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## **The Albanian Migration to Greece and the Refugee Crisis of 2015 from the Greek Perspective**

### **Abstract**

Although migration has always been a timeless and volatile phenomenon, modern transnational movements of people have become a dominant topic of interest by constantly acquiring new characteristics that modify their evolutionary process. Europe is a geographical area that has been significantly affected by recent changes as a result of the evolution of migration flows of the last 30 years. The urgent need to initially understand and later implement evidence-based policies in order to sufficiently manage the migration phenomenon can be considered as the basic spark that led to the scientific blast of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, focusing on the gradual development of migration studies. One of the most notable efforts of the scientific community was the use of the comparison method to examine, understand, and in some cases even forecast the characteristics of specific migration case studies, thereby forming the backbone of comparative migration research in general. Greece, due to its geographical position, has been unintentionally positioned, many times, inside the so called “ring of fire”, as result of multiple factors and disastrous events that evolved mainly in its neighbouring countries, forcing massive, irregular migration flows to its external borders. The outbreak of the Albanian exodus in the early 1990s and the recent refugee flows of 2015 can be described as two major migration crises that have occurred in Greek’s contemporary history, making their comparison a fruitful example of the potential capabilities of the above-mentioned method, contributing to a holistic study of the migration phenomenon in Greece.

**Keywords:** Comparative Study, Albania, Migration, Refugees, Refugee Crisis, Greece

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## **Introduction**

During the 21<sup>st</sup> century, migration has rapidly evolved in a dominant topic of interest and, at the same time, of concern in the political agenda of nearly all western democratic countries, including the European Union's (EU's) Member States. Although migration is not a newly-emerged phenomenon with its roots dating back to the first-known primitive tribes of human race when small-numbered groups of people had to travel from place to place in search of food and better living conditions overcoming any kind of natural or technical barriers, our globalised world has gradually affected the evolution of the phenomenon, changing its substantial characteristics at the same time. Diachronically, the migration phenomenon became the subject of many changes mainly concerning the number of migrants, the push and pull factors that determined their transnational movements, and the specific characteristics of each migration group. In every migration period, a complex mosaic of factors have shaped the aforementioned multidimensional phenomenon, affecting both directly and indirectly the life of the people that finally took the decision to migrate abroad.<sup>1</sup>

Although the gradual evolution of mankind, at least in its early stages, seemed to adopt the concept of permanently settling in a specific geographical area, the recent geopolitical, economic, social, and technological developments have redefined the existing status quo, altering the physical movement of people from one place to another. The complex societies that were gradually developed – because of migration flows – were mainly determined by diverse characteristics leading to the inevitable reshaping of all modern countries that became the destinations for large numbers of migrants. The unfolding of these multinational societies did not occur without the appearance of unwanted clashes and conflicts between the different cultural, political, ethnic or religious groups that transformed them, highlighting the challenges imposed as a result of the heterogenicity and stereotypes that were inevitably raised mainly in recent centuries.

Europe was not excluded from the rapid pace of the global, timeless, and volatile migration process, experiencing massive population movements to and from its geographical borders and playing a determining role in the evolution of the migration phenomenon worldwide. Starting from the aftermath of World War II and continuing with the fall of the Berlin Wall along with the conflict in the Western Balkans and more recently

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<sup>1</sup> M. Klemencic, *Migrations in History*, in: *Immigration and Emigration in Historical Perspective*, ed. A.K. Isaacs, Pisa 2007, pp. 29–30.

to the refugee crisis, Europe has repeatedly absorbed multiple types of migration flows, each of them with different and unique patterns and characteristics. As a result of the most recent migration flows over the past decade, Europe, and more specifically the EU Member States, were forced to confront and overcome the consequences of mostly irregular migration from nearly all its neighbouring countries as a result of disastrous events that occurred outside the EU's external borders such as acts of war, violent political or social revolutions, terrorist attacks, and other types of armed conflict. Although both regular and irregular migration flows have been a harsh polymorphic reality for a small number of European states in the southern part of the continent such as Greece since the 1990s, they have never been formulated in a pan-European problem requiring a common act to confront it in a supranational level with the multidimensional cooperation and solidarity of all Member States. The yearlong effort to fully adjust the contemporary migration flows require the utilisation of every available scientific alternative, including the understanding and use of comparative methodology.

