

SYRIAN REFUGEE CRISIS: A BALKAN PERSPECTIVE

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ABSTRACT

This article, deploying data from documentary sources, examines the issues of the Syrian Refugee Crisis in the Balkan's perspective and the main issues faced by the governments and the refugees. Both Content Analysis and In-depth Interview was done in order to understand the situation in the Balkans. Therefore, articles from various countries in the Balkan peninsular and interviews are conducted with the embassies and expatriates whom are currently in Malaysia. Drawing from the historical and economic situation of the states, it notes that the countries in the Balkan region were the less developed region of Europe. Based on the review of the Balkan's economy and history, the article argues and concludes that, despite some of the countries in the Balkan peninsular are in the European Union, there are still problems faced by these countries when it comes to the mass influx of the refugees in their own country.

Keywords: denial, xenophobia, euro crisis, Social Marketing Theory

INTRODUCTION

As we can see in the past few years, the Syrian Refugee Crisis was one of the worst crises in the last 10 years next to the Srebrenica Genocide that was committed by the Serbian forces in Bosnia, with volunteers from Greece, because of the Orthodox Brothers' concept (Karolos, 2006). As the massacre occurred, it is obvious on how does Radovan Karadžić decorated 4 Greek flags during Mladić's request in honour of the Greeks fighting for Serbia's side. During this Genocide, approximately 400 Bosnian refugees came to Malaysia and they were given Permanent Residency in the country. This genocide, which lasts 11 days which started from 11 of July to the 22 July 1995, which costs the lives of 8373 innocent people. Although this case was tragic, but we could not deny that they were many countries playing their roles during this crisis, such as the Netherlands whom were the peacekeepers in the region. Despite the Dutch presence, it was not enough to halt the massacre. Thus, other countries whom were involved in this crisis, such as Malaysia accepted the refugees into

the country. Despite the conflict ended when NATO launched a bombing campaign on Belgrade which causes Serbia to sign the Dayton Peace agreement in November 1995 which leads to the division of Bosnia and Herzegovina, which consist of Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina (Federacija Bosna i Hercegovina/ Федерација Босна и Херцеговина) (Bosniaks and Bosnian Croats) and Republika Srpska (Република Српска) (Bosnian Serbs).

However, after this conflict ended, we have one of the biggest conflicts, which was the Syrian Refugee Crisis which started in 2011 due to the Syrian Civil War. Due to this, we can see that many Syrians are trying to leave the homes because they feared being a casualty between The Assad Regime and the Free Syria Army, which leads to 5 million refugees fleeing the country (UNHCR, 2017). As a result, it causes many people to believe that the war between the rebels and the government does not bring any benefit towards the civilians as they were the victims of the war. However, to understand this crisis better, we should see on how this crisis arises.

OBJECTIVES

- i. To examine how the crisis elevates
- ii. To investigate on how the European countries, feel about the refugees.
- iii. To make suggestions/recommendations and investigate on how does European Union deals with the crisis

WHAT HAPPENED IN THE BALKANS?

Firstly, it is important to know where is the Balkans, and which countries are part of it. The Balkans is a region in South Eastern Europe (Hajdú, 2017), which consists of six countries which are in the Balkan region. These countries are Albania (Republika e Shqipërisë), Bulgaria (България), Bosnia and Herzegovina (Bosna i Hercegovina/Босна и Херцеговина), Kosovo (Република Косово/Republika Kosovo/ Republika e Kosovës), Macedonia (Македонија/Makedonija), and Montenegro (Црна Гора/Cрна Gora). This also includes certain countries which has certain parts of their lands in the region Such countries are Republic of Turkey (Türkiye Cumhuriyeti), Croatia (Hrvatska), Hellenic Republic/Greece (Ελληνική/Ellinikí) and Italy (Italia).

Cold War impact

As we can see from the region, we can see that they are still recovering from the past. As it could be observed, most of the Balkans were under the influence of the Eastern Bloc. The Eastern Bloc is defined as a group of communist states which are in both Central and Eastern Europe who signed the Warsaw Pact (United Nations, 1955). Since the Warsaw Pact was signed as a collective defence during the Cold War, especially when other countries signed for NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organization). The Eastern European countries (except Greece) decided to join the Eastern Bloc (Yost, 1998), whilst signing the Warsaw Pact in order to give support towards the Soviet Union during the Cold War. It could be seen that the economy of the Eastern Bloc countries were slightly different compared to their Western counterparts because of the economic

structure. The Eastern Bloc was highly influenced by the Social Market instead of the Free Market, which was practiced by Western Europe.

