ASYLUM SEEKERS: VICTIMS OR A NOVEL WEAPON FOR THE 21ST CENTURY?

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Abstract: Since 2015, the question of asylum seekers and challenges arising from forced migration have become one of the most pressing issues in the public and political discourse. The influx of refugees into European countries has raised grave concerns. What is more, two countries – Russia and Turkey – have forced migrations and aim to use the consequences to achieve their own political goals. The authors use the typology developed by Kelly M. Greenhill to analyse the weaponisation of forced migration. For example, the manner in which Russia has weaponised migration might be analysed in the framework of coercive engineered migration, the 5th column and the propagandist/political sub-types, whereas Turkey's approach can be characterized as more coercive and dispossessive.

Keywords: migration, hybrid warfare, propaganda, Russia, Turkey, refugees

1. Introduction

Throughout history, the European continent and individual European countries have faced several bouts of mass migration, with the Migration Period (encompassing the 4th to 6th centuries A.D.) resulting in the fundamental change of Europe's ethnic structure. In the 18th and 19th centuries, migration was mainly fuelled by industrialisation. In the 20th century, large-scale population movements were mainly spurred by the two World Wars and subsequent decolonization.[1] In all of those instances, migration posed a threat but also brought about changes as a result. A common characteristic of all those past migrations is their objective and impersonal causes.

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[1] **Van Mol, Christof; de Valk, Helga** 2016. Migration and Immigrants in Europe: A Historical and Demographic Perspective. – Garcés-Mascareñas B.; Penninx R. (eds). Integration Processes and Policies in Europe. Contexts, Levels and Actors. (IMISCOE Research Series). Dordrecht: Springer, pp. 31–55. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-21674-4_3 (12.11.2019).

However, things have changed in the XXI century. Not only did the 2008 global economic crisis become a reason for migration[2], but the outpouring of refugees also became an instrument for intimidating and blackmailing sovereign states or even whole regions. How it became possible and what may be done about it are the focal questions of this paper.

2. Historiography and Methodology

It is not surprising that the refugee crisis has attracted research attention. In 2008, Kelly M. Greenhill, combining statistical data analysis and case studies, provided a detailed examination of the active manipulation of population movements as political and military weapons of war. In addition, Greenhill has also proposed a comprehensive typology of the most prevalent ways that displaced persons have been used as political and military weapons since the end of the Cold War[3]. One version of Greenhill's typology is presented in the table below (see Figure 1).

* The *coercive type* of engineered migration occurs when a challenger nation utilises or threatens to utilize human migration as a foreign policy instrument to induce behavioural changes or to gain concessions from the target nation.
* The *dispossessive type* is usually precipitated by a series of events during which the challenger employs migration as a means to appropriate territory or resources from the target group. This type can include the expulsion of a target group that is considered to be an ethnic, political, or economic threat.
* The *exportive type* is when a dissident target group is expelled in order to solidify power; in addition, the displacement of a population may also be used to destabilise political adversaries.
* The *economic type* is when a challenger takes advantage of the inflow or outflow of economic migrants or dislocated civilians for financial gain.

