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## Readiness of the Croatian Navy in Case of Migrant Crisis Escalation at Sea

### Abstract

Migrant crisis which escalated in 2015 represents humanitarian and security challenge for European Union (EU) member states. Protection of the EU outer borders, as well as national one, has become priority task for all EU member states in order to preserve their political and cultural identity. This paper analyses the Croatian Navy (CN) capabilities in case of the migrant crisis escalation at sea, in order to protect national waters. The expected effect is to indicate that, considering their capabilities and experience, the Croatian Navy is capable of fulfilling the mission. Authors of the article investigated potential security threats in the area of responsibility of the Croatian Navy. This paper presents the possibility of an efficient response to possible challenges.

**Keywords:** Migrant crisis, Protection of the European Union borders, The Croatian Navy

### 1. Introduction

The basic responsibility of every democratic state is to protect its territorial integrity and to secure its citizens in every aspect by building reliable institutions. New threats, challenges and security risks are changing rapidly which creates constant need of development of effective national security strategy [1]. Nowadays, standard definition of security is quite different then before because of many critical security studies which had spread security domain. Besides standard military threats, other challenges like asymmetric threats<sup>1</sup> economic, environmental and society security challenges are

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1 Asymmetric threats are threats which occur in unusual and unpredictable way

becoming dominant in protecting basic democracy principles. State security is focusing on individual security trying to protect each member of society in order to satisfy their human rights. The Republic of Croatia (RC), as a relatively small country, should unite and incorporate all state resources in order to achieve satisfactory homeland security level. Being a member of the EU and North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), gives RC many advantages but also responsibilities in way of sharing and protecting strategic interests [1].

Broaden security challenges erase the difference between international, national and personal security taking globalization as a crucial factor in that process [2]. In recent decades the process of globalization has accelerated in a way of human migrations. The European migrant crisis which escalated in 2015 showed that EU was not prepared for dealing with such complicated challenge. Migrant movements have always been the integral part of the economic development of western EU countries but this time everything was completely different. Most of the EU members have been dealing with this problem as a security threat which endangers their national and cultural security, mostly because immigrants are non-European origin [4]. RC has also been facing immigration crisis in a way of being transit corridor to western EU countries as a final migrant destination. So far, migrants have been using only Croatian land territory on their passage to the west [1]. The Croatian sea border has not been threatened yet because migrants have been focusing on coasts of Greece, Turkey, Italy and Spain. However, considering Italian refusal of immigrants coming across the Mediterranean, the Croatian sea border security must be raised. Eventual activation of the Adriatic Sea route in migrant crisis will be a huge problem for Croatian economy and tourism.

The Republic Of Croatia National Security Strategy recognizes this kind of threat. It is emphasized that considering importance of tourism and transport in the national economy, the RC is sensitive to global security challenges [1]. In addition to the state sea borders protection, it is of utmost importance to deal with ecological issues as well. This paper points to the CN capabilities in case of migrant crisis at sea happens in their area of responsibility.

## 2. International and national security

International and national security issue is a subject of many various security studies as a part of global studies. State security has always been a reference object of International security studies, pointing to internal and international threats [2]. Definition of security equalizes with state security issues, especially in the geopolitical relations of the Cold War when military security was dominant factor in the Global political system. However, in the post-Cold War era, internal and international state security has become just one of many aspects of security issues, whereas citizen security and human rights are in focus [2]. Critical security studies, as academic discipline within security studies, develop many critical security theories and different

concepts. The mainstream is to extend thinking of security beyond military protection. Economic, social and environmental challenges give different approach to security matter, especially in terms of globalization. In this process, securitization<sup>2</sup> becomes a phenomenon where state actors can transform any subject into matter of “security” [5]. Beyond standard political approach, an extraordinary means can be used in the name of security. The fact is that the securitization process can be effective only when public is convinced and support politicians in their securitization campaign [2]. Referent object of securitization can be a state, nation, economy, society, cultural and/or environment issue, giving politicians an opportunity to use dangerous tools in order to protect it. Society is among common securitization referent objects, because it can be presented as a vital value of national identity which can jeopardize national security [2]. Globalization process strengthens this threat enabling fluctuation of humans and goods.