As for the Social Marketing Theory, it is a combination of a Free Market capitalism and the social policies of the countries. Thus, this leads to a fair competition within the market, as well as the welfare system itself. (Economist, 2017), which was an offspring of the Freiburg's school of economics (Mau, 2004). Besides that, since the signing of this pact, they are not well accustomed with the Free Market which was practiced by the other Western European countries after the fall of Communism.

Since the new system were adapted into these countries, we can see that Central Europe (Poland, Czech Republic, Slovakia, Slovenia and Hungary) with the Baltic states (Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania) managed to adapt quickly with the transition. However, the others were struggling in reviving their economy as they either joined a war in the past or struggling with their own systems. Due to this, many Eastern European countries were facing a 'Shock Therapy' in this transition. Although this managed to develop country in terms of progress, but it leaves a huge scar as they were about to suffer from a massive unemployment since most of the state owned industries were forced to shut down. (Wood, 2014).

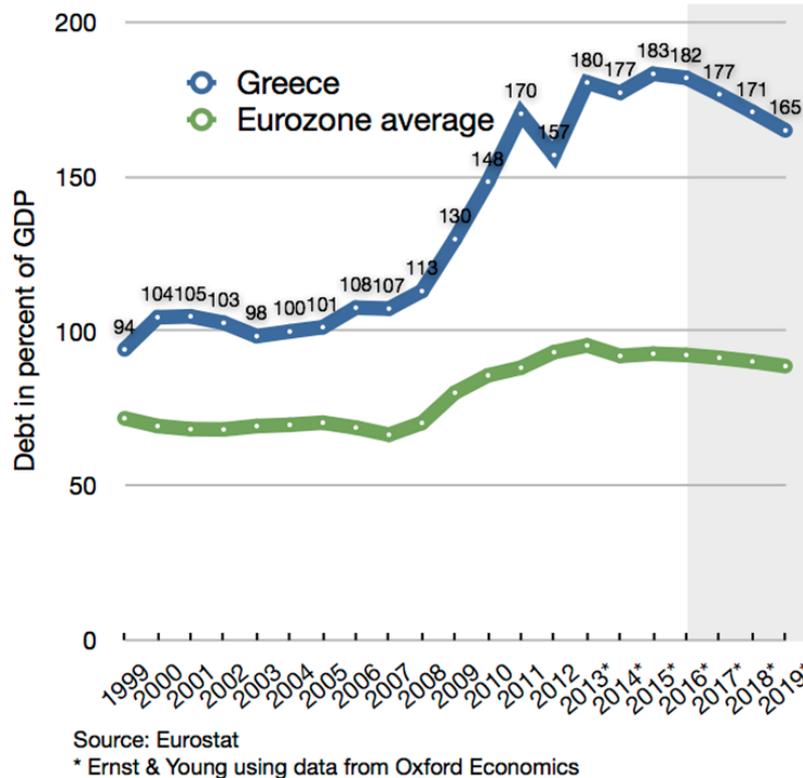
Euro Crisis impact

After 10 years of the transition, these Eastern European countries were able to finally adapt with the new system. However, as the European Crisis hits Europe in 2008, the economy of European countries hits rock bottom. This can be seen when certain Eurozone members (Spain, Greece, Portugal, Ireland and Cyprus) were unable to pay or refinance their economy.

As for Greece, it can be said that Greece had suffered the worst compared to others because its economy depends highly on tourism and shipping compared to others. Now that its economy is highly sensitive towards the changes in the business cycle, the fall of the economy caused the Greek government to

attempt really hard to revive its economy at the cost of its debt. This leads to the rapid increase of debt but a poor level of economic growth. For more information, see Graph 1.

