Cooperation on the Governance of Migration
In Western Balkans and Central European Countries

20-21 of June 2016, Skopje

In the framework of CEI - cofounded project: “WELCOMING – Wanting Europe as Leverage for Co-operation on the Migratory Insertion Governance” implemented by ALDA Skopje
Official opening and introductory remarks

The seminar “Cooperation on governance of migration management in the Western Balkans and in the Central Europe countries” was held on the 20th and 21st of June in Skopje.

The event gathered European experts, activists and representatives of local and central authorities who addressed the topic of the refugees in Europe. The rich and various presentations delivered during this International Seminar drew a global picture on the ongoing crisis.

The project is co-financed by the Central European Initiative (CEI) with the financial assistance of EU, the Decentralized cooperation Normandy-Macedonia and the International Institute for Human rights and peace in Caen.

The seminar was launched with the introductory remarks and opening speeches of Ugo Poli, representative of CEI Focal Point Migrations, Jon Ivanovski from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Macedonia, Sébastien Botreau-Bonneterre, representative of the French Embassy in the Republic of Macedonia and Antonella Valmorbida, Secretary General of ALDA – The European Association of Local Democracy Agencies.
ALDA is addressing the migration issue through several projects: through specific activities of the project “LADDER - Local Authorities as Drivers for Development Education and Raising awareness”, the project “Re.Cri.Re - Between the Representation of the Crisis and the Crisis of the Representation”, and also thanks to the localizing SDGs context, and the initiative “The Gates of Europe: Global migrants and local development” which took place in Lampedusa joining global and local perspectives. ALDA’s objectives are to reinforce development and democracy through local communities’ empowerment.

There is a favourable response to refugees in communities where there are people who already have experienced migration. Awareness raising is part of the policy-making process. The respect of diversity is a founding principle of Europe. We need to address the sense of European identity and citizenship, and to analyse how refugees perceive the notion of “European citizen”. Refugees should understand the EU building process. ALDA has made the following steps regarding future activities on the subject of migration: Considering the fact that Turkey is part of the problem and part of the solution in this crisis ALDA partnered with Association Marmara, local authorities in the region of Istanbul in the framework of the project LADDER. ALDA is also developing a project with the Aegean island Ios. LDAs in the Balkans are involved on this issue as well.

It is necessary to value the social and economic impact of the migration.

Migration is a major societal change, we need to accompany this change

– Antonella Valmorbida.
The Republic of Macedonia is a key factor on the Western Route for the transiting migrants to reach their final destination. Statistics show that in 2013 the number of migrants has grown to a staggering 232 million compared to the situation in 2000 of 175 million.

In order to rise up to the challenge of the refugee crisis a coordination between the state authorities in Macedonia was quickly established as well as internationally with a focus on safety for migrants but also for the local population. The Municipality of Gevgelija (on the Greek-Macedonian border) was under the most pressure as well as its population who was faced with problems of sanitation and inadequate structural capacities to welcome such an influx of people. However, they received a lot of international support (especially from UNDP) which helped to soothe the situation. The civil society demonstrated its importance during this period with quick emergency response, flexibility and self-organization. The local population also demonstrated its humanitarian approach. The refugee crisis is a very sensitive issue which needs to put foremost the respect of Human rights guaranteed by the International conventions. This is however a global issue which is why these type of international conferences are needed to have a wider understanding and an international point of view on this issue and better face the challenges together.

Every democratic and humane society such as Macedonia's strives to be should give priority to cooperation, protection of Human Rights and solutions which will allow each person a dignified life, maintaining their personal freedoms and rights.

This initiative matches a need to connect each other, to exchange experience, to develop common skills and develop lasting networks, so as to prevent the repetition of dramatic situations, and deploy the potential of European societies.

It is necessary to develop the potential for growth that migration has always brought, and to propose inputs for decision-makers on governmental level. To foster inclusion of refugees, it is important to provide professional skills, and to share successful and unsuccessful experiences and stories. Migrants represent an added value and a cost for society.
In the WB6 Common Statement, 6 Ministers of Foreign Affairs stressed the development potential of migration and the need for cooperation on this issue. 7% of the EU population (30 millions of people) are born outside of the EU and many of them are from the Balkans. The migrants coming from the Middle-East should be seen as a part of the past of the region. We are all the sons and daughters of migrants. Social and personal developments are crucial, and knowing the others permits to know ourselves better. We need to consider migrants as persons close to us that can recognize themselves as Europeans.