### **The Use of Comparative Migration Research**

The complexity of the international migration phenomenon, apart from its importance for both origin and destination countries and their societies, has always been a priority for the scientific community seeking to disintegrate the multiple variables that constitute the specific phenomenon and its multilevel effects. This effort has motivated a vast number of scientists to try to illuminate the dark sides of migration from all possible perspectives, trying to eventually find Ariadne's thread and solve all existing migration problems. One of the most promising and long-term recognised scientific methods focuses on the comparison of different migration flows, aiming to acknowledge the differences and similarities between unique historical events and understand the causes and the results of their existence. The comparative method is one of the main empirical methods seeking to identify certain common characteristics and differences between selected case studies by using scientific observations, thereby broadening the scope in the holistic understanding of this specific social phenomena. The word empirical is derived from the Greek «εμπειρία», composed of «εν» (in-inside) and «πείρα» (test), which suggests that knowledge is mainly based on observation and gained experience during the research procedure of a specific phenomenon or case study. Social studies generally rely on the logic and methods of empirical methodology to understand the multidimensional factors that

are responsible for shaping a specific phenomenon as well as for testing any hypothesis or theory based on them and the results of those studies are based on sensory facts and observations.<sup>2</sup>

Comparison can be described as a milestone analytical tool because it sharpens the power of description and plays a central role in concept formation by highlighting similarities or contrasts among cases. Apart from comparing and contrasting, the comparative method can contribute to theory building by categorising common characteristics that are found in different case studies and in particular circumstances, it can be used to generalise its final conclusions.<sup>3</sup> In social life, comparison as a simple act is one of the activities that have shaped human overall experience. From a more scientific point of view, the comparative approach is defined by its two basic substances. The theory – that which is used to understand or explain social phenomena – and the method that is used to reach a final goal. The link between theory and method is essential for the conduction of proper social investigations, targeting the use of logic for systematically finding answers to questions concerning the complexities of any social phenomena.<sup>4</sup> As described by J. S. Mill in his so-called *Method of Agreement and Difference*, the abovementioned link is the backbone of the comparison method, aiming to verify or, alternatively, refute the relationship between two phenomena.<sup>5</sup>

The comparative approach can be seen as the fundamental point of origin for most political and social sciences and a one-way decision in cases where there is an undeniable lack of resources or techniques that are based on sampling. The use of the comparative method focuses on highlighting broader patterns of similarities or differences which may determine the crucial influences of specific variables. Taking in account and recognising *a priori* the limitations, weaknesses but also the possibilities and opportunities of the comparison method, it can be equally applied among certain number of cases as well as within a single case study, by comparing it in its diachronic evolution. The comparative

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<sup>2</sup> F. De Nardis, *The Logical Structures of Comparison. Its Forms, Styles, Problems, and the Role of History in Social and Political Research*, “The Open Journal of Socio-political Studies”, no. 7(3)/2014, pp. 578–579.

<sup>3</sup> D. Collier, *The Comparative Method*, in: *Political Science: The State of the Discipline II*, ed. A.W. Finifter, Washington, D.C. 1993, pp. 105–113.

<sup>4</sup> N. J. Smelser, *Comparative Methods in the Social Sciences*, Englewood Cliffs 1976, pp. 2–4; C.C. Ragin, *Comparative Sociology and the Comparative Method*, in: *Comparative Sociological Research in the 1960s and 1970s*, eds. M.J. Armer, R.M. Marsh, Leiden 1982, pp. 102–107.

<sup>5</sup> B. Van Heuveln, *A Preferred Treatment of Mill’s Method. Some Misinterpretations by Modern Textbooks*, “Informal Logic”, no. 20(1)/2000, pp. 19–42.

approach is one of the basic scientific methods for establishing general empirical propositions and for discovering empirical relations among variables.<sup>6</sup> According to J.H. Stanfield II "...the best social scientific work is comparative. This is because, whether we are trying to explain something about the world or to predict future trends and tendencies, our arguments are stronger when we are able to bring to the table evidence drawn from more than one case".<sup>7</sup>

Conducting scientific research and comparing different time periods by regularly moving back and forth between past and present can be highly stimulating and helpful when evaluating the specific characteristics of a selected migration phenomenon in each period and to point out any new patterns between compared case studies. Although we may think that all modern migration flows are entirely new, and lacking common characteristics with previous ones, they are often linked to chronologically earlier flows via many similarities. Another valuable feature of the comparative migration research is the fact that there are not any particular type of data or restricted methods in the whole process, therefore making possible the use of the full breadth of evidence commonly used in academic research, from face to face interviews, survey responses, field observations or statistical data analysis. Comparative migration studies can challenge already-accepted, conventional wisdom and can lead to innovative new thinking by contributing directly to theory development or to the evaluation and the testing of the limits of a theory. It can also lead to the conceptualisation of the migration phenomenon and provide assistance in elaborating an evolving argument by considering other logical implications or undermine any other alternative explanations.

Additionally, the comparative method, along with the use of the statistical and the experimental methods, can be really promising and even lead to the formulation of probabilistic generalisations especially if implemented in a small number of comparable case studies and variables. In this context of comparison, specific variables can be sufficiently tested, while all others are treated as constants (*ceteris paribus*). One of the best ways to maximise comparability is to focus on the analysis of a single

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<sup>6</sup> H. Eckstein, *Division and Cohesion in Democracy. A Study of Norway*, Princeton N.J. 1966, pp. 60–77; P.C. Schmitter, *Comparative Politics. in The Oxford Companion to Politics of the World*, New York 1993, p. 171; J. Mahoney, D. Rueschemeyer, *Comparative Historical Analysis: Achievements and Agendas*, in: *Comparative Historical Analysis in the Social Sciences*, eds. J. Mahoney, D. Rueschemeyer, Cambridge, U.K. 2003, pp. 3–15.