2011. (European Commission, 2012). This causes the seasonal adjusted industrial output becoming 28.4% lower than it was in 2005. (Guardian, 2016) As an effect of this, 110,000 Greek companies went bankrupt



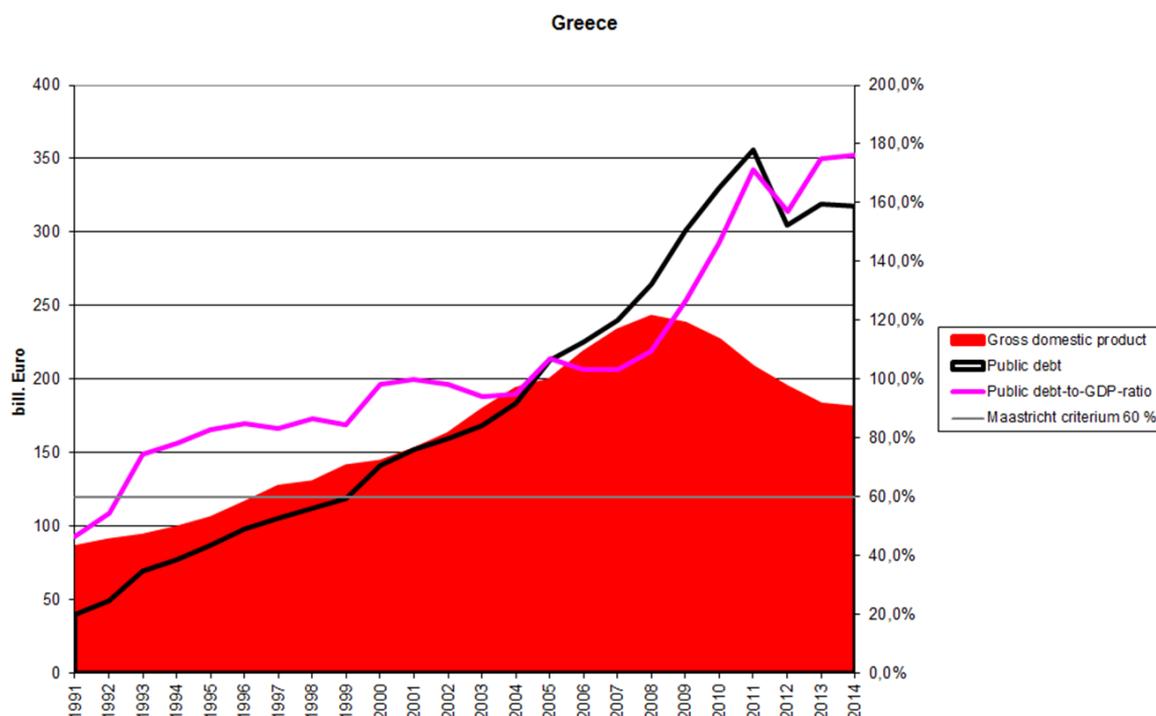
Graph 1 Debts of Greece compared to the other Eurozone countries

As shown in the Graph above, this leads to Greece being unable to borrow money from other banks in order to restore their economy. Greece decided to borrow an initial loan of €45 billion from the EU and International Monetary Fund (IMF) in order to cover its debt but the result was immediately rejected. This is because according to Standard and Poor's, an American financial services company has marked Greece's sovereign debt as BB+, or 'junk' and even has entered a 'Default' situation in which it was unable to pay their loans after the 'deadline' (Ewing & Healy, 2010).

Despite Greece's austerity measures to lower Greece's primary deficit, but it leads to a bigger problem as it has a huge repercussion towards the Greek's recession when it has reached its lowest point at -6.9% in

(Süddeutsche Zeitung, 2012). For more information, see Graph 2.

Based on Graph 2, it is obvious that the Eastern European's economy is not doing well, especially during the Euro Crisis as it has a huge impact towards the region. Therefore, these countries have a lot to worry, especially when it comes to the financial crisis. Not to mention those countries which were under the influences of the Eastern Bloc or Socialism in the past. The International Monetary Fund (IMF) has listed these Sovereign states based on their Gross Domestic Product per capita based on year 2016 (IMF, 2017), World Bank (World Bank, 2017) and according to the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA, 2017). Refer to Table 1 for more information.