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2   **de Haas, Hein** 2018. European Migrations: Dynamics, Drivers, and the Role of Policies. Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg. https://ec.europa.eu/jrc/sites/jrcsh/files/kjna29060enn.en_.pdf (12.11.2019). [**de Haas** 2018]
3   **Greenhill, Kelly M**. 2008. Strategic Engineered Migration as a Weapon of War. – Civil Wars. Vol. 10(1), pp. 6–21. https://doi.org/10.1080/13698240701835425 (10.11.2019).
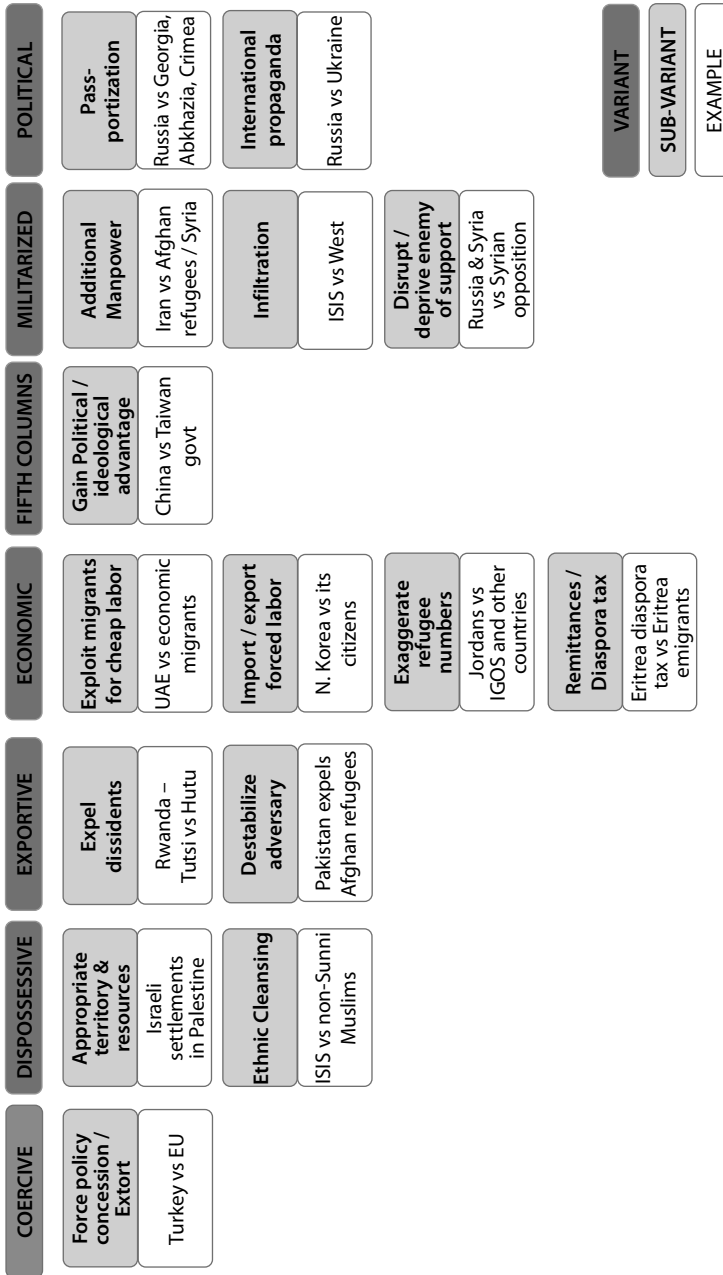
COERCIVE
- Force policy concession / Extort
  - Turkey vs EU

DISPOSSESSIVE
- Appropriate territory & resources
  - Israeli settlements in Palestine
- Ethnic Cleansing
  - ISIS vs non-Sunni Muslims

EXPORTIVE
- Expel dissidents
  - Rwanda – Tutsi vs Hutu
- Destabilize adversary
  - Pakistan expels Afghan refugees

ECONOMIC
- Exploit migrants for cheap labor
  - UAE vs economic migrants
- Import / export forced labor
  - N. Korea vs its citizens
- Exaggerate refugee numbers
  - Jordans vs IGOS and other countries
- Remittances / Diaspora tax
  - Eritrea diaspora tax vs Eritrea emigrants

FIFTH COLUMNS
- Gain Political / ideological advantage
  - China vs Taiwan govt

MILITARIZED
- Additional Manpower
  - Iran vs Afghan refugees / Syria
- Infiltration
  - ISIS vs West
- Disrupt / deprive enemy of support
  - Russia & Syria vs Syrian opposition

POLITICAL
- Pass-portization
  - Russia vs Georgia, Abkhazia, Crimea
- International propaganda
  - Russia vs Ukraine

Legend:
- VARIANT
- SUB-VARIANT
- EXAMPLE

Figure 1. Categories of Weaponised Migration[4].

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4   **Steger, Nathan D**. 2017. The Weaponisation of Migration: Examining Migration as a 21st-Century Tool of Political Warfare. Monterey, California: United States Naval Postgraduate School, p. 6. https://calhoun.nps.edu/handle/10945/56815 (10.11.2019).