“We are all sons and daughters of migrants”
– Jon Ivanovski.

There are strategic problems with migration: we need short term and long term plans, and this issue is not addressed yet with all aspects of the Globalisation. We need qualitative data and personal experience in order to analyse.

Local authorities’ role is to develop long term objectives and activities on positive effects of migration as factor for growth of local communities. “The local level is often the best level to address the migrant crises.” The Republic of Macedonia would be more efficient in the migrant crisis if it was part of the EU.

Visiting refugees’ camps in Gevgelija and Tabanovce, I realised the diversity of refugees’ profiles and paths. Three questions resulting from the migrant crisis should be raised: the question of dignity, of sovereignty and of the inclusive approach on behalf of the local population. The French Embassy is working on this issue with “Solidarités internationales”, “Secours islamique de France” and “LEGIS” to improve reception and leaving. There is an environmental impact due to the camps. To dismantle the networks of smugglers reactivated because of the border’s closing, and the need to have a better control of the illegal migrants have to be priorities as well.
Panel I - Effective migration management at local level

Catherine-Amélie Chassin
University of Caen, France

This deal does not work! - This is the conclusion when one looks from a legal standpoint on the EU-Turkey deal about the management of the migration crisis. The deal which entered into force on the 20th of March 2016. It is divided in four pillars.

- The first pillar deals with the financial aid that the EU is going to provide to Turkey, which amounts in total to 9 billion euros.
- The second pillar is the essence of the deal (1 for 1) and consists of sending each migrant arrived illegally in Greece to Turkey and for one migrant sent to Turkey, a refugee from Turkey will be sent to the EU.
- The third pillar of the agreement foresees that the migrants sent from Turkey will be integrated in the 160,000 migrants that have to be reallocated in the EU.
- Finally, the fourth pillar aims at relaunching the negotiations about Turkey’s adhesion to the EU, and states that on the 30th of June 2016, the visa for the Turkish people to go to the EU will be lifted (this point has not been definitely decided, due to unfulfilled conditions regarding terrorism and police cooperation).

UNHCR explained that the right of appeal and the prohibition of collective expulsion are implicit in the Agreement, but these points are not written anywhere. There are many points of the deal that should be criticized: Firstly, the deal was drafted and signed secretly and not even released in the Official Journal. Only the European Council declaration has been made available to the public. This EU-Turkey Agreement is more a political commitment than an Agreement with legal value.

Secondly, the deal has been concluded and signed without the approval of the European Parliament and the European Council (the procedure which is normally required) which undermined the legitimacy of the deal.
Furthermore, two Afghans and a Pakistani sued Greece before the Court of Justice of the European Union and the European Court for Human Rights, because the EU-Turkey deal which foresaw to send them back to Turkey, would not be legally acceptable. Even the Greek justice considered that Turkey is not a safe country where refugees can be welcomed. Moreover, this EU-Turkey deal is useless because another directive to face refugees’ reception had already been adopted in the past, after the Kosovo war, in 2001. It permits the “temporary protection” of refugees in the EU, setting the reception capacities according to each member state, providing procedural guarantees for refugees, and allowing them to stay 3 years in one of the EU countries so as to apply for asylum.

Regarding France and migration, the management of the crisis was “catastrophic”. In France, applications for asylum increased only by 23% in 2015 (59 000 asylum seekers, 800 000 in Germany). During the 1920s, France welcomed 800 000 persons fleeing dictatorships in 10 years. On the record it states that 160 000 refugees are accepted in the EU, but in practice, member states welcomed 8 000 people, and 2 400 asylum seekers were relocated.

**Martina Smilevska**  
Macedonian Young Lawyers Association, Macedonia

Since June 2015, the Macedonian State acted as a transit country, facilitating the journey of people on the move. An amendment introduced in the legislation on Asylum and temporary protection as the “intention to seek asylum” in June 2015, legalised the stay for 72 hours, but it did not facilitate asylum procedures. Once asylum seekers came into the transit centre at the border between Greece and Macedonia, registration was the first step, and then they could decide if they want to apply for asylum during their 72 hours stay in Macedonia. This is how Macedonia provided a safe passage for refugees. But the access to asylum procedure is still limited in Macedonia. The State of emergency started in July 2015, with 3 important periods: initial influx of people until September 2015; establishment of transit centres; selective closure of the border in November 2015 (only refugees from Syria, Afghanistan and Iraq were accepted). This selection was a political discriminatory decision.