Graph 2 Greece’s Gross domestic product, public dept, Public debt-to-GDP ratios and the Massthicht Conferium comparison.

Table 1 Comparison of countries of the Balkans and Ex-eastern bloc according to IMF, World Bank and CIA

Country	Rank	IMF 2016	Rank	WB 2016	Rank	CIA2010 Estimation
Albania	102	4,203	95	4,147	102	4,000
Bulgaria	75	7,368	71	7,351	79	6,300
Bosnia and Herzegovina	101	4,308	91	4,709	107	3,500
Croatia	44	12,095	54	12,091	48	13,400
Greece	38	17,900	36	18,104	27	34,832
Kosovo	-	n/a	-	3,661	129	1,813
Montenegro	80	6,628	77	6,701	78	6,658
Macedonia	89	5,262	86	5,237	94	4,669
Serbia	88	5,376	84	5,348	76	7,038
Slovenia	34	21,320	32	21,305	32	28,396
Romania	63	9,465	59	9,474	62	9,615
Turkey	60	10,742	56	10,788	66	17,700
Italy	25	30,507	24	30,527	24	41,259
Poland	56	12,315	53	12,372	48	12,271
Czech Republic	37	18,286	35	18,267	38	19,100
Slovakia	40	16,498	39	16,496	40	18,440
Hungary	54	12,778	51	12,665	55	13,231

Islamophobia in Europe

Besides that, there is a serious issue of Islamophobia in the Balkans, especially those which does not have huge a Muslim community. This is probably because when the Ottomans managed to conquer Constantinople, they convert it to the Ottoman's new capital (Istanbul). Since the Fall of Constantinople, the Orthodox Church was forced to moved Europe (e.g. Russia) instead of staying in the Eurasian areas. This causes a hostile environment between those regions whom practiced Orthodox Christianity. Although it has been nearly 600 years ago, but the effects are deep, especially in the Balkans.

According to Hafez (2017), he states that when the leader of the Hungarian Conservative Party-Fidesz (Fidesz – Magyar Polgári Szövetség) accuses George Soros and the European Union on trying to 'Islamize Europe'. He claimed that the European Union is posing a huge threat to the Christian identity of Europe as Europe is surrendering its sovereignty to become an Islamized Europe.

As for Croatia, according to Toe (2016) he stated that Dino Mujadžević saw a paradigmatic shift in the right wing political direction of Croatia. It was stated that since the new wave of refugees started entering Croatia, the right wing parties are trying to exploit their beliefs on the 'Muslim threat' that are trying to take over Croatia. Due to the Croatian media reporting extensively on the crimes made by the Non-European Muslims and the refugee seekers in other countries, these extensive reports on the Refugee crimes, the hate towards the refugees will not only carry an impact, but also create a real negative force in Croatia.

In Romania, Ghazali (2016) stated that there was some Islamophobic moments faced when it comes to building a mosque. as the then-Romanian Prime Minister, Victor Ponta decided to build a Mosque. Since Ponta believes that this move can reap their economic benefits with Turkey, their leading non-EU trading partner. However, Tudor Ionescu, the leader of Noua Dreaptă (New Right) a xenophobic party, stated that the building of mosques is a symbol of Turkey's symbolic conquest to Europe.

To make matters worse, Marian Kotleba, the leader of Kotleba-People's Party of Slovakia (Kotleba–Ľudová strana Naše Slovensko) supported the protests on Romania and was also cheered during the Bucharest protests. He gained the support of the Romanians when he claimed that 'Slovakia is the only country without a mosque'. Despite the plans to create the Mosque, the project was abandoned because it is 'prohibited by the Turkish Law'.

And finally, in Slovakia, islamophobia is obviously seen, especially during the refugee crisis. According to Česká televize (2015), there were problems when it comes for the Slovaks to receive Muslim refugees as the government decided to screen the refugees. Since the Slovak government decided only to accept 200 Syrian Christians refugee families, it caused Slovak Republic to gain a negative perception by EU.

Although Slovakia was criticized by Thorbjörn Jagland, the Secretary General of the Council of Europe, on the base of discrimination, the Slovak government stand their ground by stating that they are not being racist or discriminatory, but being honest when they have no interest in order to help the Muslim refugees. The spoke persons of the Government claimed that they would prefer to accept refugees whom were able to adapt with their lifestyle.