## 2.1. Migrant crisis as a security threat

9/11 terrorist attack in the USA, has completely changed the USA and its European allies doctrine. Terrorist attack prevention has become the main goal of their political and military efforts [2]. NATO’s Counter-Terrorism Policy was successful in the beginning, but the fact is it has also brought serious problems in the area of such campaign, disordering current political and social system structure.

Such instability made many people homeless and without any hope in better life, forcing them to immigrate to Europe [3]. Most of the immigrants were forced to try cross the European borders illegally, bringing huge immigration and security problems. Many of the EU member’s states had declared that issue as a cultural threat, stressing that immigrants are from the different culture which can never be assimilated in the European way of life. Escalation of migrant crisis enabled strong securitization process in national and international policy, bringing different approaches to the problem at the same time [4]. Despite the declared common policy, EU members did not respond equally. Some of the states, which were actually refugee’s intended destination, treated them as economic migrants.

On their way to the west, immigrants used some EU states as a transit corridor only, bringing many problems related to the illegal border crossing. Incoherent approach to this issue brought one of the biggest humanitarian crises in the EU. Moreover, securitization process escalated more than ever [3], including military action as a solution how to deal with. United Kingdom (UK), for instance, reacted extremely intensely. The UK government took the chance to strengthen their political power by sending a dramatic note of the security challenge [4], which can endanger British national identity. As a result of securitization, British immigration legislation came up as extremely repressive, making a huge gap from previous EU immigration policy.

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2 Securitization – the process of dealing with the specific problem as a national security threat

Besides, the immigration problem was one of the biggest reasons to vote for Brexit. Moreover, Counter-Terrorism Policy finds illegal immigration incorporated in terrorism activities.

Unlike UK, Germany took different approach to the immigration problem [4]. Immigrants were considered as refugees who need to be protected. Humanitarian aspect of the whole issue was underlined in their trying to present the situation as a European historical challenge. The real truth was that Germany has recognized a real opportunity how to solve one of the national biggest problems – lack of labor force.

The German government reacted promptly but this time refugees were considered as a referent object of the securitization process in which nationalism and xenophobia are the security threats. They urged for EU unique immigration policy, especially at the beginning of the crisis.

To sum up, the fact is that EU members were not ready for such a huge crisis, and each of them reacted differently, trying to protect their own national interests at the first place. As many times before, there was not any clear evidence that migration leads to increased terrorist activity.

## **2.2. The Republic of Croatia and migrant crisis**

The Croatian national security strategy has been undefined and inexplicit for many years as a result of new political circumstances after been recognized as sovereign state [5]. Different geopolitical relations in which RC is new NATO and EU member state, have required completely different approach to protect vital national and allies interests. Emerging economic and political integration processes made a society and individuals as referent security object. This fact was a crucial turning point in Croatian political transformation in order to define clear national strategic goals. In 2015, at the time of migrant crisis escalation, the Croatian National security strategy as well as National defense strategy was outdated and inadequate considering new security challenges. This fact was not a surprise because EU wasn't ready either, as mentioned before. The positive thing in the crisis was the fact that Croatia was not migrant desired and final destination. Croatian government treated this problem as a humanitarian, trying to enable a free corridor towards Western Europe. Nevertheless, there have been some national legislative changes considering use of Republic of Croatia Armed Forces (CAF), in order to protect national borders [9].

## **2.3. EU sea border protection**

The so-called “Arab spring” which brought many anti-government protests, spread across the Middle East in 2010 and 2011 [3]. The main goal was to protest against low standard of living and repressive regimes in those countries. However, things have not changed towards democracy. On the contrary, these activities have destabilized the

