

THE ROLE OF BORDER MANAGEMENT IN THE PROCESS OF MIGRATION MANAGEMENT AT THE EU'S SOUTH EASTERN BORDERS

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Abstract. *The issue of migration goes beyond geographical, economic and legal approaches. If we intend to treat the phenomenon from a specific point of view, we will find ambiguities and uncertainties regarding the role of states and the functioning of some institutions in the process of migration management.*

The European Union's South Eastern border region, and bordering countries are representing a so-called epicenter of the migration process. Basically, it is one of the main migration routes, also called the Western Balkan track, used by thousands of migrants and refugees on their way to the EU member states.

Managing borders and the migration management in the EU and in the neighboring countries is a social and economic investment that enables societies to strengthen their cohesion and resilience and become more prosperous. It can be considered also a societal process in which the responsibility does not rest with a specific group, but with several. The study aims to realize an inventory of the general trends and evolutions from the past decade, regarding the perception of the border in the South East European space, but also focuses on the process of migration management which had an impact on transnational institution building.

One of our research hypotheses is represented by the fact that cooperation between states in the field of border management play an important role in the process of migrant management. Transnational cooperation and partnerships between institutions can carry out valuable work by providing guidance and support in this process.

A second hypothesis that we want to test starts from the idea that the creation of certain transnational institutions in the field of migration management, working on the ground can play a more efficient role in monitoring the implementation and the impact of new policies and initiatives.

The present research is intended to be an analysis through which we would like to emphasize the lack of interaction between neighboring states border authorities at different levels in migration management at the South Eastern borders of the European Union.

Keywords: *border, migration, cooperation, Western Balkans, transnational.*

INTRODUCTION AND CONTEXT

The creation of today's status quo from the European continent is the result of a long and complex process. Over the years, this process has been influenced by numerous historical, political, economic and social factors. The understanding and good management of borders and neighborhood relations had a key role in the European construction process. The expansion of the European community has gradually changed

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the situation of the external borders of the EU. These changes produced socio-economic and political transformations that generated many opportunities in the field of regional development, but also created many potential problems and tensions. The new conjuncture created in an expanded Europe emphasizes the need for long-term commitments to support local and regional cross-border cooperation initiatives.

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Enhanced cross-border flows will also support the development of more open societies with a better understanding and tolerance of their neighbors and their cultural, religious and linguistic differences (Brie 2025). At the same time, threats related to abuse of malfunctioning border management systems can be more effectively addressed if authorities responsible for the management of state borders improve their communication, exchange of information and overall cooperation.

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METHODOLOGY

In the given context, the study aims to realize an inventory of the general trends and evolutions from the past decade, regarding the development of the border management process in the South East European space, but also focuses on the process of migration management which had an impact on transnational institution building.

One of our research hypotheses is represented by the fact that cooperation between states in the field of border management play an important role in the process of migrant management. Transnational cooperation and partnerships between institutions can carry out valuable work by providing guidance and support in this process.

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The present research is intended to be an analysis through which we would like to emphasize the lack of interaction between neighboring states border authorities at different levels in migration management at the South Eastern borders of the European Union.

In the frame of the proposed methodology two different methodological approaches were used in the writing of this paper. First, a policy analysis was conducted, which forms the majority of the findings. Secondly, a content analysis of selected documents was carried out which supplements the analysis of the legal and policy framework.

The analysis of the policy and legal framework was desk based focusing on key legislative and policy documents, database in order to query the current legislative status of proposals and other policy initiatives and thus built a corpus of policy and legislative documents that reflect the current status of the EU framework on migration and borders.

Other secondary sources such as academic literature, European Parliament briefings, research reports and reports by UN and European human rights agencies were used to supplement the analysis of key legal and policy developments.

The strengthening of EU border management was prioritized in the EU response to the refugee crisis. The EU developed a border management strategy which aims at an “integrated and global response” to the challenges emerging from irregular migration through the common external borders. The Sout Eastern borders constitute one of the fundamental targets being addressed by this strategy.

LITERATURE REVIEW AND CONCEPTUAL ISSUES

Border management. The EU’s Sout Eastern borders constitute one of the fundamental targets being addressed by this strategy. Already on November 2006, the European Commission published a communication calling for the reinforced management of the EU’s Sout Eastern borders and for the maximization of the capacities of the European Agency for the Management of Operational Cooperation at the External Borders of the Member States of the European Union – FRONTEX (RESPOND 2018).