According to Duše a Hvězdy (2015), they claimed that they believed that it is their responsibility to help the refugees, but they refused to accept the Muslims refugees. They believed that the Christians refugees are the ones under the threat instead of the Muslims. This is proven when they claimed that it's the Muslims' fault for the murder of innocent Christians such as the incident of Boko Haram, ISIS and Islamic Terrorism. They stated that the Christian refugees are oppressed by the Muslims and they are in desperate needed help.

To be firm with their stand, they stated that every Christian country should help the Christians refugees and the other non-Muslim group (Jews, Atheists, Pagans, etc.) instead of the Muslims. They claimed that the Muslim countries should accept the Muslim

refugees instead of them. Furthermore, similar to the 'Orthodox Brothers' concept, they believed that it is their obligation to help the Christian refugees because their Christian brotherhood. As a result, it becomes obvious on how the Islamophobia within Slovakia has arisen which leads to other European countries feeling the Islamophobic wave.

RESEARCH METHODS AND DATA COLLECTION

A. Content Analysis

Content analysis is a method which is used to study certain documents and artefacts, which can be found in different types, such as texts photos, audio or video. This method is used to understand the patterns of the communication, in a replicable or methodical manner (Bryman and Bell, 2011).

For this study, we decided to read certain newspapers in order to understand the Balkan's current situation, especially on how they react towards this crisis. Therefore, we decided to choose certain newspapers, such as Η Αυγή (The Dawn) and καθημερινά (Daily), which are Greek Newspapers, 24YACA (24 hours), a Bulgarian newspaper, Actualitatea (News), a Romanian newspaper and Vecernji (Evening), a Croatian newspaper and Cumhuriyet (Republic), a Turkish newspaper.

We decided to go with these articles as these are the newspaper agencies that are depicted as reliable as they have a huge reader audience.

The articles especially on their perception of the Syrian refugees will be analysed whether the attitude are either positive or negative. After analysing, we will soon discuss with the statement which was proposed by Slavoj Žižek on the Syrian refugee crisis.

B. In-depth Interview

According to Boyce and Neale (2006), "In-depth interviewing is a qualitative research technique that involves conducting intensive individual interviews with a small number of respondents to explore their perspectives on a particular idea, program, or situation."

For this study, we decided to conduct an interview with a few respondents from different backgrounds to achieve better results. Thus, we approached Embassies, Expatriates and students to gain a more holistic opinion. Especially in terms of their perception and opinions.

FINDINGS

Based on the articles that were collected, there were numerous perspectives from each country based on their news. These are the lists of articles that were chosen from these countries in the Balkans.

Table 2 List of articles according to the countries

Countries	Number of Articles
Greece	2
Bulgaria	1
Croatia	2
Romania	7
Turkey	1
Total	13

According to the article by Η Αυγή titled 'Αλεξανδρούπολη: Προφυλακίστηκε ο 32χρονος Σύρος' or 'Alexandroupolis: The 32-year-old Syros was jailed', it shows that there was a huge conflict of misinterpretation for the Syrian refugees. According to (Η Αυγή, 2017), the conflict begins when the Greek court accused the refugee for being a terrorist from the Islamic State. Although he denied those charges, but the Greek government decided to brand him as a terrorist because of his refugee status. Although it was explained that he should not be charged as a terrorist because he is a refugee, but the court went against this motion causing him to be labelled as a terrorist.

According to Kathimerini, (2017), it can be seen that the Syrian refugees were facing hardships as they forced a hunger strike against the Greek government for not allowing them to reunite with their family. This shows that the Greek government is not interested in

helping the Syrian refugees. Since the refugees are hoping that they will be reunited with their family, the Greek government are not doing their part to ease the situation. This is self-explanatory when they claimed that many promises were made but none were executed by the government.

24časa (2017), a Bulgarian newspaper stated that a Syrian refugee in Cardiff was criticizing that he refused to leave Cardiff as he was about to be deported to Bulgaria. This is because he stated that he doesn't like the life in Bulgaria. He even made it obvious when he did not receive a good treatment by the Bulgarians during his stay. As a result, this proves on how hostile are the Bulgarians towards the Syrian refugees.