<sup>7</sup> J.H. Stanfield II, *Epistemological Considerations*, in *Race and Ethnicity*, in: *Research Methods*, eds. J.H. Stanfield II, R.M. Dennis, London and New Delhi 1993, p. 25.

country diachronically. Such a comparison of the same unit, at a country level and at different time periods, can generally offer a better solution to the existing control problems of two or more different but similar units.<sup>8</sup> The selection of diachronic intra-country comparisons can take advantage of all similar national characteristics and focus only on variables that can be separated due to their differences.

Comparative migration research has developed considerably not least during the past 30 years. The focus of the comparison analysis in migration studies can be used in order to answer questions including: why do people or groups of people migrate? how do they travel? where do they go? how many are there? what are the push and pull factors that determine their decision to move from their origin to a destination country? as well as questions that highlight the procedure of their settlement in a new country and, more specifically, the level of their integration, the social, economic and cultural situation they encounter and the way they respond to it, the possible discrimination or racist reactions they face after their arrival and during their stay and the representation of immigrants in the criminal rates and trends in their new society. Apart from the abovementioned migration aspects, the possible implementation of a comparative analysis to the migration phenomenon could also contribute to the promotion of migration studies, due to the vast variety of options in the selection of the most appropriate case studies from a national, transnational or even diachronic point of view.<sup>9</sup>

### **Greece's Albanian Migration Crisis in the Early 1990s**

Since the early 1990s, Greece has evolved into a destination country for migrants mainly from the neighbouring Balkan countries, influencing the Greek social, economic, political, ethnic, and cultural status quo. The rapid transformation was mainly attributed to a combination of economic pull factors from the Greek point of view and push factors from the Albanian perspective, immediately after the collapse of the E. Hoxha's isolated communist regime. Over a period of a few months, Albania moved from a policy restricting travel abroad to a large scale emigration,

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<sup>8</sup> C. Ragin, D. Zaret, *Theory and Method in Comparative Research: Two Strategies*, "Social Forces", no. 61(3)/1983, pp. 731–733.

<sup>9</sup> D. Fitzgerald, *A Comparativist Manifesto for International Migration Studies*, "Ethnic and Racial Studies", no. 35(10)/2012, pp. 1725–1737; I. Bloemraad, *The Promise and Pitfalls of Comparative Research Design in the Study of Migration*, "Migration Studies", no. 1(1)/2013, pp. 28–39.

which resulted in the loss of at least a quarter of its total population during a period of 20 years from the initial outflow.<sup>10</sup> Before the outbreak of the 2015 refugee crisis, Albania's share of immigrants in Greece stood at nearly 60% and even today they represent the largest in size and importance as an ethnic group and for that reason nearly all existing migration studies have focused their interest on that specific group of people.<sup>11</sup> Additionally, the Albanian migration can be described as the first contemporary migration crisis of Greece, largely monopolising the interest of researchers from all scientific disciplines due to its specific characteristics, such as the sudden, unexpected, and uncontrolled arrival of thousands of immigrants, the duration of the phenomenon, the geographical distribution and, last but not least, the consequences to the pre-existing native economic and social situation.

To confront the problems of the Albanian migration crisis, Greece applied many times the tactic of mass deportations and the deployment of border guards in the Greek-Albanian land borders – efforts aimed at the reduction of the irregular migration flows. It is estimated that during the period between 1990–2003, the Greek State oversaw the expulsion of more than 2.3 million Albanian immigrants. The inflow of Albanian immigrants into Greece can be assessed as a continuous process from the early 1990s when it started, with many major transition points such as the collapse of the pyramid-saving scheme in 1996–1997 and the spillover effect of the Kosovo crisis after 1998 that led to a further influx of immigrants. The increasing presence of regular but mainly irregular immigrants from Albania and the accumulated problems that started to emerge especially during the economic crisis of 2008, deteriorate the existing problems of Albanian migration to Greece. During the first six years of the economic crisis (2008–2013), Greece experienced negative Gross Domestic Product (GDP) growth rates with a cumulative percentage loss exceeding 20%, cancelling out the growth rates that had taken place during the 1995–2007 period. Apart from the GDP growth rates, the Albanian migration crisis affected wages in both the public and private sectors of the economy. The levels of disposable income were drastically reduced because of the wages/

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<sup>10</sup> C. Nikas, D. Aspasio, *The Changing Characteristics and the Maturity of Albanian Emigration to Greece*, "Journal of Balkan and Near Eastern Studies", no. 13(3)/2011, pp. 287–288.