Under the auspices of coordinated efforts, the Council agreed on a common definition of what ‘Integrated Border Management’ (IBM) means in the EU. The prioritization of borders has been coupled with the emergence of a ‘global approach to migration’, which aims to ensure a multifaceted response covering all the dimensions relevant to migration, with particular attention to irregular mobility by third-country nationals coming from Africa.

The EU policy seems to be based on two distinct but closely interrelated and complementary approaches: on the one hand, an integrated approach to the management of common territorial borders, and on the other hand a global policy covering migration (CEPS 2007).

Efficient and effective border management will enable citizens to live in an area of security and freedom where they can travel more freely and where cross-border trade will be facilitated, all of which are key prerequisites for economic growth and poverty reduction. Enhanced cross-border flows will also support the development of more open societies with a better understanding and tolerance of their neighbors and their cultural, religious and linguistic differences. At the same time, threats related to abuse of malfunctioning border management systems, such as smuggling of goods and trafficking in human beings, drugs and arms, can be more effectively addressed if authorities responsible for the management of state borders improve their communication, exchange of information and overall cooperation (CARDS 2007).

We can say that there are no explicit definitions of neither border management nor migration management in EU documents. The closest explicit definition of what European Integrated Border Management encompasses can be found in Article 4 of the 2016 Regulation establishing the European Border and Coast Guard (RESPOND 2018).

Still, if we summarize the principles and goals of border management, we can say that border management represents the national and international coordination and cooperation among all the relevant authorities and agencies involved in border security and trade facilitation to establish effective, efficient and integrated border management systems, in order to reach the objective of open, but well controlled and secure borders.

The European Integrated Border Management (IBM) Guidelines are of a technical nature and should be viewed as a working tool, providing guidance on how to enhance cooperation and coordination at various levels. They should not be seen as

detailed technical specifications on how to develop the individual border management systems in the countries of South Eastern Europe. Rather, they should be regarded as a useful basis and supporting document when developing national IBM systems (CARDS 2007).

A variety of actors are involved in tasks related to the management of state borders in every country. While they clearly have a different focus and thus different objectives depending on their responsibilities and powers, they all work towards a common strategic goal.

Traditionally, the strategic goals at the state level in relation to border management lie in the protection of the borders against threats to national security, the national economy and public health, but also in the prevention of cross-border criminal activities and unlawful entry into or exit from the state. Border services, including border guards as well as customs, veterinary and phytosanitary inspection services, all play an important role in this regard.

Border services are obliged to ensure the security and health of people, animals, plants and cultural heritage. As the potential threats are numerous, an expeditious and at the same time effective control system is required, of which the management is accordingly complex.

On the other hand, increased international trade and tourism, as well as the increase in cultural and educational exchanges make the facilitation of licit movement of persons and goods also an important strategic goal of most countries. Border services are therefore forced to strike a delicate balance between strict controls concerning risks and fully open borders (CARDS 2007).