* The ***fifth column*** refers to a long-term strategy in which the challenger dispatches migrants into the target's territory (or recruits migrants already within an area) to undermine the target government. Opportunistically, the challenger, seeking to undermine their adversary, may choose to employ its citizens and/or sympathisers that are already living abroad as a fifth column.
* The ***militarised type*** includes the forced displacement of a population to disrupt enemy operations in order to weaken support for opposing military forces. This form of weaponised migration can also include the infiltration of migrants into a target's territory or the recruitment of dislocated civilians.
* The ***propaganda/political type*** leverages migration to increase political legitimacy, to decrease an adversary's political clout, or to justify future actions. Generally, challengers will incorporate migration-related propaganda into their information operations to improve the perception of the legitimacy of their actions both regionally or internationally.[5]

Although Greenhill developed this typology more than 10 years ago, it is still applicable for analysing the weaponisation of migration. At the end of this paper, we will determine whether the recent migration crisis has been weaponised and as what type.

In 2015, Europe welcomed 2.4 million legal refugees and migrants. In addition, Europe was also flooded with almost 1.3 million asylum seekers (with Syrians and Afghans representing about 25% and 16% of all applicants)[6], laying bare the limitations of the EU's common border control and burden-sharing systems. Therefore, it is no wonder that, since at least 2016, migration has been considered a hybrid threat in scientific texts.[7] One of the most recent papers on this subject was written by Ukrainian authors Piotr Pacek, Yuriy Danyk, and Maryna Semenkova.[8]

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[5]   **Greenhill, Kelly M**. 2010. Weapons of Mass Migration: Forced Displacement, Coercion, and Foreign Policy. Cornell University Press, p. 360.

[6]   **de Haas** 2018.

[7]   **Nail, Thomas** 2016. A Tale of Two Crises: Migration and Terrorism after the Paris Attacks. – Studies of Ethnicity and Nationalism, Vol 16, Issue 1, April 2016, pp. 158–167. https://doi.org/10.1111/sena.12168.

[8]   **Danyk, Yuriy; Semenkova, Maryna; Pacek, Piotr** 2019. The Conflictogenity of Migration and its Patterns during the Hybrid Warfare. – Torun International Studies, Vol. 1(12), pp. 61–73 (published online September, 2019). https://apcz.umk.pl/czasopisma/index.php/TSM/article/view/TIS.2019.004/18167 (12.11.2019).

3. Exploiting the EU's Weakness

Using migration as a weapon is not a novel Russian invention. For example, Libyan dictator Muammar Gaddafi successfully used migration as a coercive measure to force a lifting of European economic sanctions in 2004[9]. However, in recent years, the numbers of refugees have been much more significant, not to mention the number of problems caused.

In 2011, after the outbreak of hostilities in the Middle East, waves of refugees poured into Europe. What is more, in addition to the refugees, some people who took part in the hostilities in the Middle East also moved to Europe (e.g. fighters from various combat groups ranging from pro-government groups to ISIL fighters). Consequently, the level of terrorist threat in Europe grew, resulting in an increased number of religiously motivated terrorist attacks, as well as increasing numbers of supporters of "racial purity".[10]

In some EU countries, asylum seekers became the catalysts of crisis. The majority of member states were not really prepared to face this challenge; in fact, their authorities and societies are still looking for answers to this complex and long-term problem that includes racism, growing pressure on social infrastructure and state budgets, difficulties with upholding human rights, etc.[11]

For example, Cyprus is in desperate need of the EU's assistance to manage the influx of migrants. According to the UNHCR, one of the main challenges has been the backlog of asylum applications because the numbers
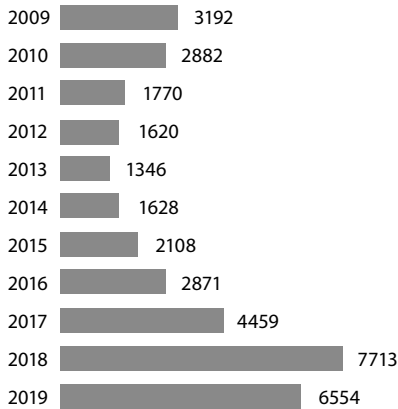
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[9]   **Bachmann, Sascha-Dominik** 2016. Hybrid Threats 2016. http://www.aspals.com/hybrid%20threats2016_english.pdf (10.10.2019).

