

Mitko Arnaudov*)

UDC: 314.151.3-054.72:323-044.372(497.7)
314.151.3-054.72:338.1(497.7)

MIGRATION IN THE 21ST CENTURY – DETERMINATOR OF POLITICAL, SECURITY AND ECONOMIC SUSTAINABILITY OF NORTH MACEDONIA

Abstract: *During the last two decades, North Macedonia has been facing the phenomena of huge emigration as a consequence of unstable political, security and economic flows in the country. Based on the results of the last census in that country, held in September 2021, this country lost more than two hundred thousand people in a period of twenty years, which, from a strategic point of view, represents a huge internal issue for the ongoing economic flows, potential economic growth and national investment strategies. Most of the emigrants have stated that the main reason for leaving the country were unstable economic perspectives, continuation of political tensions and politically initiated ethnic problems, which all contribute to security instability. Such circumstances are the reasons for emigrants to decide to start a new chapter in life abroad, mostly in the Western European countries. Moreover, long duration of the European integration of North Macedonia represents one of the key reasons why many young citizens of this state have decided to emigrate. In this paper, from a practical point of view, the author will analyze and explain the key reasons of the migration phenomena in North Macedonia, as well as how these reasons contribute to its economic, political and security sustainability on middle term. From the other side, from a theoretical point of view, we are going to explain how much small states, such as North Macedonia, without strong economic performances and political power on regional and international level, are vulnerable, from the perspective of migration, in contemporary globalized international relations. The questions we would like to reach an answer to in this paper are the following: Do small states, on the example of North Macedonia, could be sustainable if the process of globalization at the same time determines the process of migration? What mechanisms small states have in order to mitigate the migration flows, as a measure in securing economic sustainability? Does faster European integration contribute to mitigation of migration, or the contrary? How much do the political instability and security threats really contribute to emigration process?*

Key words: *Migration, Economy, Politics, Security, Sustainability, Integration, North Macedonia, European Union.*

*) Research Fellow, Centre for Neighboring and Mediterranean countries, Institute of International Politics and Economics.

INTRODUCTION

The problem of migration has been attracting the interest of the European and the world public for many years, but it came into the spotlight during the refugee crisis in 2015 and 2016. The large population movement, first from Asia and then from North Africa to the developed countries in Europe, has caused administrative, financial, and then political problems, both in the countries of transit and in the countries of final destination (Lutovac, 2018, 9). This issue has caused huge problems also in the Western Balkans region, primarily because of the already existing problems faced by these countries at the institutional level. At the same time, the migration problem, placed in the context of the European integration, has a particular importance for the research of the functioning of institutions and the process of operationalization of the European values, both in the EU and in the Western Balkans region, which is participating in the European integration process (Lutovac, 2018, 9). The Western Balkans geographic region – comprised of Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Kosovo^{*)}, North Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia, and Slovenia – is no stranger to refugee flows, having experienced massive displacement as a result of violence and ethnic cleansing during the 1990s (Greider, 2017). When it comes to North Macedonia and the migrant crisis that gripped the European continent in 2015 and 2016, this country has blocked the border with Greece, with the intention of stopping the further arrival of refugees on its territory, but such decision of Macedonian authorities was in direct opposition to the proclaimed policy of Germany, which was based on an invitation to refugees to travel freely (Kuljić, 2018, 13). In fact, the migrant crisis presented multiple challenges to the European Union: first, political (review of the Schengen Agreement, determination of a common position and unified policy, reaction to Turkey's blackmail policy), economic (additional costs of care and allocation for Turkey), then cultural (integration of a million Muslims), and the comprehensive security challenge (the securitization of the migrant issue and the reconstruction of the common European security area) (Radinović, 2018, 276).

^{*)} UN Resolution 1244.