Everything changed when the Balkan Route was closed on 7 March 2016, refugees are now moving irregularly, using smugglers to continue their journey in much bigger number in comparison to the beginning of the phenomenon in June 2015. Migration policies in Macedonia are reactive in the region, since there is a strong interdependence with other countries on the Route. In April 2016, a new amendment in the legislation on asylum argues that safe countries are EU and NATO members. Consequently, people coming from Greece cannot apply for asylum in Macedonia. Politically and legally, Macedonia closed all possibilities for refugees to obtain asylum.

Currently, in Macedonia 500 people are in transit and refugees stay approximately 5 days in the country. Only 8 people are on asylum procedure in Macedonia: the asylum procedures are long and really limited (authorities do not allow people in transit centres to apply for asylum) and they generally do not want to stay more than 5 days in Macedonia (push and pull factor). Once they arrive in Europe, refugees are not informed that Germany changed its laws on asylum, and they realise that finding a job and accommodation is going to be a long process. Macedonia is still in this transit mode. The Macedonian government has to develop integration policies. **Our integration policies are not effective.**
Italy has done a lot during the crisis but Italy has still a lot to do for hosting centres. The main recommendation for this initiative is to put in place cultural mediators (not only translators but also people acting as bridges between different cultures) to improve the understanding and identification of “diseases”. “Administrative diseases” are affecting refugees, they need guidance to understand how to carry on in their project. Local health centres should provide psychological assistance, especially for unaccompanied minors needing absolutely to be taking care of, after the landings. A Memorandum on reception for Local authorities has been created, so they can face their responsibilities. Welcoming refugees is a cultural challenge, and laws came from culture and ideas. We have to change the vocabulary (“emergency” “migrants coming to take jobs”). There is a great importance in the chain of responsibility when it comes to migration (contingency plan in Sicily in 2014) and if it is not managed properly we are providing a lot of opportunities for the black market.

The legal status “economical migrant” is kind of a password nowadays, even though we don’t know the meaning of this expression.

The Czech Republic is not a target country for migrants nor a transit country, since 2001, asylum requests are declining, although anti-refugee movements are rising (70% of the population do not want to welcome the migrants). The role of the Russian funded websites in the anti-refugee movements should be taken into consideration when analyzing the attitude of the population towards the refugees. Nevertheless, a lot of Czech volunteers are helping refugees on the Hungarian border. On the Croatia-Serbia border, there seems to be an informal cooperation between actors, but a lack of coordination between the UN and authorities. There is no systematic protection on exit points and no system of registration.
In all the camps throughout the Balkans there is a lack of coordination among the voluntary groups, the NGOs and the local authorities as well as lack of protection for the migrants since more than 10,000 minors were lost along the Balkan route. The local authorities clearly failed to provide decent security in the camps. The government needs to know who is working in the asylum centre. **It is harder to protect people when borders are closed and when people move irregularly.**

Open discussion

Antonella Valmorbida, General Secretary of ALDA: This situation is a test for the EU who is not taking its responsibilities.

Tanja Temelkoska, OSCE: Migration is an on-going phenomenon, and soon there will be a lot of environmental refugees.

Catherine-Amélie Chassin, University of Caen, France: Our world is built on state sovereignty since the Westphalia Treaty. Tools for right of asylum are not adjusted. Right of residence in the destination country is addressed through the temporary protection in the EU. **Asylum is not a Human Right, people are entitled to seek for asylum but not to obtain it.** States decide if they give a resident permit or not. We are witnessing a political collapse in the EU, with no political will from Members States to solve the crisis.

Martina Smilevska, Macedonian Young Lawyers association – MYLA: It is important to do screening, and to assess needs of refugees, so as to pressure the government to orient their engagement in the right direction. Procedures have to be improved to guide unaccompanied children and vulnerable groups. Border police from all Eastern Europe and the Balkans is patrolling the Macedonian border. There is an increase number of push back, collective expulsion even though it is forbidden by the Human Rights Convention. It is really difficult to help individuals, refugees are not keen to sue government, their goal is to go to Germany, and when they testify against smugglers, they leave the country afterward and the legal process cannot be completed thoroughly.
Cross-border cooperation is important to exchange information on the context and to provide help with individual cases. **Networks of NGOs on local level are missing, informal networks should be strengthened.**

**Zdeněk Ralík, Initiative pomoc pro uprchlik:** Idomeni (Greece) was a very bad example on how to deal with the refugee crisis. “Médecins sans frontiers” were prepared in advance for the closing of the Balkan route. Not a lot of strategic planning was demonstrated by other organisations. On the Hungarian-Serbian border the police was aware of the situation with the smugglers but took no actions toward them. A good example of a volunteer group is “**Are you Syrious**” from Croatia who developed cooperation with volunteers from different countries, updating on the situation on the Balkan route with accurate data.