<sup>11</sup> R. Fakiolas, *Migration and Unregistered Labour in the Greek Economy*, in: *Eldorado or Fortress? Migration in Southern Europe*, eds. K. Russell, G. Lazaridis, C. Tsardanidis, New York 2000; M. Baldwin-Edwards, *Statistical Data on Immigrants in Greece. An Analytic Study of Available Data and Recommendations for Conformity with European Union Standards*, Migration Policy Institute (IMEPO), Athens 2004.



pension cuts and increased taxation. The Hellenic Labour Institute estimated that during 2010–2011, the aggregate wages in the public and private sectors were reduced by €3.5 billion and €3 billion respectively. The stabilisation programs and all the austerity measures imposed led to a significant deterioration of the country's economic situation, affecting (among other indicators) the unemployment rate, which, by the end of 2013, exceeded 27%, by far the worst recorded among all other EU Member States and the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) countries. The economic crisis resulted in the unemployment of many Albanian immigrants, since a large number of them were unskilled, illegal, and informally employed in sectors of the Greek economy that were severely affected by the change in the economy, including the construction, the agriculture, and the service sectors.

Although Albanian migration was mainly understood and studied in the context of the possible economic implications of Albanian workers on the Greek economy and their influence in the national macroeconomic key indicators, there were limited scientific efforts to analyse and highlight other, thus neglected, aspects of the migration phenomenon of equal importance for both Albanian immigrants and the Greek host society. One of these grey areas of research refers to the relationship between migration and the criminality rates of foreigners in the host country. The importance of the study perspective is to test whether there is a link between migration and the changes in the criminality rates in migrants' final destination countries.<sup>12</sup> The importance of this possible link is easy to establish; take into account the findings of numerous public opinion surveys, with a characteristic example being that of the surveys at a European level which point out that native-born citizens are heavily concerned about the posed threats of an influx of foreign immigrants to their public safety and national security. In most cases, these concerns exceed those of the impact of migration on the host economy, the labour market, and working conditions.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> D. Nelken, *Globalization, Crime and Comparative Criminal Justice*, in: *A Handbook of Comparative Social Policy*, ed. P. Kennett, Cheltenham, U.K. and Northampton, U.S.A. 2013, pp. 381–391.

<sup>13</sup> H. Daskalaki et al., *Criminals and Victims in the Doorstep of 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, “National Centre for Social Research (EKKE)”, Athens 2000; European Commission, *Special Eurobarometer 371/November 2011. Internal Security, from Public Opinion*, <https://ec.europa.eu/commfrontoffice/publicopinion/index.cfm/Survey/getSurveyDetail/instruments/SPECIAL/surveyKy/998/p/3> (access 15.11.2018); European Commission, *Special Eurobarometer 432/April 2015: Europeans' Attitudes Towards Security, from Public Opinion*, <https://ec.europa.eu/commfrontoffice/publicopinion/index.cfm/Survey/getSurveyDetail/instruments/SPECIAL/surveyKy/2085> (access 15.11.2018); Euro-

The 21<sup>st</sup> century was stigmatised by the 9/11 Al-Qaeda terrorist attack on the World Trade Centre and the Pentagon in the United States of America in 2001 which caused the death of approximately 3,000 people and was the triggering event for reshaping the way migration is linked to security issues leading to the gradual securitisation of the phenomenon. The moderate asymmetric threats of international terrorism and all forms of transnational organised crime affected European and Greek policy makers as well as all western democratic societies, leading to the implementation of harsher measures for the prevention and repression of all criminal activities attributed to foreigners.<sup>14</sup> Taking in account the annual statistics of every particular stage of the Greek judicial system starting from the arrest or the pressing of charges until the final conviction and sentencing between 2008–2012, it can be presumed that foreigners, and more specifically Albanians, are overrepresented (30–50%, although they represent approximately 10% of the population during that period) in the overall Greek annual crime statistics, committing many violent and socially unacceptable crimes including homicide, rape, sexual exploitation, armed robbery, and drug trafficking. Although the study of such multidimensional phenomena should emphasise both to the personality and psychology of the offender as well as to external sociological factors that could determine or discipline a person's attitude, criminality seems to play a major role in the shaping of the politics concerning modern migration flows and the way they are managed by the society and national authorities.<sup>15</sup>

The massive migration of Albanians evolved into a crisis affecting mainly Greece and Italy due to their proximity to Albania. The so-called “Albanian migration crisis” was not comparable to any previous outflow from eastern to western Europe and its unique characteristics

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pean Commission, *Special Eurobarometer 469/April 2018: Integration of Immigrants in the European Union, from Public Opinion*, <https://ec.europa.eu/commfrontoffice/publicopinion/index.cfm/Survey/getSurveyDetail/instruments/SPECIAL/surveyKy/2169> (access 15.11.2018).

<sup>14</sup> B. Buzan, O. Wæver, J. Wilde, *Security. A New Framework for Analysis*, Colorado 1998, pp. 21–55; D. Bigo, *Security and Immigration. Towards a Critique of the Governmentality of Unease*. “Alternatives”, no. 27 (Special Issue)/2002, pp. 65–66; J. Storbeck, *Confronting Terrorism*, in: *The Club De Madrid Series on Democracy and Terrorism*, ed. P. Neumann, The International Summit on Democracy, Terrorism and Security, Volume II/8–11 March 2005, pp. 7–12.