The challenges of the migrant crisis have caused numerous problems in the region of the Western Balkans as well. Because the states of this region, even though they were not members of the European Union, at that moment were forced to guard the external borders of the Union, primarily taking into account the fact that the migrants did not want to stay in the territory of Greece, nor in the territory of the Western Balkans region. In the case of North Macedonia, migrant crisis saw the effects of deploying police forces from the member states of the European Union, but also from neighboring countries, such as the Serbian police forces, on the borderline between this country and Greece. The goal of these “mixed” police forces was to contribute as much as possible to the management of migrant flows, the prevention of illegal migration, and the prevention of human trafficking. The migrant pressure that North Macedonia faced during 2015 and 2016 was particularly strong, considering the country’s limited institutional, economic and security capacities. In North Macedonia, an unrelated political crisis related to corruption scandals in that period meant that the migration flows did not receive as much media attention as in other countries. And if anything, the government’s ability to close the border in that period and act on internationally brokered agreements shored up its legitimacy against the opposition party (Greider, 2017). During the peak of the European migration and refugee crisis, hundreds of thousands of asylum seekers and migrants arrived in the European Union via the Western Balkans. In 2015, 600,000 of refugees and migrants were registered in the Presevo camp alone, on the border of Serbia and the North Macedonia (Greider, 2017).

At the same time, during the last twenty years, North Macedonia has been facing the problem of internal emigration. A significant number of the population decided to leave the country due to poor living conditions, primarily low living standards, lack of jobs for qualified individuals, political clientelism, but also institutional inefficiency, which creates additional insecurity in the society of this country. When it comes to economic migrations or the so-called migrations of the working population, it is important to point out that they represent movements of

the population in search of work outside the borders of their country of origin and their roots can be found in the last quarter of the 19th century (Ljuboja, 2015). The trend of constant growth in the number of migrants from the Balkans is also confirmed by the data of the European Statistics Agency (EUROSTAT) (Vučković, 2022). Countries such as Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Albania and North Macedonia continue to show a high emigration character, even in spite of a significant drop in emigration at the beginning of the 21st century (Ljuboja, 2015). In North Macedonia, there are no official statistics on young people who have left the country in the past 10 years, but it is estimated that their number is not less than 200,000. These numbers testify to the danger of population loss in North Macedonia, which, in the medium term, brings into question the sustainability of this country, primarily in the economic context, due to the labor force deficit that increases year by year on the labor market in that country.

A Professor at the University of “Ss Cyril and Methodius” in Skopje, Ilija Aceski, said that polls show that a dysfunctional state and the inability to find employment legally, through a competition, are the top reasons why young people leave the country (Vučković, 2022). “The major problem is the fact that young people are losing or have already lost faith in public institutions and the state, and the worst thing is that young people in North Macedonia do not see perspective, at all” says Aceski (Vučković, 2022). Internal migrant challenges actually represent contemporary security challenges of countries because, in the medium and long term, due to the lack of qualified labor force, bring into question the sustainability of a country’s system infrastructure. In North Macedonia, entire settlements are being emptied and left without inhabitants, and according to the results of the census, published at the beginning of 2022, this alarming situation is evident in certain parts of the country (Simovski, 2022). In the 2002 census, there were 147 settlements without inhabitants, while according to the latest census, that number increased to 207.

1. POLITICAL CRISIS AND ECONOMIC PERFORMANCE AS THE MAIN CAUSES OF EMIGRATION IN NORTH MACEDONIA

The Republic of North Macedonia has been facing a succession of political crises since the independence until today. The unstable internal political situation in that country greatly contributes to poor economic performance, and thus to the poor living conditions of the population, regardless of their national, ethnic or religious affiliation. Pervasive corruption in North Macedonia largely determines political trends and makes political institutions unstable, inefficient and ineffective. In fact, the Republic of North Macedonia has always been considered a highly intensive migration area, characterized by both exhaustive inner movements of its citizens, as well as continuous emigration processes towards other countries (Sotiroski, Hristoski, 2014, 33). North Macedonia has entered the new millennium with social problems, ethnic tensions and economic instability (Apostolovska-Toshevskaja, Madjevikj, Ljakoska, Gorin, Radevski, Dimitrovska, 2018, 59). Almost 2/3 of the emigration flows are directed towards some of the European countries (Germany, Switzerland, Italy and other), out of which 12.1% towards America and almost 10% towards Australia and Oceania (Apostolovska-Toshevskaja, Madjevikj, Ljakoska, Gorin, Radevski, Dimitrovska, 2018, 61). Apart from this trend of permanent emigration, many young people, mainly students, go to work abroad for a limited period of time through employment agencies or students' "work and travel" and "internship" programs. Most of them work in Germany, Italy, Austria, Sweden, the USA, Canada and Australia (Apostolovska-Toshevskaja, Madjevikj, Ljakoska, Gorin, Radevski, Dimitrovska, 2018, 62). Based on the Eurostat data (2014), in the European countries alone, the number of Macedonian citizens increased from 135,000 in 2000 to 240,000 in 2014.

