illegal migration from these two neighboring countries (Kyuchukov 2016, 2). Due to illegal migration activity, Bulgaria has been significantly affected by the onset of the migration crisis in 2015 that has been evident in the public opinion of migration in the country.

In regards to public opinion of migration in Bulgaria, public opinion seemingly differs from those countries of Western Europe. In an independent study conducted by the Friedrich Ebert Foundation, the institution found that “nearly forty-seven percent of [Bulgarians] believe that the EU should not help refugees seeking asylum on its territory” in 2016 (Kyuchukov 2016, 5). The response specifically relates to how Bulgaria views migration within their borders. Even with economic support from the European Union, there is not an overwhelming sense of urgency to support migrants in Bulgaria. The study observed that the reasons for the outcome of the public opinion were the consequence of numerous misconceptions about migrants in Europe. These reasons included that it will permit terrorists to enter Europe and therefore pose a threat to

national security, the poor economy of Bulgaria cannot support migrants adequately, migrants have no place in Europe because they will not integrate into the European community, migrants should seek asylum within the peaceful parts of the region, and the spread of Islam is a threat for Europe (Kyuchukov 2016, 5). These reasons are not easily solved and therefore significantly affect how Bulgaria is able to address migration and adopt laws of the European Union in dealing with migration.

Table 1a. Friedrich Ebert Foundation 2016: Citizens Beliefs on EU Assistance for Migrants in their Country [Bulgaria]

Bulgarian citizens that believe the EU should not help refugees seeking asylum on its territory	47%
Bulgarian citizens that believe the EU should help refugees seeking asylum on its territory	28%

In addition to the public opinion poll conducted by the Friedrich Ebert Foundation, the fall 2016 Eurobarometer, a research survey that focuses on the public opinion polls of European Union member states, supports these findings that were reported on by The Sofia Globe. The report states that the negative perceptions of migration by non-European Union nationals have increased by five percent as the effects of the 2015 migration crisis affected the country (Sofia Globe 2016). In the public opinion poll conducted by the Eurobarometer, thirty percent stated that unemployment was the most pressing issue for Bulgaria accepting migrants, where twenty-nine percent stated that immigration procedure was the most pressing issue, and thirty percent cited the current economic status of Bulgaria is the largest concern (Sofia Globe 2016). The economic situation of Bulgaria becomes overwhelmingly evident in the public opinion polls of the Friedrich Ebert Foundation and the Eurobarometer. Consistently as one of the poorest member states of the European Union, citizens of Bulgaria are concerned with how the government will help their own citizens before helping migrants. Therefore, the poor economic conditions must be taken into account when analyzing Bulgarians’ responses to how migration should be handled within their country.

Table 1b. Eurobarometer 2016: Most Pressing Issue for Bulgaria Accepting Migrants

Unemployment	30%
Immigration Procedure	29%
Current Economic Conditions	30%

However, migration continues to be a contested issue within Bulgaria. As many citizens want to help migrants from a human rights perspective, there is still an evident rise of anti-migration rhetoric evident by the public opinion polls. The President of Bulgaria, Rumen Radev, has contributed to this phenomenon by stating that the Balkan states will not turn into “migrant ghettos” (Tsolova and Krasimirov 2016). In response, there has been a rise in the number of anti-immigration protests within the country. Protestors have been argued to display a high level of “selfish and superficial [attitudes], with a high degree of inhumanity” (Pachkova 2016, 122). The protests have gained substantial support for building enclosures around the country, limiting the rights of migrants outside of reception camps, and urging the European Union to take responsibility for the migrant process (Pachkova 2016, 8). These protests show a rise in opposition that could significantly change the status of public opinion polls as the migration crisis continues to worsen.

Although Bulgaria must obey supranational laws concerning migration by the European Union, the inference can be made that the lack of cooperation and support for migration within Bulgaria can be justified through the nationalistic identity of the country. Citing concerns such as migrants are not able to assimilate to the Bulgarian or European identity and wanting to prevent the spread of Islam within the nation are two key indicators for the growing nationalism within the country. Bulgarians are focused on helping other Bulgarians, despite the desperation of migrants coming to Europe fleeing for their lives. As the migration crisis continues to increase in the number of asylum seekers traveling to Europe, the pressures to uphold the human rights standards set in the Fundamental Rights Charter of the European Union and provide resources for migrants has proved to be a difficult task for the poorest member state of the European Union (Dickinson 2015). Despite financial aid awarded from the supranational institutions, Bulgaria still significantly struggles economically which can contribute to the strengthening of the Bulgarian identity by helping other Bulgarians financially, but not migrants of African and

Middle Eastern descent. These factors reinforces the general fear of differences between Bulgarians and the “otherness,” which is significant in considering the rise of nationalism within the country. Therefore, the Bulgarian response to public opinion polls can be analyzed by nationalism with a significant lack for overwhelming support to provide assistance to migrants.