**Andrea Bellardinelli, Association EMERGENCY:** Peripheral authorities and coast guards are under a lot of stress, as well as the local authorities. Most vulnerable groups have to be the priority because of the important number of cases of violence. What women face on the route and in Italy is indescribable, terrible system to prevent pregnancy. **The vulnerable groups among the migrants, the women and the children, are the new slaves of this century.**

**Panel II - Local policies managing diversity**

**Aleksandra Vukmirovic**  
*Standing Conference of Towns and Municipalities, Serbia*

The refugee crisis is a challenge for cities in Serbia since they have a legal obligation to provide services to local citizens, so cities have to guide refugees, and give them assistance (transport, infrastructure, water, food and medical support). Communication between municipalities on the country borders needs to be improved. The centre for asylum in Belgrade is outside of the city but there is no transport provided. In Serbia, there is no institution determined by law to implement integration policies. However, some actions have been planned: local actions, assessment of needs and allocation of funds, communication with the local population, trainings for local self-governments staff, and establishment of a Council for Migration on local level (programmes, measures, and action plan with stakeholders). Serbia has previous experience with refugees from ex-Yugoslavia and Kosovo. 5 centres for asylum and 12 reception centres were established in Serbia in 2015.
The key for the integration of migrants is language, right to education and right to employment, healthcare, social protection of vulnerable groups through centre for social work on local level and monitoring of unaccompanied minors. Unfortunately, Serbia does not recognize the language as something important, very little is done to teach Serbian language to newcomers. The educational system is discriminatory and leads to socio-economic marginalization of the migrants. Finally, on the employment side, as there is high unemployment in the country, local people fear that migrants take over their jobs and intolerance is rising. From the perspective of the local community, we are witnessing also a positive spontaneous response and 52% of people support stay of refugees. Good practices: Info Park, Refugee aid Centre “Miksalište” for collecting and distributing aid to refugees who are passing through Serbia. The role of local government associations is to develop projects and platforms, connexions with other levels, and support from experts.

Ugo Poli
CEI Focal Point Migrations

The Italian Asylum system SPRAR (sistema di protezione per richiedenti asilo e rifugiati) is an interesting model because it includes the three main actors to cope with migration: state, local level and NGOs. The national system in Italy for the coordination between these three sectors, is set up in a way that central service is delegating to the national association of local authorities.

SPRAR aims at fostering cooperation between the Ministry of interior in collaboration with prefectures and municipalities. The people entitled with the refugee status and the applicants for this status can ask to be integrated into the SPRAR programme. The objective is to accompany the migrants to the recovery of their personal ability to have an independent life in the Italian society. To do so, SPRAR provides sanitary accommodations, language class, cultural harmonization, professional re-training and school education. In the same time, they prepare the Italian citizens who live near the refugees’ accommodations to welcome them.

“Policies have to shift from emergency to management, taking into account the question of territorial implication” – Ugo Poli.
The municipalities eligible to receive funding need to match requirements. Unfortunately, only few municipalities received funding and became really committed to SPRAR. On 8 000 municipalities, 500 cities are really committed to this system, providing 800 000 euros to finance activities through calls, and supporting 60 000 refugees.

Concerning DG Health programmes, Balkan countries are not involved in projects and calls, but the DG Regio has a budget directed toward migration and local authorities are in the forefront of new guidelines. It is important to advocate for specific rules so as to encourage flexibility of proceeding and reliability of funding.

Dimitris Karalis  
Vice-Mayor of Chios, Greece

In Chios, the population count is 50 000 people, the count of refugees is 3 000 people. Currently, there are around 100 refugees arriving per week, some of them stay 3 to 4 months. Before the EU-Turkey Agreement, the island was a transfer place. Local population was helpful in the beginning but the local people’s response is less positive now. Integration policies are focused on education and healthcare. Due to important uncertainty toward future and lack of data, in Chios there is no long term plan projecting beyond 3 months-time.

In Chios, representatives of the refugees are not present in the coordination meetings but the stakeholders discuss with them on daily basis. The local population feared that all refugees are sick. Still, many local people are working with refugees.