“The largest increase is noticed in the receiving countries of the European Union, especially in 2011, after the stagnation during the economic and financial crisis (2008–2010) (Apostolovska-Toshevska, Madjevikj, Ljakoska, Gorin, Radevski, Dimitrovska, 2018, 63). In North Macedonia, the unsustainability of economic policy is actually the main cause of emigration. The strong influence of political subjects in the creation of economic policies contributes to an unfavorable economic situation that directly threatens the inhabitants of this country who reject the so-called clientelist model of ensuring economic sustainability.

In North Macedonia, the political elites are abusing the inter-ethnic relations, as well as political opponents as a mechanism for an additional division of the society on different levels, and in that way the politicians are succeeding in marginalizing the real economic problems within the country, as a leading reason for emigration. The fact that almost 452,000 people in North Macedonia in 2022 live below the poverty line, according to the latest data from the State Bureau of Statistics, represents a significant indicator of the large emigration of the country’s population (Mitevaska, 2022). The cost of living in April 2022 in North Macedonia was 10.5 percent higher compared to the same month last year, while retail prices were 11.1 percent higher in the same period. From the other side, the state debt reached a record level of over 7.1 billion euros, or more than 60 percent of the gross domestic product (GDP). “We can no longer talk about economic development, but economic survival. This implies that capital investments must continue in order to maintain the continuity of the private sector”, says the economic analyst Arben Halili (Mitevaska, 2022). The unstable political situation, the irresponsibility of the political elite, as well as the widespread corruption, determine the economic problems in North Macedonia, which directly result in a significant number of the population leaving the country.

The great indifference and inferiority of the youth, especially students, who should be the generators and the critical mass of the society, is evident in North

Macedonia. The latest research detects an increasing mass exodus of young people, especially intellectuals from North Macedonia, who are most often looking for a “better tomorrow” in the Western Europe countries. This trend of “brain drain” is becoming more and more worrying and it is the topic of many formal and informal youth meetings (Fazlagić, 2013). Hundreds of thousands of Macedonians have already left the country. According to the World Bank statistics, a half a million of Macedonians already live abroad. That is about a quarter of the total population. One of the Macedonians who already lives and works abroad says that a good job in North Macedonia requires political connections (Deutsche Welles, 2020). Such tendencies bring into question the sustainability of North Macedonia because of three key reasons: first, this country is continuously losing its working-age population; second, the decreasing number of working-age population makes the national pension system unsustainable; an third, the country is becoming less and less attractive for new investments as a consequence of the deficit in the labor market.

The large variations in the official statistics for 2012 and 2013 between the OSCE and the State Bureau of Statistics of North Macedonia testify to the fact that North Macedonia does not lead a serious policy, even when it comes to migration flows. Thus, according to the data of the State Statistics of North Macedonia, in 2012, 1,330 inhabitants emigrated from that country, while in 2013, only 945. On the other hand, according to official OSCE data, 17,530 inhabitants emigrated from North Macedonia in 2012, while in 2013, as many as 20,562 of them did the same (Vračić, 2018). In the countries of the region, there are no exact statistical data on the number of young people who have permanently emigrated since the beginning of the new millennium, and all estimates are based on the OSCE database for the period from 2012 to 2016. During that period, an average of slightly more than 9,500 of mostly young people left North Macedonia annually (Radio Slobodna Evropa/CDM, 2022).