<sup>15</sup> D. Aspasio, *The Changing Characteristics and the Economic Consequences of Migration from the Balkan Countries to Greece. The Case of Albanians*, Unpublished Ph.D Thesis, University of Macedonia, Department of Balkan, Slavic and Eastern Studies, Thessaloniki 2014, pp. 310–368.

have led to the maturity of the phenomenon in Greece gradually bringing a completely new set of priorities and necessities for Greek society and its politicians to the surface. The transition of the early 1990s crisis to a more permanent situation over the years has promoted many policy implications both for the receiving and the sending countries, leading to a new age of transnational cooperation to abolish the multilevel negative consequences of Albanian migration to Greece.

## **The European Refugee Crisis of 2015 from the Greek Point of View**

The 21<sup>st</sup> century can be easily referred as the century of migrants. The International Organization for Migration (IOM) estimates that the total number of international migrants has grown rapidly from 173 million in the year 2000 to 244 million in 2005, and exceeded 258 million in 2017. Europe is undoubtedly one of the main geographical areas that were significantly affected by the recent migration flows.<sup>16</sup> The vicious war in Afghanistan and more recently in Syria and the armed conflicts in many other places all over the world have catapulted the numbers of displaced persons, forcing many of them to flee their homes and migrate in search for protection of their human rights as well as better life conditions in European territory.<sup>17</sup>

Between 2013–2018, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNCHR) data figures recorded the highest levels of displacement on record during recent decades, with the total number of forcibly displaced persons exceeding 68.5 million. The vast majority of refugees worldwide come from Syria and Afghanistan, with Turkey at the top of the list of the refugee-hosting countries, having more than 3 million refugees and asylum seekers inside its borders.<sup>18</sup> Third-national immigrants (or non-EU citizens) in Europe represented approximately 10.5% of the total number of inhabitants for 2017, reflecting a 2.8% increase from the corresponding total number from the year 2000. This increased trend was 10.9% in Greece for 2017 and a significant rise was recorded in nearly all western European countries, among them Germany and Austria,

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<sup>16</sup> International Organization for Migration, *World Migration Report 2018*, International Organization for Migration, The UN Migration Agency, Geneva 2017.

<sup>17</sup> United Nations, *Global Trends. Forced Displacement in 2017*. United Nations, The UN Refugee Agency. United High Commissioner for Refugees, Geneva 2018.

<sup>18</sup> United Nations, *International Migration Report 2017: Highlights*. Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division, United Nations, New York 2017.

highlighting the significant role of migration flows in the continent and the need for more productive long-term management of them.<sup>19</sup> Most of these immigrants arrived in Europe after 2014, when the migration problem started to become more pronounced as a result of the increasing numbers of irregular arrivals in Mediterranean countries, mainly via sea routes to Italy, Greece, and Spain. The refugees were crossing the European external borders in large numbers from unauthorised border crossing points with the help of smugglers who participated and formed wider transnational organised criminal networks and the migrants were already applying for asylum by the time they were detected by the police, army or port authorities.

In summer 2015, the Greek island of Lesbos became a symbol of the so-called “refugee crisis” in Europe, because thousands of people were arriving daily by sea to its coasts, trying to escape from the conflict in the Middle East. A striking example of the aforementioned crisis is that during 2015, Frontex reported more than 1.8 million irregular border crossing detections at the external borders of the EU.<sup>20</sup> Most of these people arrived in Europe after crossing the Mediterranean Sea and, inevitably, images of asylum seekers in distress became headline news in what is considered to be the worst humanitarian crisis in Europe since 1945. The EU and its 28 Member States were taken by surprise and struggled to manage the large influx of migrants and refugees caused by war and conflict events. The effort of millions of refugees to find a safe land during the migration crisis led many of them to risk their lives to cross the external borders of the EU undetected, unfortunately causing the deaths of thousands of them during their dangerous journey. For every immigrant who finally managed to cross the external borders of the EU and reach their final destination country, there were hundreds of others who did not manage to see their dream come true, due to their arrest by border control authorities or even the loss of their most valuable human right, the right to live.<sup>21</sup>

The management problems that modern migration flows have caused since then have been at the top of EU’s political agenda and it was soon understood that the refugee crisis cannot be confronted unilaterally; it

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<sup>19</sup> United Nations Refugee Agency, UNCHR Figures at a Glance. Statistical Yearbooks, from The United Nations Refugee Agency 2018, <https://www.unhcr.org/figures-at-a-glance.html> (access 15.11.2018).

<sup>20</sup> European Border and Coast Guard Agency, Annual Risk Analysis 2017. European Border and Coast Guard Agency (Frontex), Frontex Risk Analysis Unit, Warsaw 2017.