Cimponeriu (2016) claimed that the Romanians tend to have a negative perspective towards the Syrian refugees. This is shown when reports from the Bacău County in Romania where which the refugee started firing his weapon in Bacău. Subsequently, the Romanian police in Bacău are accusing him for various crimes such as failing to comply with the weapons and ammunition regime, useless weapons and smuggling. However, this seems to be bias since the Romanian countryside is famous for its high violence and crime rate compared to other cities such as Bucharest (Banciu and Balica, 2009).

Vecernji (2017) proven that the Croatian government approaches the situation better compared to Greece and Bulgaria as they accepted the resettlement of approximately 100 third-country nationals and has accepted 150 people. Although this may be a political move in order to gain the Schengen visa, there is no denying that they were open in terms of accepting the refugees as they plan to absorb them in certain industries such as Agriculture.

In accordance to Cumhuriyet (2017), it shows that the Turkish government is openly welcoming the Syrian refugees. This is when Turkey hosted approximately 3.5 million refugees in their country as the Interior Minister, Süleyman Soylu claimed that it has fulfilled its humanitarian and legal sense of it's immigration responsibilities. For this reason, Turkey hosted

approximately 3.3 times more refugees compared to the total population of the European Union countries.

Interview Results

Based on the interview sessions that was conducted, it shows that the government do not have any problems with the refugees as they were given both financial and humanitarian aid to the refugees. Noted that there was a huge influx of refugees in the area due to a huge number of approximately twenty thousand refugees coming in at one time. This causes a huge problem for European Union as they have too much to handle within a day.

Despite the European Union countries in the Balkans are trying to register them allowing them to stay in the Balkans, approximately 99% of the refugees were using this as a gateway in order to enter the Western European countries such as Germany, France and the United Kingdom instead of staying there. Nevertheless, there were instances in which some of the refugees decided to live in the Balkans. Thus, the government does its best by giving educational programs to the children to learn the language and also the Arabic teachers, Muftis to the Muslims in order to help them feel settled.

According to Glavač (2017), for certain countries, such as Croatia whom used to be refugees during the Yugoslav Wars, they understood the current situation of clearly especially as they hosted refugees during the Bosnian-Serbian war.

As for the situation in Aleppo, it is stated that the crisis reminds them of Vukovar (Bykovar), as they had face the same level of damage that was condone by the Serbian and Yugoslavian forces. As a result, the current situation in Syria does not hold them back to help the Syrian refugees. Although with the high number of refugees entering the country, they believe that they should help them in the best way possible.

As for Croatia, a European Union country, they brought up this subject as they enter the monthly European Union meeting held in Brussels. This is used to discuss the crisis itself and possible solutions. Therefore,

Croatia suggest and recommends solutions on what could be implemented.

Ibrahimović (2017) stated that the Bosnians tend to have a positive view towards the Syrians unlike the Greeks or Romanians. This was because they don't view the refugees as threats but felt the sentiment of being refugees in the past.

Although Bosnia is not quite a wealthy country compared to their Western European correspondent, they believe that it is possible to give some monetary help to the Syrian refugees. Besides that, they believe that, other International Organizations such as the Red Cross and other societies could also help by giving humanitarian aid as well.

Considering Bosnia and Herzegovina is not part of the European Union, they are trying to voice out suggestions on solving the issue. However, with the difference of culture, perception, mentality and goals. It is believed that they're trying their best in order to prevent the war from escalating. Although solving the issue is out of their hands, but they believe that the European Union are doing its best. It is believed that a flaw will cause the country to self-destruct, which is the worst case scenario.

Slavoj Žižek's perspectives

As seen from the findings, it is possible to discuss on what the Balkan representatives reacts to the crisis. Views by Slavoj Žižek will be discussed in accordance to the situation. He primarily believes that Europe are playing certain games towards the Syrian refugees. He believes that they are not committed in order to help the refugees with their current issue. He slams the current ideas that Europe are trying their best to help the refugees by stating that they're only helping those who they are interested in.

As stated by Merelli (2016), Žižek believes that the only way to help the refugees is by understanding and accepting the differences between the European culture in order to avoid the crisis from intensifying. As a result, certain right-wing political party that neglects to learn about the differences are causing

problems to their respective countries.