The poor living conditions of young people in North Macedonia is evidenced also by the fact that an increasing number of them want to continue their lives abroad. According to the latest research, 58 percent of young people say that they would move out of the country, and 64.8 percent are dissatisfied with their place in the country. According to the research of the Foundation for Democracy in Westminster, in North Macedonia, there is a high degree of youth dissatisfaction related the fact how state authorities take care of this category of people, and there is a huge discrepancy between the opportunities and needs of young people at the local level and at the central level (Deutsche Welle, 2022). Many young people decide to move because of the opportunities they have in other countries in terms of social life, cultural events, educational opportunities, etc. Therefore, the reasoning is that in these areas the state (North Macedonia) should try to find solutions²⁸⁾ that will attract young people to stay in their country. The most common emigration is present among the highly educated staff from the field of medical professions, as well as from the field of engineering, who have gone to the EU member states in recent years, and especially to Scandinavia, Germany, Britain (Deutsche Welle, 2022). Better work conditions and economic perspectives are not the only reasons for young people to leave North Macedonia. The trends of leaving in recent years have also been attributed to the non-economic reasons – they are bothered by pollution, politics, corruption, and in an open world, in which there are no barriers to migration, young people leave easily, without hesitation. Although North Macedonia has a National Strategy for cooperation and preventing the brain-drain of young and high-quality personnel 2013-2020, it was not implemented, which is shown in the analysis of the Brain Drain Prevention Network – composed of seven civil society organizations working in various areas related to development of young people, youth policies and rights and youth

²⁸⁾ Aiming to stop the negative migration trends in North Macedonia, the authorities have adopted the Government Program 2022-2024, which provides support for each employed person up to the age of 29 who will be employed for the first time, for all those who have not yet developed employment skills to do so through practice. A personal income tax refund is provided for all newly employed young people under 30 years of age; the support is also seen in the opening of youth centers and local youth councils, with the aim of involving young people in decision-making processes and increasing the capacities of the youth.

information (Večer, 2020). According to the World Bank data, in the last ten years, half a million citizens have emigrated from North Macedonia, most of whom are young. The research conducted by the German foundation “Friedrich Ebert”, with participation of 1,200 respondents, shows that only eight percent of young population wants to stay in North Macedonia, while two thirds of young people want to emigrate (Večer, 2020). These trends undoubtedly further bring into question the overall sustainability of North Macedonia. Emigration of young people not only affects the reduction of the population in the medium term, but also makes the institutional infrastructure of the country non-functional because the number of employees who retire will not be replaced by new personnel over time due to the increasingly pronounced labor force deficit on the labor market.

2. MODERN SECURITY CHALLENGES AS A NEW GENERATOR OF EMIGRATION IN NORTH MACEDONIA

The security challenges faced by the North Macedonia from 1990 to 2010 were not the cause of increase of the rate of emigration among the population of this country during the mentioned period. More precisely, the wars in the territories of the former Yugoslavia during the nineties, as well as the economic sanctions that this country was faced with immediately after the declaration of independence, did not affect the residents moving out in large numbers. The largest migration of the Macedonian population was recorded in 2001, during the armed conflict in the north-western parts of the country. But, in this case, it is primarily about the internal migration of the population, that is, on the territory of North Macedonia. According to the Ministry of Labor and Social Policy, during the eight months of the conflict, there were over 140,000 displaced persons in North Macedonia (Popovski, Naumova, 17). But, the important thing in the context of armed conflict and migration, what is important is the data that in the year after the conflict ended: approximately 90% of the population gradually returned to their homes (Popovski, Naumova, 18).

On the other hand, North Macedonia continuously began to face population emigration due to the unwillingness of the national system to face with the modern security challenges that are not related to the so-called traditional threats of sovereign states, such as the threats to political sovereignty and territorial integrity. In that context, as Gocevski and Gjurovski have stated, the theories of security and peace unequivocally indicate that one of the key factors for the promotion and preservation of world peace is precisely raising the level of economic development of countries (Gocevski, Gjurovski, 2017 pp.20. op.cit.). North Macedonia is nowadays facing security threats such as economic underdevelopment, weak and dysfunctional institutions, as well as a health system that does not respond to modern challenges in the field of public health. These challenges create intra-institutional security challenges, respectively, the institutional infrastructure of North Macedonia creates contemporary security threats which directly threaten the security of citizens in the context of creating conditions for normal life. Based on it, as we have mentioned previously in this paper, numerous young citizens of North Macedonia are deciding to emigrate because they are not satisfied with the living conditions that public system in this country provides them.