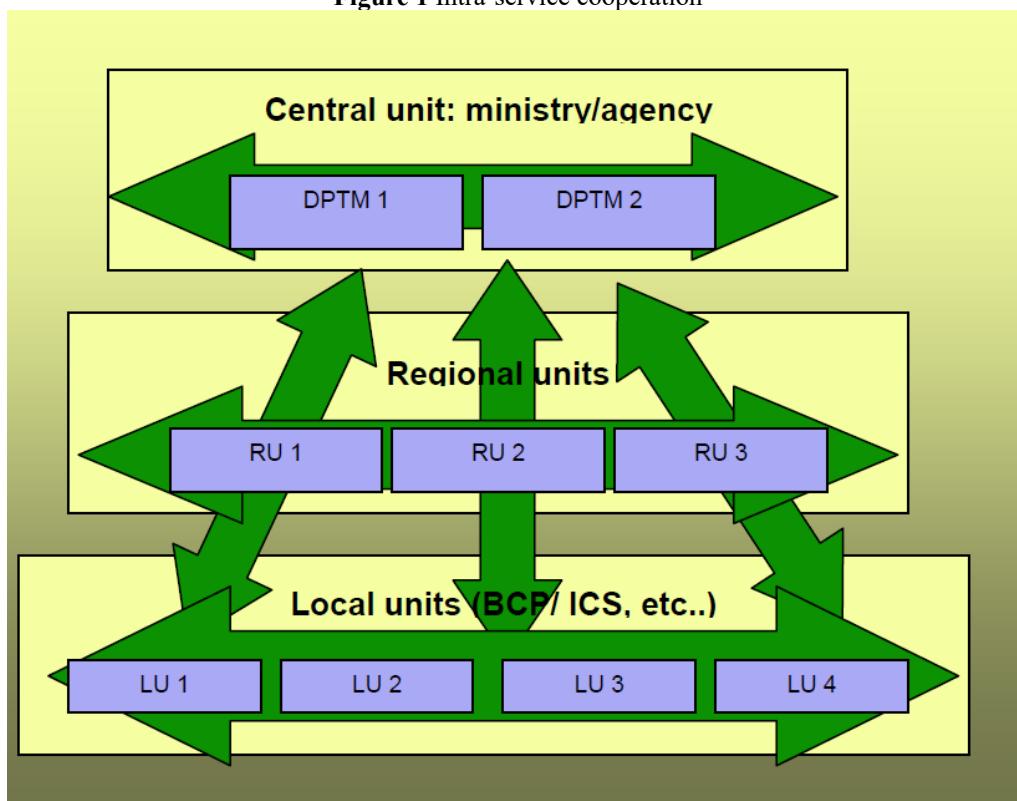
In order to balance these twin goals of modern border management – that is, border security and facilitated movement of persons and goods – in an efficient and effective manner, appropriate equipment and well-trained and motivated staff are as important as a strong legal basis, a clear division of tasks and responsibilities, streamlined processes and an efficient exchange of information.

Taking into account the complexity of the task, this cooperation and coordination should not only be limited to the units within one ministry or agency, but should also occur both between all actors involved in border management within a certain country and at the international level. Most importantly, the services need to realize that they have common objectives and tasks, and that their individual objectives can only be reached by frank communication and by working together.

In order to conceptualize integrated border management, we can say that the key aspects of it are cooperation and coordination. The specialty literature defines that these are carried out at three pillars: intra-service cooperation, inter-agency cooperation and international cooperation (CARDS 2007).

Intra-service cooperation refers to cooperation between units within a state body: both the vertical aspect of intra-service cooperation between the different administrative levels from the state body to the units working at the borders and the horizontal aspect of cooperation between the various border crossing points (BCPs) as well as inland control stations should be taken into account.

Figure 1 Intra-service cooperation

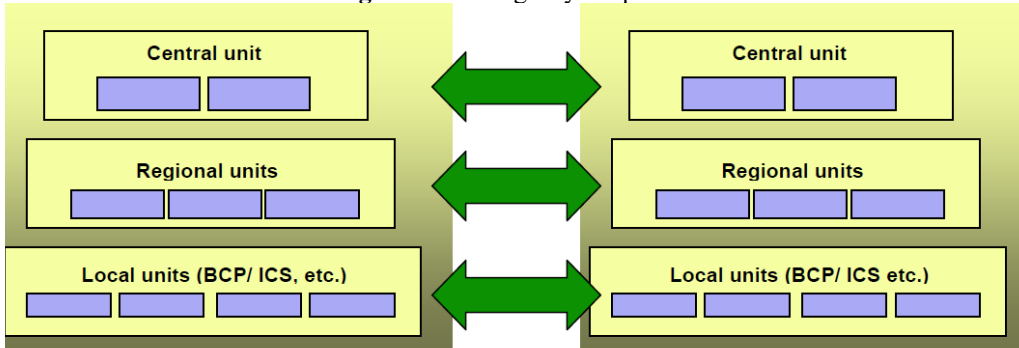


Source: European Commission, *Guidelines for and Integrated Border Management in the Western Balkans*, updated version (CARDS) 2007

Intra-service cooperation therefore describes the efficient internal cooperation and management of processes, information and resources within a ministry or agency responsible for specific tasks: (a) Between local, regional and central levels (vertical cooperation); (b) Between different units of the same levels (horizontal cooperation).

Inter-agency cooperation takes a horizontal approach based on cooperation and coordination between officers of the different services active at the border (local level), as well as among the regional and central ministries/authorities responsible for those services. This starts with day-to-day operational contact at the BCP (at the formal and informal levels) and extends to the need to coordinate discussions on mid- and long-term strategies between the regional directorates and within and between the ministries.