This is proven when Croatia and Bosnia does not have problems in dealing the refugee crisis unlike Romania and Greece. According to Cimponeriu (2016), the Romanians tend to view the Syrian refugees as a new wave of terrorism as they refused to accept the differences between the Romanian culture as well as the Syrian culture. This causes the situation in Romania to become hostile, especially for the refugees.

According to Kriss (2015), it stated that Slavoj Žižek has made a mistake especially by pointing out that Žižek is delusional with the current crisis. As it was argued that Žižek's perspective of the crisis is semi-utopian since it depends on the person to open themselves up to a culture. This can be seen when Glavač, (2017) states that despite Croatia efforts to make the refugees feel at home, the refugees decided to head to Western Europe for their own personal agendas.

Another point stated by Slavoj Žižek is when he claimed that most people do not understand the crisis very well. According to Southbank Centre (2015), this is stated as Žižek claimed that the understanding of 'terror' between Western Europe and the Refugees are different. He claimed that how the European countries felt for a single bombing of terrorism was nothing compared to what the refugees felt. According to Kathimerini (2017), the Greek government is not doing anything to help the Syrians to reunite with their family as they do not comprehend the current situation of Greece and the Syrian refugees.

Conforming to Aljazeera (2016), Žižek claimed that the analysis of the refugees is a part of the 'European geopolitical games'. This causes the refugee crisis to be confusing. Thus, leading him to ask for a clearer explanation of the crisis and on how the European Union will handle the crisis. This was also supported by Ibrahimović (2017) as he believed that the European Union should be careful with their upcoming actions. It is believed that a wrong decision could cause the whole country to collapse.

RECOMMENDATIONS

This paper should not focus solely on the Balkan which are facing the crisis directly such as Greece and Romania, I believed that a different setting such as Central Europe could make it interesting as well. Due to the refugees are trying to enter Central Europe as well as Western Europe, a study of the crisis on a Central European perspective would be interesting.

LIMITATIONS

One of the limitations of this paper is the lack of respondents and the language barrier faced in order to gain the information. Since the research was carried out in Malaysia, there is a lack of respondents from the Balkans. Those who we were able for the interview were from both Croatia and Bosnia. Due to the lack of expatriates in Malaysia and embassies that were available in Malaysia that were active was Bosnia and Croatia.

Besides that, there was language barrier. Since it is best for a person to understand the situation or the point of view of a country is by reading their articles in their native language, we are expected to get a better viewpoint of how they view the situation itself. This leads to a better understanding rather than being biased.

However, with the lack of knowledge on certain languages, there may be an obstacle of gaining the real interpretation of the article which leads to a misunderstanding of the statement itself. Thus, it is best to have a grasp of the language itself before reading the article in order to avoid further confusion or complications.

CONCLUSION

The motive of this paper was to have a clear understanding on how the Balkans react to this crisis. What is shown here is that there was a mix reaction between the states. This could be possible due to

the economic situation of the country itself. It can be seen when certain countries such as Greece, Romania and Bulgaria were not very welcoming towards the refugees considering their poor economic situation. Unlike Croatia, that has a better economy was much accepting towards the refugees, even for a price to enter the Schengen region.

Thus, this study concluded that in order to ease the crisis itself, one should have an understanding about the conflict. Moreover, it can be seen that these countries are actually trying ease the crisis, but with a high influx of refugees entering the country, it seems nearly impossible for anyone to carry out any necessary steps.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank Veleposlaništvo Republike Hrvatske (Embassy of the Republic of Croatia), Njegova Izvršnost, Veleposlanik Republike Hrvatske, Gospodin Krešo Glavač (His Excellency, Ambassador of the Republic of Croatia, Krešo Glavač and Treći Tajnik Republike Hrvatske, Gospođica Tamara Crnjac (Third Secretary, Miss Tamara Crnjac) for their time and insights to address this topic. Besides that, I would also like to thank Mr. Damir Deliđ, Haris Ibrahimović, Fatmir Shehu and Jetmir Zendeli for spending their time during the interview sessions. Finally, I would like to thank those who helped me either directly or indirectly to contribute to this article.

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