The best modern example in that context is the health system of North Macedonia facing the *Covid-19* pandemic. During the *Covid-19* pandemic, the North Macedonia has applied more or less the same measures as its neighboring countries. Basically, all of them applied “copy-paste” measures in the fight against *Covid-19*, but North Macedonia fared the worst, because it has had the largest number of new *Covid-19* cases and deaths in relation the number of citizens. The difference between North Macedonia and other neighboring states was only in the measures for entering and leaving the country, where state quarantine was obligatory for Macedonian citizens, as well as for foreigners (Mirilović, 2022). During the *Covid-19* pandemic, the citizens of North Macedonia were faced with numerous systemic inconsistencies, which have led to a sudden increase in the number of infected people, but also to a high mortality rate due to the inconsistency and inefficiency of the national health system.

Even the NATO membership of North Macedonia did not enable provision of better conditions for overcoming the contemporary security threats faced by the North Macedonia's citizens. Although NATO allies through the Euro-Atlantic Disaster Response Coordination Centre (EADRCC) have provided different types of assistance to North Macedonia in the fight during the *Covid-19* pandemic, internal institutional and systematic problems in this country were a crucial reason for such negative trends during the pandemic. According to data from September 1, 2022, North Macedonia, from the beginning of the *Covid-19* pandemic, has registered 340,510 cases, from which 329,434 recovered patients and 9,490 deaths, which position this country in the group of the list of European countries with the highest rate of mortality due to the pandemic (Worldometers, 2022).

In fact, modern security challenges, such as political instability, the unsustainability of the health system and weak economic development are the key determinants of the emigration of the Macedonian population, which, as a process determined by internal problems, is also a security challenge in itself, because it contributes to further reducing the capacities for creating long-term sustainability of North Macedonia.

CONCLUSION

Migration flows are a modern trend present in all parts of the globalized world. In fact, the process of globalization has directly contributed to the promotion of a large-scale migration due to the ever-increasing possibilities of population movement. The great mobility of the population on the global level was generated by economic processes and trade exchange at all levels, but also by modern technologies that significantly influenced the simplification of mobility of the world's population. There are different reasons for world population migration. If only a hundred years ago the reason for migration were the struggle for fertile

land and food production or to avoid wars, today it is primarily due to economic reasons, i. e. the wish to ensure better living conditions, not just basic human needs, such as food and water. But we should not ignore the fact that wars have remained one of the main reasons for migration, which we saw in the example of civil wars in the former Yugoslavia, but also in the example of war conflicts in the Middle East, North Africa and the ongoing war in Ukraine. Almost millions of people were displaced as a consequence of the armed conflicts in the Middle East and north of Africa which, in fact, were the cause of the European migrant crisis during 2015 and 2016.

On the other hand, when we talk about the migration of the young population, the main reasons for migration are primarily the living conditions, respectively, finding better economic conditions, as well as the stable systemic organization of a society. Based on the existing data, it can be reiterated that the main causes of increased population migration in North Macedonia are poor living conditions that appeared as a consequence of systemic inefficiency and ineffectiveness. In fact, in North Macedonia, it is a cause-and-effect process that is continuously contributing to the collapse of the sustainability of this country. At the top is an inefficient and dysfunctional political system, riddled with continuous political crises and corruption scandals. Such a political system contributes to the constant collapse of the infrastructure of the public system in the economic, health, educational, security and social contexts. So, the collapsed infrastructure of the public system of North Macedonia is enabled to perform its basic function, respectively, to serve the citizens. On the other hand, such a dysfunctional public system not only does not serve the citizens, but additionally threatens their safety, which is most clearly presented in the way of responding during the *Covid-19* pandemic. All this contributes to the increase of the emigration of the Macedonian population, which is not only a consequence, but also a new-established problem that additionally determines the political, economic and security trends in this country in a negative

way. The emigration of the population of North Macedonia, especially young and educated population, is a pervasive problem of this country, which in the medium and long term, affects not only the overcoming of existing systemic problems, but also the creation of new challenges that permanently block all potentials for the development of this country. The development of the economic system is almost impossible, due to the deficit of qualified labor on the labor market, which automatically deters potential new investments. The social and pension system became dependent on foreign lending, due to the impossibility of creating new additional value, so in that context, the public expenditures are based on external credit institutions. At the same time, the education system becomes absolutely dysfunctional because it produces new qualified workforce who are placed on foreign markets; at the same time, there is no return of value from investing in qualified workforce through the public education model. In fact, all this leads to conclusion that emigration is the main problem and challenge for North Macedonia, which as a process should be stopped, so that another process of solving the systemic and all-pervasive institutional challenges should start, which as a consequence of its functioning has produced migration.