<sup>21</sup> D. Aspasios, *The “Collateral Damage” of Irregular Migration in the European Union*, “European Police Science and Research Bulletin”, no. 12/Summer 2015, pp. 25–28.

requires the cooperation of all European countries at a supranational level.<sup>22</sup> All the effort to promote a common European policy and specific measures to limit the consequences of the uncontrolled refugee influx was not accomplished without major problems, provoking, among others, the fundamental principles of European solidarity and at the same time raising questions about its potential success in the future.<sup>23</sup> The refugee crisis also led to the acknowledgement of the inability of the EU to effectively manage and secure its external borders, its sovereignty, and generally to encounter all the problems that may arise from the crisis. This is because policy focus prior to 2015 was targeted at overcoming the economic obstacles of the integration process as well as to abolish the internal borders control by formatting the Schengen area. The operational point of view aside, the EU also failed to respond to the 2015 refugee crisis from a strategic point of view. EU Member States did not prove, at least at the beginning, their core solidarity in the management of the crisis, restraining their role to the provision of financial assistance to the Mediterranean EU Member States that were facing extended consequences of the uncontrolled migration influx, practically letting their national authorities to exclusively cope with the mass migration flows and the numerous problems that this situation brought for these first line countries that hosted thousands of immigrants in their territory.

As in the case of the economic crisis of 2008, the EU refugee crisis had to be faced by promoting a two way solution, one which balanced between answers that target to overcome the dead ends of the crisis by implementing policies and instruments in order to absorb the internal political, economic, and social pressure from the large numbers of immigrants while at the same time trying to diminish the multidimensional drivers of the transnational movement of people and, more specifically, the negative externalities of instability in EU's wider neighbourhood, through economic assistance and a broader strategic plan of cooperation with the countries of origin of the immigrants in general.

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<sup>22</sup> T. Bauer, M. Lofstorm, K. Zimmermann, *Immigration Policy, Assimilation of Immigrants and Natives' Sentiments Towards Immigrants: Evidence from 12 OECD Countries*, "Swedish Economic Policy Review", no. 7(2)/2000, Mobility and Flexibility of Labor Markets, Institute for the Study of Labor (IZA), pp. 11–53; A. Geddes, *The Politics of Migration and Immigration in Europe*, London 2003.

<sup>23</sup> M. Keith, *From Punishment to Discipline? Racism, Racialization and the Policing of Social Control*, in: *Racism, the City and State*, eds. M. Cross, M. Keith, London 1993.

## Comparing and Contrasting the Two Migration Crises

Both the Albanian migration crisis and the recent refugee crisis had a strong and undeniable impact in the existing socio-political scenery of Greece, leading to many changes in the way the migration phenomenon is now understood and conceptualised, mainly by the residents of the specific host country. Focusing our comparative approach to the common characteristics of the two, *ab initio*, chronologically different migration case studies in the Greek territory, we can first point out that both migration crises can be categorised as being irregular. This can be mentioned because both evolved mainly through the illegal crossing of the Greek borderline with the use of transnational, organised criminal networks and the illegal activities of smugglers or traffickers. More specifically, in the case of the Albanian migration, the immigrants were crossing the difficult topography of the mountainous north Greek-Albanian land borders through unguarded sites, managing in most cases to enter Greece undetected and afterwards to move mainly inland in search of unregistered work. It has been estimated that 87% of the Albanians who entered Greece, mainly during the first years of this highly escalated phenomenon, used this illegal border crossing tactic to accomplish their goal.<sup>24</sup> Similarly, during the refugee crisis, entry to Greek territory was achieved through the eastern Greek-Turkey sea borders, again with the help of transnational, organised criminal networks which are, to this day, responsible for the smuggling of the vast majority of immigrants to Greece, representing as much as 96% of the total number of irregular migrants who were registered after they entered Europe through its southern borders.<sup>25</sup>

In correlation to the aforementioned uncontrolled and unregistered entrance of immigrants in both time periods, it became clear that the Greek border control authorities could not effectively tackle the irregular migration and the transnational, organised crime element even after the establishment of the Greek Police Border Guards in the first crisis and the deployment of European Border Guards with the assistance of Frontex in the subsequent crisis. Concerning Albanian migration to Greece and according to the data of the Greek Police, between 1998 and 2010 the number of arrests of foreigners increased dramatically to 27,000 (not including those arrested for illegal entry and stay into the

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<sup>24</sup> N. De Zwager et al., *Competing for Remittances. Project of the Albanian Government Managed in Cooperation with IOM*, IOM, Tirana 2005, p. 15.