[10]   **Crone, Manni; Falkentoft, Maja Felicia; Tammikko, Teemu** 2017. Europe's Refugee Crisis and the Threat of Terrorism – An Extraordinary Threat?, DIIS (Danish Institute for International Studies) Report 2017:05. http://pure.diis.dk/ws/files/910914/Report_05_Europes_Refugee_Crisis_Web.pdf (12.11.2019); **Simcox, Robin** 2018. The Asylum–Terror Nexus: How Europe Should Respond. The Heritage Foundation, Backgrounder No 3314, June 18, 2018. https://www.heritage.org/sites/default/files/2018-06/BG3314.pdf (12.11.2019). For more detailed data, please refer to Europol's annual **EU Terrorism Situation and Trend Report (TE-SAT)**. 2019. – Europol. https://www.europol.europa.eu/tesat-report (12.11.2019).

[11]   **Improving the Responses to the Migration and Refugee Crisis in Europe**. 2016. Vision Europe Summit. https://bruegel.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/VisionEurope%E2%80%93PolicyPapersweb.pdf (21.11.2019); **Carballo, Manuel** *et al*. 2017. Evolving Migrant Crisis in Europe: Implications for Health Systems. – The Lancet Global Health, Vol. 5 (3), pp. e252–e253. https://doi.org/10.1016/S2214-109X(17)30040-2 (21.11.2019).

have drastically increased over the last two years and the system was not prepared to absorb such a high number of asylum seekers.[12]

Asylum applications in Cyprus 2009–2019

Year		
2009		3192
2010		2882
2011		1770
2012		1620
2013		1346
2014		1628
2015		2108
2016		2871
2017		4459
2018		7713
2019		6554

Source: UNHCR, Data until June 2019   © DW

Figure 2. Asylum applications in Cyprus, 2009–2019[13]

Source: Deutsche Welle, based on UNHCR Fact Sheet – Cyprus (April 16, 2019)

The Turkish President, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, has been using forced migrations to extract additional funds from the European Union.[14] According to the deal concluded between the EU and Turkey in March 2016, Ankara agreed to stem the flow of refugees and migrants into Europe in return for billions of euros in aid; recently, Erdogan has even resorted to blackmailing the EU. Turkey, currently hosting about 3.6 million Syrian refugees, controls parts of northern Syria where it says 350,000 Syrians have already returned.[15] As of October 2019, approximately 1 million refugees were concentrated on the Syrian-Turkish border, and Erdogan has threatened to unleash them on the

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[12] **Refugee crisis in Cyprus close to tipping point**. 2019. – Deutsche Welle. Top Stories. Europe, September 09. https://www.dw.com/en/refugee-crisis-in-cyprus-close-to-tipping-point/a-50352565 (10.10.2019).

[13] *Ibid*. Data derived from **UNHCR (UN Refugee Agency) Fact Sheet – Cyprus** (April 16, 2019). https://www.unhcr.org/cy/wp-content/uploads/sites/41/2019/04/Cyprus-Fact-Sheet_APRIL-2019_FINAL.pdf (12.11.2019).

[14] **Ingleby, Melvyn** 2019. Europe's Complicity in Turkey's Syrian-Refugee Crackdown. – The Atlantic, August 29. https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2019/08/europe-turkey-syria-refugee-crackdown/597013/ (12.11.2019).