Open discussion

Aleksandra Vukmirovic, Standing Conference of Towns and Municipalities: In the response plan for refugees, the Serbian Government is counting on the EU, donors’ funds, IPA, but it is not enough, and funds are not properly redistributed to municipalities (no total reimbursement) and budget is not adjusted in order to welcome refugees. Financial stability is a condition to benefit from Cross-border cooperation programme, but it is impossible in this context considering the floods in Serbia, and with the refugee crisis. HCR is developing trainings for local media, and a really elaborated communication plan (institutional and legal framework, rights of migrants, vulnerable groups). The government used the opportunity of the positive response of local population. Social networks are important for the public opinion in cities, and some activities are organised through Facebook. Social media are used by refugees also (mostly in order to inform about the closed parts of the borders). Local population who has been a refugee during the wars considered that refugees are not responsible for this situation. The main opinion is that they need to be supported.

Nikolina Milic, Belgrade Centre for Human Rights: Some refugees are living in refugee camps since 1990s Balkans wars, mostly Serbians from other parts of ex-Yugoslavia. A generation of refugees grew up in the camp which do not have perspectives for the future. There is a new word circulating in Serbia for people coming from the Middle East “Asylee” implying that newcomers arrived to take
advantage of social protection in Serbia. **It is important to use the term “refugee”, they are refugees even if their status is not recognised.**

**Marjan Huc, SLOGA, Slovenia:** Example on how to build understanding local communities in Austria: **we need to highlight that local economy benefits from refugees’ arrival.** Good practice: migrants renovating old houses and living inside (boosting the real estate sector also). Local authorities have to decide through discussion and reflection with local population in order to develop pro-refugees actions, thanks to equilibrium of different opinions.

**Panel III - Immigration as an opportunity for local development**

**Brigitte Le Coutour**

Association Itinérance, Cherbourg, France

It is important to act on the field to guide refugees, and face local authorities and prefectures on crucial issues: education, legal assistance for asylum application, accommodation. Local authorities do not want to help refugees because they are in transit, they are providing less support for literacy and education.

> What is the point to close a squatter camp, when it will surely open in another place?

– Brigitte Le Coutour

Refugees in Cherbourg are dreaming about England and Ireland, they are English-speakers, and often they have family there. There are refugees who are trying to transit illegally to the UK, it is important to warn them about risks and dangers of this route and many migrants are convinced to stay in France. After that step it is crucial to provide them with French language courses and assistance for the asylum procedure.
In 2015 there were 12 000 asylum application in Poland, 557 people obtained protection. The Polish Migration Policy adopted in 2011 is assimilationist, the law is not explicitly discriminatory but ‘in practice only white Christians from Eastern Europe are welcomed in Poland’. The Polish language as well an understanding of the Polish culture are considered a prerequisite for a successful integration.

The new conservative government said no to the EU relocation plan, agreed by the previous Government with the EU and which aimed to resettle 7000 migrants in Poland. There is no integration assistance available, and refugees are seen as threat to national security, moreover, they suffer from physical and verbal attacks. The new government has a centralized management of the migrant crisis and excluded the NGOs from this task although NGOs are the main providers of integration assistance.

The local population needs to be more informed about the migrants since there are more and more aggressions against migrants in Poland. We should find a way to value migrants and explain to the local authorities that they could be an economic weapon. Nationalist groups are supported by State authorities. It is impossible to tackle discriminatory policies through EU funds since the Government decides who will benefit from these funds, and NGOs rely a lot on EU funds. That’s why Polish NGOs are trying to find new funds from other donors. It is important to talk about this issue on this type of conferences in order to raise awareness.

However, this crisis is a real opportunity to rebuild the European identity based on a new citizenship and a new solidarity. Creativity and imagination should be encouraged for the integration of migrants. Furthermore we need to ask ourselves how we can switch from territorial exclusion to territorial inclusion. It is imperative that we build new relations with neighbours, societies transform themselves in relation with others. We have a necessity to assert citizenship and rethink European values.
The army and the civil society sector is active in providing help to refugees in upper Austria. However, due to raising nationalism and xenophobia a centre for refugees was burnt and crimes against asylum seekers increased. One of the main issues are through which channels are figures and data presented to the public. Far-right politicians share propaganda through statistics which state that the criminal acts by asylum seekers have increased by 38,8% between 2014 and 2015 which is false. For instance, in 2014, 371 criminal acts out of 1000 were done by asylum seekers whereas in 2015 less than 200 criminal acts out of 1000 were done by asylum seekers.