There are three types of inter-agency cooperation at the border and within the country: coordinated processing at border crossings, integrated information technology systems and awareness-building and joint responsibilities (CARDS 2007).

Figure 2. Inter-agency cooperation

Source: European Commission, *Guidelines for and Integrated Border Management in the Western Balkans*, updated version (CARDS) 2007

Inter-agency cooperation therefore describes the cooperation at the border (local level) - at the regional and central level - between ministries or state bodies with different tasks related to border management.

International cooperation, the cooperation between agencies involved in border issues in different countries, exists at the local, regional and multinational levels:

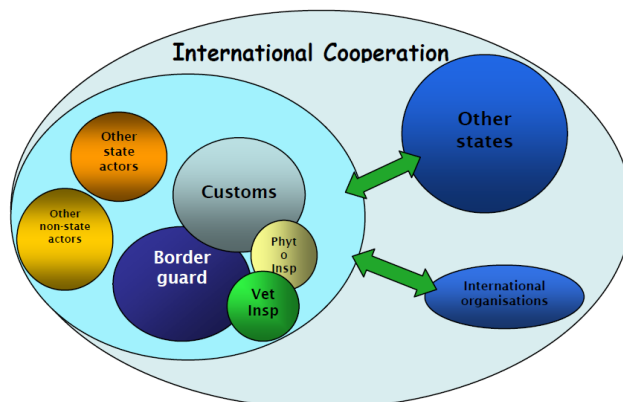
(a) Local cooperation between officials on both sides of the border. This cooperation would focus on improving day-to-day operations. It can range from information exchange up to the flexible solving of possible operational challenges in the interest of the facilitation of legitimate cross-border movements.

(b) Bilateral cooperation between neighboring states. Bilateral cooperation should include meetings between neighboring countries at the regional and central levels to discuss matters such as the status of the different BCPs.

(c) Multinational cooperation, focusing on border management issues.

It should be kept in mind that international cooperation initiatives can also have an interagency cooperation aspect, and that at least the ministries of foreign affairs have to be associated in the negotiation process of related bilateral and multilateral agreements. Further inter-agency cooperation aspects of international cooperation, for example, include the possibility of establishing a common contact office for custom and border guard officers from different countries (CARDS 2007).

Closer international cooperation in the field of border management with neighboring and other relevant countries is an effective tool to facilitate trade and address cross-border crime and irregular migration. This can be achieved, for example, by establishing appropriate working mechanisms and communication channels, local contact points, joint emergency plans or exercises and handling of incidents in a factual manner to avoid political disputes. While the central level will focus on coordination of strategic aspects such as the joint organization of the protection of the most endangered border sections, cooperation at border crossings focused on operational issues should be carried out on a continuous day-to-day basis.

Figure 3. International cooperation

Source: European Commission, *Guidelines for and Integrated Border Management in the Western Balkans*, updated version (CARDS) 2007

International cooperation thus means cooperation: at the local level between officials on both sides of the border; Between neighboring states (covering various issues, e.g. from border limitation and border management to the organization of patrols and the organization of common contact offices); At the multinational level to better approach common fields of work such as transborder crime, irregular migration, trafficking in human beings, terrorism and smuggling of goods.

MIGRATION MANAGEMENT IN SOUTH EASTERN EUROPE

Migration issues and demographic issues are two of the key elements of modern society, bringing benefits and conflicts both to the receiving places and to the place of origin and raising issues of security, social measurements and multiculturalism in our globalized world. One of the great challenges of contemporary Europe is related to migration and the need for European integration of minority communities, including immigrants. Evaluations conducted have shown that there is a great need for expertise and policies regarding the European integration of migrants in both their countries of origin and in the new host countries which are dealing with migration (Polgár 2016).

In recent years, the discourse on migration has become increasingly negative. It is more and more obvious that the complex, transnational migration challenge cannot be handled or managed anymore only by the state as actor. Especially because the states are no longer the most important actors in the migration process (Newland 2010). As a consequence, there is an increasing tendency to advocate for closing the borders and trying to stop migration.

If we are trying to figure out how to manage migration, or how to elaborate comprehensive and sustainable migration policies, the issue of integration of migrants it must to be considered. Usually, the question of integration, or the method of integration is a very sensitive subject. When it is already difficult to discuss whether and how the migratory trajectory should happen, it is even harder to discuss how and whether immigrants should be helped to integrate.