whole region, strengthening terrorism and fundamentalism at the same time [3]. The endless wars in Syria and Afghanistan have also caused huge destructions and human suffer, leaving few choice how to survive in such hard conditions. Once again, the attempt to establish democracy instead of authoritative system has failed. All things mentioned have started an enormous and unprecedented migrant wave towards Europe. The European migrant crisis was first given as a term in April 2015 when five ships with 2.000 migrants sank in the Mediterranean, causing death of at least 1.200 people [6]. Unfortunately, after these tragic events there was no doubt, Europe is expecting massive migrant crisis. Many people from Africa and Asia have tried to cross Mediterranean Sea, risking their lives in mostly poor condition vessels. They left everything behind hoping for better life in Europe. In 2015 there were three main migrants' routes [6]. Two of them were sea routes – the Central Mediterranean route (Italia and Malta) and the East Mediterranean route (Aegean Sea, Greece). The third one was the Western Balkan land route. It is estimated that, in 2015, more than 470.000 people came to Europe by sea, in comparison to 155.000 arrived by land. These numbers shows how dramatic challenge was the attempt to protect EU sea border, especially for Greece [6].

EU was forced to undertake urgent measures in order to stop illegal migrant routes and to identify and sanction human smugglers. The demanding challenge was to take on unique EU asylum seekers policy.

In addition, such a huge loss of lives at sea, needed prompt reaction of maritime forces. In the period from February 2016 to August 2018, more than 285.000 migrants were saved [7], thanks to the EU naval operations in the Mediterranean. Moreover, additional efforts were made with a view to enhance EU sea border control system. These intentions have resulted with a new agency called FRONTEX<sup>3</sup> with 1.350 experts placed on main migration routes. According to European integrated border management strategy, EU borders should be protected with a common effort of all members. One of the biggest challenges is to coordinate national and EU institutions and bodies in that regard. Apart from saving migrants lives, there are plans to improve living conditions in their states of origin, thus preventing them to leave the country.

With common actions of the United Nations and the African Union, the final aim is to achieve better quality of life. Many financial and infrastructure investments are planned in order to boost up local capacities and to enable sustainable development.

Desperate living conditions have forced many people to cross the Mediterranean Sea despite inadequate boats and few navigation experiences. Due to this reasons, an enormous number of lives have been lost. Table number one shows the number of migrant deaths in different parts of the world in 2017 and in 2018. Comparing to other world regions, the Mediterranean is ultimately migrant world's most lethal zone.

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3 Frontex (European Border and Coast Guard Agency) is an agency of the EU which is primarily responsible for coordinating border control efforts

*Table 1: The statistics of global migrant deaths in 2017 and in 2018.*

Global Migrant Deaths Jan 1 – December 31 (Source: Missing Migrants Project)		
REGION	2018	2017
Mediterranean	2,297	3,139
Europe	109	97
Middle East	121	221
North Africa	567	1007
Horn of Africa	274	179
Sub-Saharan Africa	559	555
Central Asia	52	-
Southeast Asia	68	299
South Asia	11	22
East Asia	3	1
North America	-	1
US/Mexico border	393	415
Central America	77	93
Caribbean	34	168
South America	27	-
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>4,592</b>	<b>6,197</b>

Source: <https://www.iom.int/news/grim-milestone-migrant-deaths-disappearances-top-4000-fifth-consecutive-year> (09.01.2019.)

In 2018, 104.506 migrants crossed the Mediterranean Sea [8]. In comparison to a year before, it represents one third less, because in 2017, 157.323 migrants passed the same route. However, in contrast to previous period, Spanish coast has become most desired migration destination.

In 2018, 50.962 illegal immigrants bordered in Spain [8], which is two times more than number of migrant arrivals in Italy. Obviously, recent Italian local authorities' behavior has affected migrants in their sea passage planning.

### **3. Readiness of the croatian navy in case of migrant crisis escalation at sea**

In case of the crisis escalation, i.e. in case of activation of the Adriatic route, RC should engage all existing capacities at sea in order to protect its borders. Consequently, it is planned that the CAF provide support to the Ministry of the Interior of the Republic of Croatia (MI RC), so they protect together vital interests of the RC. As early as in 2016, during the migrant crisis, the Government of the RC adopted amendments to the State Border Surveillance Act [9] and Defense Act [10], on the basis of which, in

exceptional cases when the Prime Minister or the Minister of the Interior estimate it is necessary, the CAF can provide assistance in the state border protection.