The situation in Europe is escalating: growing nationalism, intolerance, Euroscepticism, globalization or even the death of Schengen are part of the many crises that the European society is facing today. The role of local authorities and NGOs were essential in the management of the migrant crisis. However, without the support of the national and supranational level, the solution will always be partial. We need to rebuild trust but not only on the local level.

After the Yugoslavian wars in the 1990s, there was no post war reconciliation process. We need to learn from the mistakes made in the past in order not to repeat them. In the EU, the ever growing Union is disputed - the challenge is to rebuild trust among the population. The local level needs to be supported by corresponding measures on national and supranational levels.
It is impossible to start the process of integration of refugees in centres without Human Rights and dignity. Are we ready for a new Balkan route? How to use our structures to respond to the needs of refugees?

An example of real practice (instead of good practice): the City of Logatec, Slovenia which counts 9200 inhabitants. In this city, there were demonstrations against the refugees. In order to raise awareness among the population public debates and round tables were organised. In schools, children gain a lot, they are happy to have international friends. Social responsibility programmes are as well in development carried out by private companies (ex. scholarship for migrants who obtained the status of refugee). Youth centres were as well involved in this process of changing mentalities.

In the end, the protests against the refugees from the locals have progressively transformed into cooperation between the locals and the migrants. For instance, after three weeks, some locals started to come to the centre and propose their help. Furthermore, non-organized contacts between locals and migrants increased. Local volunteers also organized with some migrants an activity which consisted to build wooden outdoor chairs. Local municipalities could contribute to the integration of migrants without providing money. They could involve and integrate the asylum seekers in already existing structures. For instance, in Ljubljana, they do not want to build new kindergarten in the asylum centres but the already existing city playgrounds could be used.

Migration woke up the society; it questions the community and brings new perspectives

– Primoz Jamsek.
Panel IV - The role of citizens: what they are doing and what they can do

Mersiha Smailovik
Legis, Skopje, Republic of Macedonia

All the humanitarian aid for the refugees was provided by the Macedonian citizens, and local communities. We are really proud that we stood with the refugees. We saw a big solidarity from local population in villages.

In March 2015, 14 refugees died on the train track of which 6 minors, it was difficult to identify the bodies. In April and May 2015, the journey was really dangerous, for example roads were perilous for bicycles but they were still sold and bought for 600 Euros. On the 20 June the first trains and local transports were provided for refugees, that is when they started to be visible for the public. In the following months, Macedonia implemented the same laws on migration as in Serbia. From January to May 2015, refugees were detained up to 6, 7 months in the detention centre of Gazi Baba.

We have to be the voice of the refugees
– Mersiha Smailovik.

Currently we have 400 refugees kept in closed camps; local authorities said they want to protect local population from refugees. For 4 months they stay without legal status in closed camps.

Refugees do not want to stay, Macedonia has no plan for integration and it is not useful to learn a language that only 2 millions of people can speak.

Paolo Riva
Q CODE Magazine, Italy

Italy passed from an emigration to an immigration country. Numbers and figures are not used well by the media, and there is a lot of prejudice in local media, focusing on the ethnicity of crime perpetrators. We observed an exponential increase of the number of articles and TV reports on migration, but no polarization of the press like in the UK. For instance, the number of newspapers about migration in 2015 rose from 70% to 180% in comparison with 2014. There were also 3437 prime-tv reports about migration in 2015 (the highest figure in 11 years). The Media often associates refugees and radical Islam. The mainstream narrative is to welcome refugees and to expulse economic migrants. Local activist initiatives are not changing media narrative. Media should report migration in a more positive way, with more accurate information and without spreading fear.
Some improvements in the Italian media coverage can be acknowledged. For instance, they used to call the asylum seekers “clandestine” which has a bad connotation but now after several human tragedies they call them “profugi” (refugee).

We have to put an end to the distinction between refugees and economic migrants in the media coverage and better media access in the hot spots in Italy is needed.

Nikolina Milic  
Belgrade Centre for Human Rights, Serbia

64 persons received subsidiary protection in Serbia. Asylum offices improved their work; they welcomed mainly Russians from Ukraine and some Syrians. Professors and students from the Philology University proposed language courses for refugees, but the project did not last, due to stereotypes and lack of benefits for the volunteers.