There is a different perception between countries with regard to the definitions of the terms: migrant, national minority and ethnic minority. In some cases, EU Member States are treating migrants and minorities like own citizens, in other cases like non-

citizens - their migration or minority background is viewed as irrelevant in statistical terms (Centre for Strategy & Evaluation Services 2011). There are also differences in the way these people are viewed as having an ethnic minority background irrespective of how long they have been in the certain country (Polgár-Popescu 2016).

There are several legal issues and obstacles which are identified especially at the Eastern and South Eastern border of the EU. These obstacles are directly related to the status and the rights of migrants in the Member States. Therefore, one of the main questions of the research is: How have the migration tendencies impacted the development of cooperation processes in actions regarding border management and migration management?

Some believe that the solutions can be fined if the political leadership, civil society and also employers from the labor market will focus on the role and importance to achieve broad representation of different ethnic groups (Jusufović 2025). This can have important implications for the stability and quality of democracy, especially for states in transition to democracy and emerging out of long periods of authoritarian rule. Withal, the way that minority groups are included in the democratic process strongly influences the inter-ethnic relations at the state level and the creation of an inclusive society is an important task for any democratic government.

The issue of migration and the so called „new minorities” are, in the process of European construction, one of the most important aspects that European countries have had to manage. Learning about and researching migration, for them to transmit knowledge and experience to young people through education, have become an essential pillar of European values on the construction of an intercultural society based on direct and indiscriminate cooperation and collaboration between ethno-religious communities. It is known that European legislation and practice promote the idea of living together in the sense of social value consisting in accepting otherness, good understanding of the various ethnic groups within the same local communities and openness to communication and cooperation (Briec, 2016:13-14).

As the economy expands to become increasingly more global, society and workplaces are more diverse than ever before. To succeed in a multi-cultural workplace, it is essential to be able to work with and adapt to the work styles and habits of people of varying ages and cultural identities. To be a successful job candidate it is a must to be able to demonstrate a sensitivity and awareness to other people and cultures.

A theme that appears frequently in public debate, in recent years, concerns the future and destiny of a united Europe, from the cultural approach of the European integration, the relationship between national and European level, the relationship between the national cultures in the European space and the possibility of the emergence of a European cultural identity with supranational character.

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If we speak about the term “migration management”, we can observe that there is a similar absence of tangible definitions or policies, even though there is extensive consensus on what types of policy measures constitute migration controls (RESPOND 2018).

Boswell defines policies of migration control as measures adopted to exclude irregular migrations or other unwanted foreign nationals through entry restrictions, border control, detention and deportation (Boswell 2011).

Vogel defines migration control policies as all governmental efforts to prevent access to seemingly legal entry, residence or work by foreign nationals who are not eligible by law especially if they try to gain access under false pretenses, identities or with fraudulent documents.

Also considers that migration management is necessary to prevent illegal entry, residence or work by ineligible foreign nationals (Vogel 2000).

As Vogel's definition suggests, migration control policies have a dual focus on entry into a territory and lawful residence/presence (Anderson 2013; Faist and Kivisto 2010) that corresponds to the classification of controls as external and internal (Frank 2014; Triandafyllidou and Ambrosini 2011; Vogel 2000).

External controls regulate the admission and entry of migrants at the border or beyond it; they also include externalized and remote-control policies and measures.

Internal controls ensure that migrants already in the territory of a state have a legal right to reside and sanction them for breaching regulations related to residence/stay rules (Boswell 2011).

Hebling et al. (2017) similarly differentiate between policies that target external populations (i.e. entry controls/visa regimes etc.) and those internally-focused, such as length of stay of residence permits or right to work.

Triandafyllidou and Ambrosini in their work introduce a further distinction between 'gatekeeping' and 'fencing' strategies, the former preventing legal access to the territory of a state or its institutions and the latter focusing on the removal or expulsion of unauthorized migrants (Triandafyllidou and Ambrosini 2011).

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Migration control policies seem to incorporate both legal frameworks as well as implementing and enforcement measures (Anderson 2013; Faist and Kivisto 2010; Castles 2004; Vogel 2000). However, Brochmann and Hammar differentiate between 'regulations', which refer to laws and 'mechanisms of control', which refer to mechanisms that monitor whether the regulations are adhered to (Helbling et al., 2017).