<sup>25</sup> European Border and Coast Guard Agency, op.cit.

country).<sup>26</sup> In both cases, the migration-security nexus had a negative impact on public opinion, leading in many cases to the emergence of fear for the preservation of national and European security, and resulted even in xenophobic and racist reactions against migration groups.<sup>27</sup>

These indicatives are the results of the yearly-published Standard Eurobarometer Surveys as well as the results of two Special Eurobarometers conducted in March 2015 (Special Eurobarometer 432)<sup>28</sup> and in October 2017 (Special Eurobarometer 469).<sup>29</sup> The added value of the Eurobarometer Surveys is that they register public opinion for specific issues at a particular chronological period. More specifically, in the published findings of the European Public Opinion Surveys after 2015, migration and terrorism are registered as the two most important issues facing the EU. Terrorism including the foreign fighters phenomenon, organised crime, religious extremism, irregular migration, and the insecurity of the EU's external borders are the main challenges for the internal security of the EU and EU citizens, highlighting the significance of irregular migration and the future problems that may be caused and provoked by the unauthorised entrance of foreigners into the EU.<sup>30</sup> The last basic common characteristic is the fact that the Greek authorities were absolutely unprepared to manage the two crises from political, legal, economic, and social points of view, and policymakers were forced to implement short term decisions rather than long term solutions under the pressure of hundreds of thousands of immigrants detected daily while trying to cross Greece's external borders. Those policy makers were one step behind the constantly evolving migration events rather than forecasting and controlling them. Both crises affected internal and external policies addressing the public demand for an immediate and effective response to humanitarian, security, integration, budgetary, and border management issues of interest.

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<sup>26</sup> Ministry of Public Order and Protection of the Civilian, The Official Site of the Hellenic Parliament (1.06.2013), <http://www.Hellenicparliament.Gr/> (access 12.11.2013).

<sup>27</sup> R. Rumbaut, W. Ewing, *The Myth of Immigrant Criminality and the Paradox of Assimilation: Incarceration Rates Among Native and Foreign-Born Men*, "American Immigration Law Foundation-Immigration Policy Center", Washington D.C. 2007; B. Karyidis, *Metanastefsi kai Englima ti Dekaeitia tou 90 stin Ellada (Μετανάστευση και Έγκλημα τη Δεκαετία του 90 στην Ελλάδα)*, in: *Law and Social-Politics Perspectives of Migration in Greece*, eds. G. Amitis, G. Laxaridis, Athens 2001.

<sup>28</sup> European Commission, *Special Eurobarometer 432*, op.cit.

<sup>29</sup> European Commission, *Special Eurobarometer 469*, op.cit.

<sup>30</sup> European Commission, Eurobarometer, <https://europa.eu/eurobarometer/about/eurobarometer> (access 15.03.2021).

Now, drawing at this time our attention to the differences between the two crises and trying to contrast them, we can firstly highlight the fact that the Albanian immigrants of the 1990s had Greece as their destination country, while the most recent refugee flows used Greece's external sea borders and inner land as a transit ground in order to use the existing secondary migration flows to reach northern Europe, where they wanted to settle down permanently and apply for asylum. The first migration crisis that Greece had to confront can be described by the common nationality of the immigrants that entered its territory (of Albanian nationality) and by the fact that it was mainly economically driven. For that reason, the face of the Albanian migration flows was completely changed by the fact that those flows consisted of economic migrants (and not asylum seekers) as a result of the rapid collapse of the socialist regime and the economic starvation that expanded all over the country. The second migration emerged and escalated mainly because of the need for international protection and humanitarian assistance in many parts of the world and, more specifically, in the Middle East and the sub-Saharan African countries, due to undeniable push factors such as armed conflict, civil wars, economic depression or other kinds of justifiable fears for their lives in origin countries. For these reasons, the mixed migration flows of 2015 were characterised by many diverse nationalities with different political, cultural, religious, and educational backgrounds.

Although the Albanian migration in the early 1990s can be defined by general illegality involving entry, residence, and work, the refugee crisis significantly differs because after their entry, most of the refugees were granted legal residence permits because of their vulnerable status and their need of international help and protection. From a geographical point of view, Albania is in proximity with Greece, giving the opportunity for seasonal migration and to maintain relatively strong links between immigrants and their family or relatives that stayed behind, while the crisis of 2015 and the great distance between the origin and the destination countries of the refugees does not offer many opportunities to travel back even in cases of voluntary return. Concerning the interaction of immigrants with the Greek economy, Albanians performed high rates of informal employment in many sectors such as agriculture and construction, while the migrants who entered Greece in 2015 were more dependent on the welfare fund from the EU or national aid, resulting in higher unemployment rates. Differences can be also detected concerning the use of remittances, which, in the case of Albanian migrants, were sent back home to the members of their family who did not emigrate, proving their will to return to their origin country in the future, with no intention for family reunification at least in the first



years after their arrival. Unlike the Albanians, the immigrants who entered Greece during the refugee crisis had no functional economic links to their origin country, trying to use the beneficial provisions of European law concerning the family reunification process. The refugee crisis had a pan-European impact and for that reason Greece and the other Mediterranean EU countries were supported economically through European funds (the asylum, migration, and integration fund, the internal security fund, etc.), but were also operationally supported by other EU Member States and international Non-governmental Organizations (NGOs) such as the IOM and UNCHR. That kind of assistance was not provided in the case of Albanian migration, forcing Greek authorities to confront the crisis solely with the use of state funds.