Serbia

In contrast to Bulgaria, Serbia presents a unique case study when analyzing the support in migration affairs in the country by public opinion polls. As a country with potential membership to the European Union after attaining candidacy status, Serbia has an opportunity to show the institutions of the European Union the country’s capabilities of adopting supranational laws that will assist Europe in addressing the migration crisis. Serbia anticipates the institutions of the European Union will look favorably at their assistance in the migration crisis in accession negotiations. When the current migration crisis began in 2015, the European Commission amended and released Directive 2013/32/EU that issued a list of safe countries for migrants, which included Serbia (Migration Policy Center: Serbia 2017). Understanding the large scope of this issue led the European Union to grant €3.2 million to the Serbian national government to address the urgent need for shelter for refugees, with €400,000 improving the conditions in reception centers specifically in Belgrade and Presevo (Migration Policy Center: Serbia 2017). However, numerous factors have forced Serbia to enact multiple restrictions on the number of migrants entire the borders. Serbia’s Interior Minister, Nebojsa Stefanovic, stated that increased controls of migrants in the European Union and the closing of borders in multiple member states such as Hungary poses the threat of many migrants will be “stuck” in Serbia (Marusic and Pantovic 2016). Therefore, these conditions have shaped attitudes towards migration in Serbia in a different manner than of other Balkan states.

Public opinion within Serbia for migration has produced unanticipated results. In a public opinion poll conducted by the United States Agency for International Development in 2017, approximately forty-seven percent of Serbian citizens have positive attitudes towards the European migration and refugee crisis, thirty-four percent had negative views, and nineteen percent remained neutral (US Aid: Serbia 2017). Although this poll was quite general in the questions concerning the support for migration in Serbia, it is still a key indicator in how Serbians perceive and address the migration crisis within their country. As there is not an overwhelming majority towards one view, the support still leans towards a positive attitude

towards European migration and refugee crisis. This is important considering Serbia’s future membership in the European Union and implications for their assistance in Europe’s migration crisis of 2015. Therefore, focus can be shifted on the continued support Serbia gives, as effects of the onset on the migration crisis in 2015 are still evident in the region today. However, there is an optimistic attitude that can result from the findings of this public opinion poll, as Serbians remain positive of their involvement of the migration crisis.

Table 2a. United States Agency for International Development 2017: Attitudes of Serbian Citizens Towards Migration

Positive attitude towards migration by Serbian citizens	47%
Negative attitude towards migration by Serbian citizens	34%
Neutral attitude towards migration by Serbian citizens	19%

In addition, the response to migration has been also quite similar to that of public accession to the European Union, where forty-seven percent of Serbian citizens are in favor of membership, twenty-nine percent of Serbian citizens would be opposed, and fifteen percent of Serbian citizens said they would not vote (Bjelotomic 2017). This public opinion poll was conducted in 2016 by the Serbian European Integration Office, which reports that the same percentage (forty-seven percent) of Serbian citizens that support migration also support accession into the European Union (Bjelotomic 2017). Serbia’s actions in the migration crisis to assist the European Union in addressing the influx of migrants are a key point in their candidacy status to the international organization. Therefore, both public opinion polls provide a key piece of evidence to analyze Serbia’s perceptions of migration that is related to their membership to the European Union.

Table 2b. Serbian European Integration Office 2016: Opinions on Serbian Membership to the European Union

Serbian citizens in favor of EU membership	47%
Serbian citizens opposed to EU membership	29%
Serbian citizens that decline to vote	15%

However, compared to the public opinions of Bulgaria, there is a similar division of support and opposition to accepting migrants of the 2015 crisis in Serbia. Despite these similarities it is important to consider that Serbia has a key difference from Bulgaria that has contributed to this position; Serbia has a higher economic growth and a more positive economic situation than Bulgaria. Although the Balkan states do not represent Europe's wealthiest countries, gross domestic product (GDP) has indicated that Serbia is currently "wealthier" than both Bulgaria and FYROM (Europa 2016). Programs have been set up to assist migrants in providing basic resources that has been a result of both European Union and United Nations funded programs. The European Union has provided significant financial assistance in the accommodation, protection, healthcare, management, and programs for the voluntary return of migrants within Serbia (Europa 2016). The United Nations Country Team has supported Serbia in aid that has surpassed over eight million USD in 2016 alone by providing programs to help register migrants as well as provide protection, shelter, food, and health services for migrants and refugees (2016). The substantial economic support for migration, specifically for Serbia, and the growing positive trend of the Serbian economy is a key difference and potential indicator for explaining why there is a great difference in migration support. Therefore, the public opinion poll differences can be analyzed in the economic differences of each state and the amount of aid they receive to address the migration crisis.

Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia

The Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia also has been significantly affected by the current migration crisis. In similar political conditions to Serbia, FYROM is considered a candidate country for joining the European Union but has yet to begin accession negotiations. FYROM's approach to migration has been similar to that of other Balkan states. FYROM is considered to be a transit country with four to five thousand migrants entering the country per day (Migration Policy Institute: Macedonia 2017). This mass influx of migrants is due to Macedonia's shared border with Greece, who receives an overwhelming disproportionate number of migrants that has affected Macedonia's ability to sufficiently provide the needs of migrants (Migration Policy Institute: Macedonia 2017). These insufficient conditions often include inadequate shelter, food, and sanitation that have continued to worsen as FYROM has become overwhelmed with a large influx of migrants in a short amount of time. Despite the

closure of the Balkans route of migration in 2016, issues pertaining to migration still persist for FYROM due to their geographic location and the overflow of migrants from Greece.

Public opinion in FYROM has been quite mixed when analyzing migration. In a Gallup poll from 2016, the public opinion poll asked citizens in whether their country accept Syrian refugees. In the FYROM, only two percent of citizens polled stated that the country should accept all Syrian refugees, sixteen percent stated the country should only accept a limited number of Syrian refugees, and sixty-six percent of citizens stated that the country should not accept any Syrian refugees (Esipova and Ray 2017). This Gallup World Poll provides a general oversight of the current situation regarding migration in the FYROM, which has been significantly affected by the migration crisis due to their geographic location in relation to Greece.

Table 3a. Gallup World Poll 2016: Attitudes on Macedonian Acceptance of Migrants

Percent of citizens stated that their country [FYROM] should accept all Syrian refugees	2%
Percent of citizens stated that their country [FYROM] should accept a limited number of Syrian refugees	16%
Percent of citizens stated that their country [FYROM] should not accept any Syrian refugees	66%

In addition to the Gallup World Poll, the United States Agency for International Development and conducted by the Center for Insights in Survey Research conducted a public opinion poll in April 2016 concerning Macedonian’s view of the support of the Macedonian government has given to migrants. The poll found that twenty-seven percent of Macedonians felt their government was providing too much support for refugees, thirty-five percent responded that the government was providing sufficient support, nine-percent responded there is some support but the government needs to do more, fourteen percent responded the government was not providing support, five percent responded they are not aware of the current refugee crisis, and ten percent declined to participate (Center for Insights in Survey Research: Macedonia 2016). This public opinion poll has produced dispersed responses of how Macedonians perceive their

government’s response to support for migrants arriving in FYROM, but also is consistent with the public opinion trends evident in other Balkan states.

Table 3b. Center for Insights in Survey Research 2016: Attitudes on Macedonian Government Support

Citizens believe the Macedonian government was providing sufficient support	35%
Citizens believe the Macedonian government provides some support but needs to do more	9%
Citizens believe the Macedonian government was not providing support	14%
Citizens were not away of the current refugee crisis	5%
Citizens declined to participate	10%

However, the overall support for migration in FYROM has showed a decline from previous years. The researchers of the Center for Insights in Survey Research disclaim that the timing of conducting this survey also coincides with the increased terror attacks of within Europe (Center for Insights in Survey Research: Macedonia 2016). International discourse has also contributed to the growing fears, as popular news and media outlets often insinuate that there is correlation between Muslim migrants from Northern Africa and the Middle East and terrorists. Although this is not accurate and depicts a false reputation for migrants, predominantly of Muslim descent, Macedonians are still concerned with the security of their country that has prompted response from the national government. Particularly after the Paris attacks in 2015, the country called for the Macedonian National Security Council meeting to restrict the entry of migrants that was similar to the tactics used by Croatia and Slovenia (Deliso 2016). The escalation of terrorist attacks within Europe has been one factor that has contributed to FYROM “closing the Balkans route” in 2016 to prevent further migrants from entering the country.