Castles includes regulatory systems such as Schengen and common EU migration and asylum policies in migration control. Building on the above, there might be scope for differentiating between migration control regimes or systems (Fahrmeir, Faron, and Weil 2005; Vogel 2000) which incorporates laws, regulation and policies, and measures/mechanisms which refer to specific policies and actors like security agencies, local authorities, bureaucracies which enforce laws.

One difference in conceptualizing migration management concerns which migration processes they target – all types of migration or migratory movements that are designated as 'unwanted' such as irregular migration or asylum seeking (RESPOND 2018). Some of the literature treats migration controls as concerning the admission and residence of all migrants (Bloch, Sigona, Zetter 2013; Bosworth and Guild 2008; Castles 2004; Faist and Kivisto 2010; Messina 2007) even though control policies can discursively and practically target mainly unwanted migration. This approach could suggest that all

contemporary migration policies could be considered control policies, or at least could have a control orientation (RESPOND 2018).

The emphasis on preventing unwanted migration is consistent with the paradigm of migration management. Migration management is a key policy term adopted by international organizations (Kalm 2010), the European Union (Squire 2009) and governments (Castles 2004; Geddes 2005).

Broadly speaking, liberal democratic states allow migration that is seen as economically beneficial while they curtail migration that is seen as undesirable – irregular migration and refugee movements (Hampshire, 2013; Kalm 2010; Squire 2009). This approach underpins EU policy as well (Favell and Hansen 2002).

In this context migration control policies have a ‘filtering’ function, differentiating between ‘wanted’ and ‘unwanted’ migrants, facilitating the movement of the former and restricting the movement of the latter (RESPOND 2018).

This region can be characterized also through its specific features, context and trends in the fields of economy, demography, socio-politic environment and migration. Although there are several differences between the countries of the region, the so-called sub regional migration dynamics connect these countries and create similar challenges and opportunities. The majority of the common issues and challenges are identified as a side effect of migration. These issues are concerning demographic shifts, skills and labor gaps, human trafficking and stranded migrants, inadequate access to health care, environmental and climate change impacts, irregular migration, and return and reintegration, as well as unaccompanied and separated children (International Organization for Migration 2020).

The history of South Eastern Europe, with a population consisting of different ethnic groups that overlap national borders makes it challenging to define and measure migration. Nowadays the region is experiencing an unprecedented influx of migrants, making the so-called Western Balkan route the most frequented migratory track.

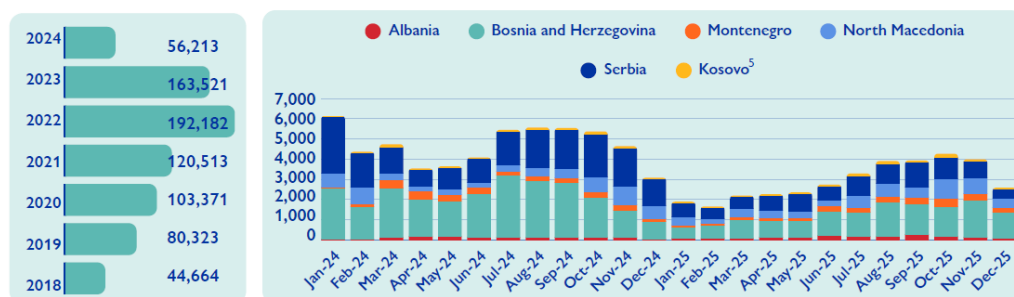
Figure 4. Main migration travel routes in South Eastern Europe



Source: *Global Data Institute (2025): IOM Displacement Tracking Matrix (DTM): Migration Trends in The Western Balkans*

As it is presented in figure 1, as migrants reach the Western Balkan countries, the most active routes are through North Macedonia, Serbia and then directly attempting to cross into the European Union through the Hungarian border (Tanasijevidi, Popovski, Skoric 2025). Alternatively, once in Serbia, many others cross the border into eastern Bosnia and Herzegovina and then attempt the crossing into Croatia from the north and north-western part of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Figure 5. Number of arrivals in South Eastern Europe (Western Balkan countries)



Source: IOM UN MIGRATION (2025): Mixed Migratory Flows in The Western Balkans

According to the official statistical data, since 2018, authorities in the Western Balkans have consistently been registering more migrant arrivals until the year of 2022. As it is presented above in figure 2, in 2022, authorities registered 192,182 migrants in the Western Balkan countries. This is a 59.5 per cent increase in arrivals compared to 2021 and a 348 per cent increase when compared to 2018.