The government doesn’t do anything to further the integration of refugees in Serbia. For instance, no language courses are provided for the refugees. The status of refugee is only granted to the Serbs who fled from the wars in the 1990s. Migrants who arrived recently are called “asylanee” or even “asylee” which are words with bad connotation, often associated with people taking jobs of locals.

Nonetheless, some efforts regarding working permits and housing procedures have been done by the government: refugees have the opportunity to have service contract to work, but without the benefit of a labour contract. The UNHCR is providing housing aid for 1 year, once the asylum is obtained. There are not enough resources to stop traffics and smugglers in Serbia.

Marzia Bona  
Osservatorio Balcani e Caucaso, Italy

There is a need to gather information to deconstruct stereotypes in the South East Europe region. Two themes are always used in media coverage of migration: numbers and emotions (words such as
invasion and swarms are used to describe the migration influx). Inciting emotions through media can increase empathy but the point of view is really self-centred, focusing on Europeans’ reactions. No voice given to refugees. We lack accurate and clear information on Agreements and legislations.

The media systems in South East Europe are characterized by: tabloidization (entertainment prevails on information), lack of independence and pluralism, media ownership concentration, lack of transparency on who owns the media. Solidarity actions on the grassroots level are criminalized by media. A code of ethics for journalism was developed in Greece (Charter of Idomeni), in Greece journalists need authorization to go into hot spots. Media, political elite were not ready to react to the migration phenomenon. Case study in Bulgaria (sensationalist approach), case study of Macedonia (lack of responsibility and accuracy).

We need to give space to the subjectivity of migrants in media. Media should develop solutions journalism, through constructive and explanatory approach, with open data as a key tool, and using transnational monitoring and professional networks. Synergies between CSOs and media should be reinforced.

Open discussion

Marzia Bona: Authorization to go into hot-spots is a 2-day procedure in Greece. When journalists are inside hotspots, they try to get catchy pictures. Journalists should be trained by UNHCR to respect dignity and privacy of refugees in these centres. The only pictures of camps being evacuated came from drones, and we cannot see if Human Rights are violated in those images. Positive and innovating news report: The Guardian developed a crowdsourcing platform collecting stories from volunteers on the Balkan route, an Italian journal is also collecting positive stories of successful integration and it was received really well in Italy.

Andrea Bellardinelli: We are losing the urge to get deeper into analysis putting on the table the complexity of the situation.

Ugo Poli: We have to develop awareness raising and education towards multimedia representation of reality, importance of videos and pictures. Connection between media and research has to be reinforced with the true figures. Links between research and media are crucial in order to have better information.

Paolo Riva: Concerning the hot-spots in Italy, access is denied or postponed for journalists, because authorities do not want to show in which ways the distinction is made between refugees and economic migrants in these centres. When the initiative of hosting refugees in families or at politicians’ home came, journalists were trying hard to find testimonies about it. Depending on the frame and the trend journalists are looking for good or bad news. In Italy, journalism is lacking in-depth analysis, due to political or editorial pressure. Carta di Roma is an ethical code for journalists made with UNHCR, it is a tool on how to make more accurate reports.
Mersiha Smailovik: In March 2016, Macedonia closed its border and thousands of refugees got blocked between the Greek and Macedonian border. Few days later, as the Refugees still wanted to cross the border illegally, some international volunteers in Idomeni, told 3 000 refugees that they could come to Macedonia by crossing a river, even though it was winter. At that moment, they were put in danger, about 3 000 refugees tried to cross the river, and a few of them died. When UNHCR, Legis and other organisations saw the refugees coming by the river, they tried to provide aid, but the police did not allow it because they came illegally. The volunteers should think about security of the refugees. The media did not have a good approach in analysing the refugee situation in Macedonia. The Greek media and police said Skopje closed the border, but in reality the EU closed the border.

Agostino Zanotti: It is important to protect traumatised refugees from journalist searching for scoops. **Political authorities are responsible for not responding to the migration phenomenon. We need to denounce deficiency of political authorities that provoked suffering and deaths.**
Closing remarks

**Ugo Poli**: The value of this conference is European but has a specific dimension related to the Western Balkans countries and all the countries connected to the Balkan route, which is partially frozen for the time being but which will remain a sensitive area in Europe.

“This conference confirms that we should be confident on the importance of civil society organisations, and in our professional capacities essential to fill and fulfil the gaps in migration management developed by local authorities and on the state level” – Ugo Poli.