This divide on the migration crisis has been argued to further inhibit the democratic principles of FYROM and negatively impact their potential proceedings for European Union integration. The Macedonian government has resulted in the election of right-wing populist groups to power that has significantly affected how the country is able to assist migrants (Spasov

2016). The President of the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Gjorge Ivanov, has praised Germany's response to the migration crisis, but sharply criticizes Germany's lack of concern for the security of their own citizens with accepting the largest number of migrants and refugees in the European Union (Beale 2016). The openness of leaders against the acceptance and support of migrants has been a common trend for both Bulgaria and the FYROM, contributing to the rise of anti-migration sentiments and protests in these regions. The FYROM and Bulgaria also share the similarity of low economic growth, which has led citizens to pressure their government to help their own citizens before helping migrants, as they simply do not have the means to support migrants adequately in their state.

In addition, the rise of anti-European attitudes in the FYROM has also contributed to the rise in anti-migration attitudes. There has been a significant clash between the current major parties, the conservatists Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization-Democratic Party for Macedonian National Unity (VMRO-DPMNE) and the center-left part of the Social Democratic Union of Macedonia (Marusic 2017). However, both parties have been guilty of spreading false information in order to support their stances. Therefore, the significant differences between party lines can help account for the dispersion of the independent public opinion poll sponsored by Gallup World Poll and the United States Agency for International Development provides an impartial public opinion poll analyzing the support of migration within FYROM. However, it is evident that fears of terrorism, spread of Islam, and political party differences are key contributors to how migration is supported in the country.

Conclusion

In conclusion, it is evident that there is not an overwhelming support nor opposition to migration in the Balkan countries of Bulgaria, Serbia, and the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia based on public opinion polls. Although these public opinion polls pose different questions to their population samples, it has allowed for inferences to be made from the results considering the political and economic differences within these countries. The case study of Bulgaria can be deduced to the rise of nationalism and populism in the country that has led to an overwhelming support of migrants based on responses to fears of the rise of Islamic xenophobia and economic concerns. Although Serbia also has not had an overwhelming support or opposition to migration, the economic differences has made an impact in the rise of migration

support programs including adequate resources. FYROM has a rather complex case based on the responses of the public opinion poll, but the growing trend towards anti-migration have been evident within the country. Therefore, the Balkan countries are significantly impacted by migration that has shaped how citizens view migration within their country.

The political differences of these Bulgaria, Serbia, and FYROM in terms of European Union membership does not seem to have an impact on these states. Despite Bulgaria being a member of the European Union, their poor economic status has significantly affected their capabilities to address migrants as a transit country that has also led to a highly nationalistic state and a strengthened Bulgarian identity. Serbia has opened negotiations with the European Union and has the most positive responses towards assisting migrants, which is reflective on their desire to attain European Union membership in the coming years. This sharply contrasts with FYROM, as the country is an official candidate country but has yet to open negotiations with the European Union, who has seen a dispersed response in public opinion polls but fears of terrorism associated with migrants has led to a rise in nationalist identity.

The response of these particular Balkan states poses some similarities to Western Europe in their response to the 2015 migration crisis, but also some significant differences in the overall attitudes of citizens and the government's willingness to assist in the migration crisis. For example, the German government, specifically Chancellor Angela Merkel, has been open to migrants entering the country from their point of first entry. This approach has received both support and criticism that is important to consider with the ongoing threat of the migration crisis, but considerably different from the approach of Balkan state leaders and the public opinion of citizens. However, economic differences are obviously a significant concern for the Balkan case studies of Bulgaria, Serbia, and the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia than that of Germany, which relates to how Eastern Europe, specifically the Balkans region, is able to adequately provide for the needs of their own citizens as well as refugees. This is not to say that citizens of the Balkan states are not concerned of the human rights issue pertaining to the migration crisis, but rather to protect the economic interests at the present time. Therefore, the public opinion of Balkan states concerning migration is important to compare to Western European states to analyze the approach of the governments currently and potential future action.

Public opinion polls provide a definitive indicator that take into account the differences in perspectives without regard to gender, class, or race that has allowed for the analysis these three

representative case studies in an objective manner. The case studies of Bulgaria, Serbia, and FYROM can be inferred to have significant political and economical progresses in the immediate future, therefore a contributing factor to affecting the public opinion of the current migration crisis. As the migration crisis continues and the European Union continues to push forward in enlargement and integration, it will be of interest to compare if these factors have had a significant impact on public opinion of migration in future developments.

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