REFERENCES

1. Vračić, Alida. 2018. "Put za povratak: Odlazak obrazovanih ljudi i prosperitet na zapadnom Balkanu". European Council on Foreign Relations. <https://ecfr.eu>.
2. Večer. 2020. "Младите сакаат да се иселат, причините не се само парите". <https://www.vecer.press>.
3. Vučković, Branko. 2022. "Млади odlaze trajno': Migracije sa Zapadnog Balkana". Radio Slobodna Evropa. <https://www.slobodnaevropa.org>.
4. Greider, Alice. 2017. *Outsourcing Migration Management: The Role of the Western Balkans in the European Refugee Crisis*. Brussels/Washington: Migration Policy Institute.
5. Deutsche Welle. 2020. "Zemlje bez mozgova, zemlje bez budućnosti". <https://www.dw.com>.
6. Deutsche Welle. 2022. "Истражување: Од младите 58 проценти би се иселиле". <https://www.dw.com>.
7. Kosovo Online/Telegrafi. 2022. "Simovski: U Severnoj Makedoniji za 20 godina oko 10 odsto manje stanovništva". <https://www.kosovo-online.com>.
8. Kuljić, Đorđe, 2018. "Odgovor Srbije na izbegličku krizu u kontekstu puta ka članstvu u EU". U: *Savremene migracije i društveni razvoj: interdisciplinarna perspektiva*. Tematski zbornik vodećeg nacionalnog značaja 2018. Beograd: Srpsko sociološko društvo, Institut društvenih nauka, Univerzitet u Beogradu, Filozofski fakultet, Institut za sociološka istraživanja.
9. Lutovac, Zoran. 2018, "Reč urednika". U: *Savremene migracije i društveni razvoj: interdisciplinarna perspektiva*. Tematski zbornik vodećeg nacionalnog značaja 2018. Beograd: Srpsko sociološko društvo, Institut društvenih nauka, Univerzitet u Beogradu, Filozofski fakultet, Institut za sociološka istraživanja.

10. Ljuboja, Dušan. 2015. "Balkanski migracioni procesi u 20. i 21. veku". Beograd: Center for International Relations and Sustainable Development (CIRSD).
11. Mitevska, Marija. 2022. "Sjeverna Makedonija na putu ekonomskog opstanka umjesto razvoja". Radio Slobodna Evropa. <https://www.slobodnaevropa.org>.
12. Mirilović, Filip. 2022. "Makedonski scenario". Vreme. Available from: <https://www.vreme.com>.
13. Popovski, Mihajlo, Naumova, Katerina. 2008. "TRAUMA AND POSTTRAUMATIC STRESS IN WAR IDPs IN MACEDONIA". Institute of Psychology, University "St. Cyril and Methodius" – Skopje, North Macedonia. <https://scindeks-clanci.ceon.rs>.
14. Radio Slobodna Evropa/CDM. 2022. "Mladi odlaze trajno: Migracije sa Zapadnog Balkana". Radio Slobodna Evropa/CDM. <https://www.cdm.me>.
15. Sotiroski, Kosta, Hristoski, Ilija. 2014. "Statistical Performances of Population Migration in the Republic of Macedonia at the Beginning of the 21st Century". U: *Migracijske i etničke teme*. 2014. <https://hrcak.srce.hr>.
16. Toshevska, Apostolovska, Biljana, Madjevikj, Mirjanka, Ljakoska, Marija, Gorin, Svemir, Radevski, Ivan, Dimitrovska, Olgica. 2018. "Republic of Macedonia – A Timeless Migration Mosaic". U: *Migracijske i etničke teme*. 34/2018.
17. Fazlagić, Admir. 2013. "Mladi Makedonci vide budućnost van zemlje". AlJazeera. <https://balkans.aljazeera.net>.
18. Wordlometers.info. 2022. "Republic of North Macedonia". Worldometers.info. <https://www.worldometers.info>.