In the surveillance and protection of the maritime state border, the CN can provide support to the MI RC in line with available capacities and capabilities. The CN can engage forces from the Coast Guard of the Republic of Croatia (CG RC), forces from the CN Flotilla, forces from the radar and visual surveillance (*Coast Surveillance and Warning Battalion* – CSWB Battalion) and capacities of the Maritime Base Split [11]. In line with the Strategic Defense Review, the Flotilla is developing capabilities of maritime warfare and participating in international maritime operations, whereas CG RC is developing capabilities of the surveillance and protection of maritime rights and interests of the RC [11].

### 3.1. Croatian Navy in the European Union's border protection operations

Upon the accession to the EU, the Republic of Croatia assumed certain obligations in terms of developing capabilities for integrated management of the state border, as the EU's external border in order to meet the requirements for the accession to the Schengen area [1].

Therefore, the Republic of Croatia committed to participate actively and initiate legislative and operative measures at the EU level for the purpose of strengthening overall capabilities and readiness for responding to migration challenges and external border surveillance. The objective is to suppress illegal migrations, especially illegal crossings of the state border, and to carry out intensive measures of returning third country nationals who try to enter the EU illegally. In this way, the overall security of the RC and EU is increased. On the basis of the aforementioned, in 2015, the Parliament of the RC adopted the decision of sending a CN vessel to the Mediterranean Sea to participate in joint efforts of defending the EU's external borders [12].

#### 3.1.1. Participation of the Croatian Navy in international operations dealing with the migrant crises in the Mediterranean Sea in 2015

From 1 August to the end of October 2015, members of the CN and MI RC aboard the CG RC vessel ŠB-72 *Andrija Mohorovičić* participated in the combined joint maritime operation EU JO EPN Triton<sup>4</sup> (*European Union Joint Operations European Patrols Network*), with the aim of providing support to Italian authorities in keeping

4 Frontex launched the Triton operation on 1 November 2014, by coordinating deployment of two airplanes, three offshore patrol boats, four patrol boats and one helicopter in the area of the central Mediterranean Sea with the allocated budget amounting to 2.9 million euros per month. The operation's command was under the Italian Ministry of the Interior in cooperation with the Italian Coast Guard and Financial Police. The objective of the Triton operation was to ensure efficient border controls in the Mediterranean Sea, and at the same to provide assistance to people and vessels in distress in the area of responsibility.

the EU's maritime border and saving migrants in the area of the Mediterranean Sea. During the operation, the crew of ŠB-72 saved 2.516 people, out of whom 551 were children, 448 women and 1.517 men [12], [13].

Through the work in the multinational environment on the tasks and events relevant for the whole JO EPN Triton 2015, the members of the first Croatian contingent<sup>5</sup>, 1<sup>st</sup> HRVCON, provided a quality contribution while carrying out operations and at the same time they obtained new experiences and knowledge of conducting maritime operations.

The main tasks of all the forces participating in JO EPN Triton 2015 were as follows:

- Detecting, identifying, reporting, tracking and, if necessary, intercepting all suspicious vessels carrying persons who intend or prepare to cross the maritime border in an illegal manner, checking at the border control point and checking of vessels involved in smuggling of migrants at sea in the areas of operation.
- Preventing of illegal crossings of the border.
- Providing an insight into the situation in the areas of operations by identifying regular and irregular maritime traffic.
- Documenting (with pictures and/or video clips) all activities (detecting, tracking and intercepting) and presenting all available materials to the International Coordination Centre (ICC) in Rome.

The complexity of implementing the main task was emphasized by the complex procedure of receiving and providing care for migrants on the ship herself. Receiving and providing care for migrants was conducted in a predefined and specially prepared space.

### *3.1.2. Participation of the Croatian Navy in international operations dealing with the migrant crises in the Mediterranean Sea in 2017/2018*

In order to obtain necessary experiences in preparation of the CN for providing support to the protection of the maritime state border (participating in suppression of illegal migrations, disrupting and disabling of smuggling people, sharing of information with police and judicial bodies of the EU member states as well as other Croatian state maritime services with the aim of improving the cooperation), a CN officer performed the duty on a vessel within the Operations Headquarters of the peace support operation called EU NAVFOR MED OPERATION SOPHIA<sup>6</sup> [14], [15]. In addition, within the

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5 The first Croatian contingent (1<sup>st</sup> HRVCON) consisted of fifty (50) members of the CAF (CG RC and an additional medical team), and the total of twenty (20) Border Police officers members of the MI RC.