We have the right and the position to advocate, consult and design the collaboration with public bodies, and also to implement their tasks.

There is a role to play to push ahead the evolution and the upgrading of the regulatory framework and organisational structures and methodologies, in cooperation with the EU and OSCE.

Through a civil society bottom up approach we can reach these specific objectives:

- First to propose evidence of the loopholes of the system, and to find solutions to solve contradictions within the system that we see on the field day by day;
- Second to advocate these conference recommendations to improve policy making system and organisation and regulatory frameworks on the basis of a permanent partnership between CSOs, LAs, and States, in order to develop their networking capacities.

*We are facing the evidence on how Human Rights are implemented on the territory, and LDAs associated to ALDA are pivotal players in this region to deal with the shift from emergency to migration management and integration. CEI is playing his role in these objectives as a political platform for dialogue between members, so as to raise awareness.*
Recommendations for inclusive and resilient communities

**Policies on emergency reception, moderator: Zdeněk Ralík**

Concerning the emergency aid, it is important to agree on clear coordination and task sharing schedule between CSOs on the field and registration centres, as well as the creation of a code of conduct in reception structures. Moreover, the necessity was stressed to improve professionalization of aid workers (providing trainings on safety, psychological supervision and cultural backgrounds). We have to focus on the protection of vulnerable groups among refugees, individualisation of processes, and on the quality of practical information delivery. The Balkan route can be reopened soon, we need to be prepared.

**Integration policies, moderator: Nikolina Milic**

On the area of integration, it is crucial to foster cooperation and coordination between CSOs and local stakeholders on local and national levels so as to improve integration structures and implement better public partnership principles on this issue. CSOs need to develop platforms and networks dealing with refugees and migrants, which will lobby and advocate for improving legislation on local, regional and national levels, and exchange good practices. CSOs and local communities should cooperate to provide support and services in order to develop refugees’ skills (linguistic and income generating activities), and to implement local awareness raising campaigns to create a true bond between the hosting community and the refugees and migrants.

**Intercultural dialogue and public perception, moderator: Marzia Bona**

A lot of factors are influencing public perception: politicians’ statements, media reporting, social media... The solution can be to develop direct face to face contacts between refugees and local population through local activities involving schools, local media and social media. Solutions journalism is crucial to bring positive perspectives on migration and to have positive answers from people. Working on local level is necessary to deconstruct and fight against problematic collective labelling. One main point is to recognise refugees as human beings in situation of vulnerability (and not victims, terrorists...). They experience forced displacements, we have to develop empathy for their experience. A major way to improve the situation is to focus on Education so as to develop critical thinking, to process the huge amount of information and increase direct encounters with the local population through pupils and parents.
About the Central European Initiative – CEI

The Central European Initiative (CEI), founded in Budapest on 11 November 1989, is a regional intergovernmental forum committed to supporting European integration through cooperation between and among its Member States and with the European Union (EU), other interested public institutions or private and non-governmental organisations (NGOs), as well as international and regional organisations. In order to offer a solid contribution to European integration, the CEI combines multilateral diplomacy and project management, both as donor and recipient. Its institutional and geographical position enables the CEI to act as a bridge between European macro-regions.

About ALDA

ALDA - the European Association for Local Democracy is a non-governmental organisation dedicated to the promotion of good governance and citizen participation at the local level. ALDA in particular focuses on activities that facilitate cooperation between local authorities and civil society. ALDA was established in 1999 at the initiative of the Council of Europe's Congress of Local and Regional Authorities. Most of ALDA's work is based on the method of multilateral decentralized cooperation. This method involves a multi-stakeholder approach which focuses on strong partnerships between Local Authorities and non-governmental organisations. In the framework of promoting good governance and citizen participation at the local level ALDA focuses on various themes, such as European integration, decentralisation, civic initiatives and volunteering, human rights and sustainable economic development.

About ALDA Skopje

ALDA Skopje is a branch of the European Association for Local Democracy (ALDA), European non-governmental organization dedicated to the promotion of good governance and citizen participation at the local level. ALDA focuses on activities that facilitate cooperation between local authorities and civil society. ALDA’s mission is the promotion of good governance and encouragement of local development. ALDA Skopje aim is to contribute to the promotion of local democracy in Macedonia as well as to enhance the European Integration process. ALDA Skopje has been registered in 2011 upon implementation of several project initiatives and creation of the local team. In the last 5 years ALDA Skopje has been engaged in implementation of projects on local, national and regional and international level.