Nevertheless, data show that in 2023 and 2024 there is a decreasing tendency of the migratory flow through the Western Balkans. These numbers refer to any registration of a migrant in one of the six countries or territories of the Western Balkans (IOM UN MIGRATION 2025). We can state that this tendency it can be a result of the increasing cooperation between state entities from neighboring countries which deal with migration.

Figure 6. Yearly arrival figures broken down per country or territory

	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
Albania	3,339	3,067	3,628	18,496	12,216	4,802	1,394
Bosnia and Herzegovina	24,067	29,196	16,150	15,740	27,429	34,409	25,147
Montenegro	4,645	8,695	3,007	3,336	8,318	4,987	2,970
North Macedonia	3,132	19,716	37,937	17,919	22,379	11,795	6,107
Serbia³	22,817	30,162	58,103	60,075	124,127	108,828	19,483
Kosovo¹	594	2,038	3,001	1,487	957	642	992
TOTAL	58,594	92,874	121,826	117,053	195,426	165,463	56,093

Source: Global Data Institute (2025): IOM Displacement Tracking Matrix (DTM), Annual report for 2024

Based on the data from figure 3, an increase is visible in the number of migrants registered in all countries or territories in the Western Balkans in 2022 compared to 2021, except for Albania and Kosovo. This reduction is possible because in the past years fewer

migrants choose the Albania-Kosovo-Serbia route. Instead of this route, nowadays the Albania-Montenegro track is preferred. Serbia remains the main transit hub in the region, accounting for almost two-thirds of all registrations (Global Data Institute 2025).

Also, data show that in 2023 and 2024 there is a decreasing tendency of the migratory flow through the Western Balkans. These numbers refer to any registration of a migrant in one of the six countries or territories of the Western Balkans. We can state that this tendency it can be a result of the increasing cooperation between state entities from neighboring countries which deal with migration.

The increasing number of arrivals and high turnover rate are representing a significantly bigger challenge to the entities involved in humanitarian actions. Authorities from the region face the same issue, their institutions are overwhelmed by the scale of the problem. In this case, neither the legal framework which stipulates the process of handling migrants and asylum seekers is enough. Over the logistic problems, there are missing mechanisms which should ensure the implementations of the laws and procedures (Malkki 1995). Even if these mechanisms or methodologies would exist, several times these are inadequate.

All these remarks are underlining the need of cooperation and common work between neighboring states.

But, over the high number of migrants, logistic and social issues, the importance of transnational partnerships and institution building in migration management also represents a sensitive policy concern to (Boit 2025). Most of the actions delivered by state entities are taking place in border areas. These borderlands, or border areas represent key sovereign objectives over which states claim full control (Fauser-Di Stefano-Fattorelli 2023). Because of the specific reasons mentioned above, actions delivered by these entities face specific challenges. These specific challenges can represent a serious obstacle especially if the beneficiaries (migrants) have needs that are unrecognized or even forbidden by the state law.

In order to present some specific examples, first we choose the case of undocumented migrants. For these the most important thing is to stay and not to be deported. Another example is the case of migrants in transit, specific to the South East European territories. For them the most important is to continue their journey towards the destination country. All these situations are difficult to be handled and solved by mono statal entities, since most of the carried out activities can be considered illegal by neighboring state public authorities. Interfering and delivering actions to solve these issues can generate legal problems, both for the migrants and organization from the neighboring states (Cuttitta-Pécoud-Phillips 2023). Since, the given context and status quo is at least awkward, but the need for support in migration management is high, compromises are necessary. This compromise means that several state entities are limiting their actions to humanitarian support for migrants, covering their basic needs. This way legal and political issues are avoided. On the other hand, we must emphasize that through these humanitarian actions, state entities directly contribute to the fulfilment of governments agenda (Cuttitta 2018).

All the data and information presented above underlines the complex and multifaceted roles of the partnerships between state entities in neighboring countries as a distinct category of actors working in contemporary migration and border regimes. It is also visible that there still are unclear situations, lack of unity and motivation in the actions of these state entities. Also, there is no clear antagonism between public authorities from the different side of the borders as both can perform the same tasks. But

it is more than obvious that public authorities need to focus and consider the role of transnational partnership and cooperation in migration management.