6 The EU NAVFOR MED Operation Sofia is carried out so as to prevent people smuggling and to build capabilities of Libyan security forces for the suppression of illegal activities at sea and for independent functioning in the implementation of assigned tasks. Peace support operations and missions carried out by the EU within the framework of the Common Foreign and Security Policy represent a contribution to reinforcing European stability and security and



NATO's Sea Guardian Operation<sup>7</sup>, the RC decided to take part with one vessel which can comply with the requirements of this operation [16]. It was decided that it would be the missile boat RTOP-41 *Vukovar*, whose crew was experienced with intercepting vessels, which is one of the basic requested capabilities of the vessel.

The missile boat departed the naval base "Admiral flote Sveto Letica-Barba" in Split on 3 September 2018 and arrived on 24 September 2018.

During the Sea Guardian Operation, the CN ship carried out non-combat tasks with an emphasis on creating an integral maritime situational picture along with identification of vessels, deterring security threats and providing support to NATO's strategic communication. Her basic tasks were to support the fight against terrorism, to contribute to the development of maritime situational awareness, to develop regional maritime security, to provide freedom of navigation and to conduct maritime interception tasks. NATO ships participating in Operation Sea Guardian coordinate with the operation Sophia by sharing information on observations at sea [19].

The departure of the missile boat RTOP-41 *Vukovar* from the naval base "Admiral flote Sveto Letica-Barba" in Split on 3 September 2018 is shown in Figure 1.

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encompass a wide range of activities, from humanitarian and rescue tasks, military advising and assistance, to prevention of conflicts, peace keeping operations, tasks of combat forces in crisis management, and peace enforcement. Members of the CN have been taking part in the EU NAVFOR MED Operation SOFIA since September 2017 [14].

- 7 At the summit held in Warsaw in 2016, NATO formally announced the transformation of the maritime counterterrorist operation "Active Endeavour" in the Mediterranean Sea into a new security operation called "Sea Guardian". Started on 9 November 2016, Operation Sea Guardian is a standing Maritime Security Operation aimed at working with Mediterranean stakeholders to deter and counter terrorism and mitigate the risk of other threats to security. Operation Sea Guardian is a flexible operation, designed to conduct a variety of maritime security tasks in response to the challenges we face. Operation Sea Guardian, as a Maritime Security Operation, is working to identify and counter illegal activity that may cause instability and threaten Allied security [19].



*Figure 1: The departure of the missile boat RTOP-41 Vukovar from the naval base "Admiral flote Sveto Letica-Barba" in Split on 3 September 2018  
Source: Authors (3 Sep 2018)*

It is necessary to stress that the ship complied with standards required by NATO capability targets by implementing the mentioned tasks

### **3.2. Possibilities of the response of the Croatian Navy to the migrant crises at sea and cooperation with other state maritime services**

Tourism and transport represent vital parts of the RC national economy. Possible migrant crisis at sea would have been a huge problem which could affect national interests [1]. As the leading national maritime power, the CN is the main authority and guarantee of the protection of Croatian interests at sea. The area in which the CN supports protection of the maritime state border, in line with laws, rules and regulations, covers the internal waters of the RC, territorial sea of the RC and a part of the open sea between the territorial sea and the line determined by international agreements between the RC and the neighboring countries, as reported to the International Maritime Organization (IMO) in the area of the South Adriatic.

The CN task forces would provide support to the MI RC in preventing illegal crossings of migrants by sea in the area of the EU's external border, by: monitoring

and controlling the maritime border, conducting search and rescue operations at sea, transporting migrants by sea to reception centers, transporting police officers and technical devices by sea and providing medical support [9].

For the purpose of sharing information and coordinating activities in the maritime area of the RC, the CN has already been cooperating with bodies of the following state maritime services:

- *National Maritime Centre* for Data Collection in Zadar,
- Maritime Rescue Coordination Centre (MRCC) in Rijeka,
- Central state administration body responsible for fishery affairs (Ministry of Agriculture). Sea fishery inspectors are representatives of the Ministry of the Agriculture,
- Vessel Traffic Service (VTS) [17, p.1, 11. and 12.].