The lack of sufficient, reliable statistical data and solidarity from other States in the Albanian migration crisis made its management extremely difficult, although it did have lower extant rates where the numbers of irregular immigrants that entered Greece in a very short period are concerned. Not unlike the Albanian migration, specific characteristics of the refugee crisis were also responsible for the worsening of an already difficult situation that Greece and other EU Member States were facing. More specifically, the forced migration that led many refugees to cross the Greek borders automatically meant that all these people were protected from the national, European, and international law for refugees. Additionally, due to their legal status, many legal restrictions were applied in the refugee case study, including non refoulement in an unsafe country, that in contrast did not apply in the Albanian case leading to the implementation of a pushback policy for every immigrant who failed to comply with the harsh and numerous legal obligations. The refugee/asylum seeker legal status that was granted to the majority of the immigrants of the most recent migration crisis also guaranteed a list of financial and social benefits, the backbone of this common effort of each and every EU Member State being the mutual respect and protection of fundamental human rights. Unfortunately, the abovementioned legal framework did not apply during the first decade of the Albanian migration to Greece, which can be defined by the extremely low rates of asylum applications and recognition as well as the very strict migration policies for obtaining any legal status in Greece; the long-term residency permit or Greek nationality of especial note.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> D. Aspasios, *Metanastefsi kai Asphalia. I Exelixi ton Kharaktiristikon ton Asimmetron Apilon stin Ellada (Μετανάστευση και Ασφάλεια. Η Εξέλιξη των Χαρακτηριστικών των Ασύμμετρων Απειλών στην Ελλάδα)*, Thessaloniki 2020, pp. 120–153.

Finally, the refugee crisis of 2015 was simultaneously a huge humanitarian crisis due to fact that thousands of immigrants, in their unsuccessful efforts to bypass the security measures that modern states imposed by using dangerous ways to cross the external borders unnoticed, had to pay with their lives. The loss of human souls in the external sea borders of the EU was dramatically increased during the recent refugee crisis, underlining the collateral damage of the EU efforts to create “fortress Europe” and to generally put many obstacles and restrictions to sufficiently control human transnational movements. From 1993 until 2012, the number of immigrant fatalities in Greek territory were approximately 311, but during 2015 and 2016 the Mediterranean Sea became a graveyard for thousands of people in their effort to reach Europe’s coastline. Unfortunately, 6 out of 10 dead or missing immigrants worldwide were reported in the external northern sea borders of the EU and from 2014 until 2018 more than 14,500 deaths were registered, proving in the harshest terms that the death toll is higher even though migration flows have been gradually decreasing since 2015.<sup>32</sup>

## Conclusions

The modern migration environment that has been created and briefly described in this paper has caught the national and European institutions by surprise and puzzled the Member States of the EU, accelerating the process of the adoption and implementation of common rules for the management of the phenomenon while upgrading the degree of cooperation between them. As mentioned in the introduction, the basic purpose of the comparative methodology is to identify common and different patterns in specific social phenomena, such as migration, trying at the same time to illuminate their causal relationship, leading to an even deeper understanding of the political, social, economic, ethnographic, and cultural characteristics at a national or even transnational level.

The superficial presentation of the comparison of the two major aforementioned migration crises that Greece has been forced to overcome during its modern history identifies, with zero doubt, the importance and

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<sup>32</sup> United for Intercultural Action, *The Fatal Realities of Fortress Europe, from United for Intercultural Action. European Network Against Nationalism, Racism, Fascism and in Support of Migrants and Refugees* (November 2012), <http://www.unitedagainstracism.org/campaigns/the-fatal-realities-of-fortress-europe/> (access 15.11.2015); The Migrants’ Files (June 2016), <http://www.themigrantsfiles.com/> (access 20.03.2018); The United Nations Refugee Agency, *Desperate Journeys. Refugee and Migrants Arriving in Europe at the Europe’s Borders* (January–December 2018). The United Nations Refugee Agency, New York 2019.

need for a holistic study and management of the migration phenomenon. At the same time, it makes clear that migration is a timeless, evolving phenomenon, which requires the constant alert of society as well as the scientific community in order to deal with its unwanted consequences promptly and successfully for both the hosting countries but mainly for the lives of the immigrants and their families. Comparing and contrasting the two migration crises proves that Greece probably has not learned from the mistakes of the past and has not implemented all the necessary measures to prepare the ground in case of a future similar migration crisis not unlike the recent refugee crisis of 2015, which saw failings to successfully adapt to the new worldwide migration reality. Although both the above-mentioned migration case studies have major structural differences and different previous experiences, the Albanian migration crisis specifically – and the lessons learned from it – could have smoothed the multilevel consequences of the refugee crisis of 2015, providing the tools for better management conditions at a national as well as European level, directly affecting the immigrants who desperately needed the protection and assistance of Greece.

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