CONCLUSIONS

A variety of actors are involved in tasks related to the management of state borders in every country. While they clearly have a different focus and thus different objectives depending on their responsibilities and powers, they all work towards a common strategic goal.

Traditionally, the strategic goals at the state level in relation to border management lie in the protection of the borders against threats to national security, the national economy and public health, but also in the prevention of cross-border criminal activities and unlawful entry into or exit from the state. Border services, including border guards as well as customs, veterinary and phytosanitary inspection services, all play an important role in this regard.

In order to balance these twin goals of modern border management that is, border security and facilitated movement of persons and goods in an efficient and effective manner, appropriate equipment and well-trained and motivated staff are as important as a strong legal basis, a clear division of tasks and responsibilities, streamlined processes and an efficient exchange of information.

Taking into account the complexity of the task, this cooperation and coordination should not only be limited to the units within one ministry or agency, but should also occur both between all actors involved in border management within a certain country and at the international level. Most importantly, the services need to realize that they have common objectives and tasks, and that their individual objectives can only be reached by frank communication and by working together.

Managing migration in the European Union and at its South Eastern borders is a social and economic investment that enables European societies to strengthen their cohesion and resilience and become more prosperous. It can be considered also a societal process in which the responsibility does not rest with a specific group, but with several: migrants, host communities, public authorities and institutions, social and economic partners, civil society organizations, churches, religious and other philosophical communities, and the private sector (European Commission 2020).

Illiberal tendencies impacted negatively transnational cooperation processes and their actions in the process of migration. The main tool was the creation and the spread of fake ideas about the other, the neighbor, which were presented as an engine and promoter of illegal migration (Freedom House 2022). But the new frame for cooperation and the European organizational culture and dynamics made thrust in partnerships to reproduce, to answer new tendencies and to accommodate or remain receptive to new challenges and demands of the society and the environment (Brie, Goreainov 2026).

Transnational cooperation between state entities and its organizations plays an important role in migrant and refugee integration in all the target countries. The result of this type of cooperations carry out valuable work assisting or even substituting domestic governmental institutions by providing guidance and support in integration processes. However, their involvement in the design of integration policies and integration activities does not always correspond to the importance of their role. Basically, the results of this study confirm H1, which assumes that cooperation between states in the field of border management play an important role in the process of migrant management. Transnational cooperation and partnerships between institutions can carry out valuable work by

providing guidance and support in this process and can play an important role in migrant management. Therefore, South East European states should step up their efforts to achieve more structured cooperation between their governments, authorities so as to create synergies and make better use of the knowledge and resources available on both sides. Sharing the expertise and the good practice should be much more used and capitalized when designing integration strategies and measures in order to increase their efficiency.

The second hypothesis which assumes that the creation of certain transnational institutions in the field of migration management, working on the ground can play a more efficient role in monitoring the implementation and the impact of new policies and initiatives is also confirmed. State entities can be relevant and can operate at different levels. Some entities are active at EU level, others at national level, and others at regional or local level. Activities at different levels complement each other (EESC, 2020). State entities working on the ground are monitoring the implementation and impact of new policies and initiatives. However, in addition to impacting political decisions, these entities also deliver services to the people it represents.

Generally speaking, countries facing migration should apply a multi-level governance and multi-stakeholder approach involving national, local and regional authorities, employers, trade unions and civil society organizations when developing integration policies to ensure that they correspond to actual needs and circumstances and benefit migrants and refugees in an optimal way.

The overall picture that emerges from the article presents that societies from the South East European region are in fact becoming more confrontational, more political, more polarized, and less open to compromise: these characteristics apply both to the government and to civil society itself. Civil society acts as a counterbalance in this so-called social turbulence, with a special focus on the question of migration management and integration, drawing new policy recommendations (Freedom House 2022).

Thus, transnational partnerships and cooperation between neighboring states is experiencing increasing difficulty in engaging with each other because of the emerging political polarization. The cooptation of the civil society in the decision-making process can generate a higher acceptance and legitimacy for the state in implementing reforms or new policies. At the same time, the civil society sector is diversifying, with many of the newcomers themselves less open to constructive dialogue and working within the confines of the system (Gautier 2018).

The EU and the cooperation frame proposed by this remains at the forefront in the defense and promotion of values across the South East European states, but its constant and tireless endorsement of values is not without challenges in the present volatile and interdependent national, European and global contexts.

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