Based on previous experiences, both from the European Union's border protection operations as well as from present cooperation with the bodies of the Croatian state maritime services [12, 14 and 17], the possible deployment of CN task forces should be conducted in three phases of the operation: preparation, engagement and withdrawal and analysis phase.

In the preparation phase the main task is to gain relevant and timely intelligence information in order to react properly. In addition, it is of vital importance to establish Rules of Engagement (ROE) for the purpose of correct actions at sea. Coordination with the MI RC is very important in this phase of the operation.

Commencement of the phase two, that is engagement of CN task forces in providing support to the MI RC, depends on capabilities of the latter to protect the state border from illegal crossings of migrants with its own human and technical resources. Upon the adoption of the decision by the Minister of Defense and the Armed Forces Chief of Staff's order to support the state border protection, forces of corresponding composition would be deployed to the assigned area and carry out assigned tasks. Depending on the situation, it is possible to engage complete CN task forces or only some components.

In this phase the CG RC would have the following tasks:

- to carry out tasks of the state border protection and to protect maritime interests of the RC with vessels and aircraft,
- when necessary, to transport police officers and technical devices by sea,
- to be alert, when called by the MRCC, to take part in search and rescue operations,
- after conducted search and rescue operations or upon a request, to transport migrants to reception points or transit centers and other facilities intended to accommodate migrants, and
- when necessary, in cooperation with the CN Flotilla, to transport goods by sea (supplies, humanitarian aid, etc.).

In this phase the CN Flotilla would have the following tasks:

- when necessary, to transport movable fences for blocking passage,
- when necessary, to transport goods (supplies, humanitarian aid, etc.),
- when necessary, to transport police officers and technical devices.

In the withdrawal and analysis phase the CN task forces would withdraw personnel and all technical capacities from the area of the operation. At the same time, thorough analysis of all parts of the operation should be made, in order to gain quality lesson learned process. These processes would enable enhanced possible retrieval in the preparation phase.

#### **4. Conclusion**

The development of the geopolitical situation in the world presents the migration crisis as a new form of security risks and threats that the Mediterranean countries have been facing since the beginning of the migration crisis in Europe. Such a new security situation in Europe has led to the adaptation of the existing and to the development of new capabilities of national services in the prevention of illegal crossings of state borders on land and at sea, in order to achieve common security in the EU. Based on the experience of the migrant crisis in 2015, the RC has passed some statutory regulation changes enabling the engagement of all assets, including the armed forces, if necessary. In that sense, challenges that the CAF might face require new knowledge, skills and acting procedures in synergy of providing support to the state border protection on land and at sea. The need for engagement of forces at sea represents a challenge for the CN, whose tasks would be to carry out this non-traditional military operation.

It is of vital importance to have available, highly trained and well-equipped forces, which, together with other state maritime services, could provide requested support in the shortest time possible. It should be emphasized that the CN, as part of its regular tasks, already cooperates at sea with the bodies of the Croatian state maritime services in order to increase the security in the Croatian maritime area. This refers particularly to the CG RC whose naval operations helped the CN gain a lot of experience in carrying out non-traditional tasks. Furthermore, the participation of CN ships and staff officers in EU and NATO external border protection operations in the Mediterranean Sea provides valuable experience, based on which potential tasks of the state border surveillance and protection can be planned and carried out.

Key preconditions for achieving such tasks are preventive actions, i.e. carrying out of targeted simulation exercises in coordination with all the state service bodies participating in the protection of the maritime state border. Forming of tasked forces as well as planning and carrying out of tasks represent an integral part of the doctrine of using naval forces. Such a concept enables efficient accomplishment of all tasks, including those not considered to be classical military ones. Task readiness of the armed forces is evaluated through the status of staff, weapons, equipment and the organization as a whole. CN has already successfully passed such evaluation of

readiness in preparing and participating in EU and NATO operations. Therefore, it can be concluded that, if necessary, CN, as a bearer of the protection of national interests, is ready to respond effectively to any possible escalation of migrant crisis at sea, whether this problem is treated as a humanitarian or security issue.

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