[15] **Erdogan: Turkey could open the gates of Europe to refugees**. 2019. – Al Jazeera. News, September 5. https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2019/09/erdogan-turkey-open-gates-europe-refugees-190905103137895.html (12.10.2019). [**Erdogan: Turkey could open the gates of Europe to refugees** 2019]

EU, which would undoubtedly exacerbate the refugee situation in Europe. Thus, Turkey is taking advantage of Europe's weakness and using it to capture Syrian territory, while also aggressively handling the Kurdish issue. At the moment of writing, Turkey had launched a combat operation against the Kurds in Syria.[16]

4. The EU's Political Situation and its Susceptibility

There is nothing newsworthy in pointing out that Russia is actively seeking to influence the political situation in some EU member states, with the aim of bringing to power parties and politicians that would be loyal, or at least sympathetic, to the Kremlin. To that end, Russia has used the following instruments of influence:

- sponsoring political forces and actors that have an impact on the political life of targeted countries and on the overall strength of the European Union;[17]
- supporting non-governmental organisations by providing tools targeted to affect public attitudes[18];
- pragmatic and intensive use of opinion leaders (e.g. retired politicians (e.g. Gerhard Schröder), intellectuals, journalists, etc.) and social media to promote messages that serve Russia's interests[19];
- concealed advertising placement (i.e. paid media coverage not counted as advertising) that leaves the impression of an authoritative opinion, intended to influence public opinion and people's attitudes.

This is important in the framework of the refugee crisis because these politicians and media are ready to promote pro-Kremlin narratives of the refugee

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[16] **Turkey's Erdogan threatens to release millions of refugees into Europe over criticism of Syria offensive**. 2019**. –** CNBC News, published October 10. https://www.cnbc.com/2019/10/10/turkeys-erdogan-threatens-release-of-refugees-to-europe-over-syria-criticism.html (12.11.2019).

[17] The most famous example being France's National Rally (until June 2018 known as the National Front): **Is the Kremlin financing Europe's right-wing populists?** 2014. – Deutsche Welle, November 29. https://www.dw.com/en/is-the-kremlin-financing-europes-right-wing-populists/a-18101352 (21.11.2019).

[18] **Vojtíšková, Vlada** *et al*. 2016. The Bear in Sheep's Clothing: Russia's Government-Funded Organisations in the EU. Wilfried Martens Centre for European Studies (Research Paper), July. https://martenscentre.eu/sites/default/files/publication-files/russia-gongos_0.pdf (21.11.2019).

[19] **Russian Social Media Influence: Understanding Russian Propaganda in Eastern Europe**. 2018. – RAND Corporation. https://doi.org/10.7249/RR2237 (21.11.2019). [**Russian Social Media Influence** 2018]

problem[20]. Against the background of increasing numbers of refugees, radical movements are also becoming more active, and their numbers are growing steadily as the rhetoric of far-right politicians fuels anti-refugee sentiments. Thus, the activities of right-wing extremist groups may be considered a destabilising factor in the EU.

5. Resulting Problems

Growing differences within the EU. There have been many disputes among various countries in the process of trying to find solutions to Europe's migration problem. Increasing confrontation among EU member states is one of Russia's most obvious foreign policy goals. For example, Austria, the Slovak Republic, Hungary, Poland, and the Czech Republic have proposed alternative migration quotas, to no avail.[21] Furthermore, the European Court of Justice confirmed the legality of the EU's refugee allocation quotas, dismissing the complaint brought by Slovakia and Hungary that sought recourse from the court to overturn the decision of the European Council.[22] Slovakia has acknowledged the Court's judgment and will therefore not be subject to sanctions by the European Commission.

Turkey's dependence on external aid. The deal concluded between the EU and Turkey in March 2016 does not seem to satisfy Turkey anymore. We have already mentioned Erdogan's blackmailing, and he has threatened that Turkey may reopen the route for 3.6 million refugees and migrants into Europe if it does not receive adequate international support to manage the millions of refugees it has taken in. "This either happens or otherwise we will have to open the gates. Either you will provide support or excuses, but we are not going to carry this weight alone. We have not been able to get help from the international community, namely the European Union," said Erdogan in one of his speeches[23].

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[20] **Russian Social Media Influence** 2018.

[21] **EU targets Poland, Hungary and Czechs for not taking refugees**. 2017. – BBC News, June 13. https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-40259268 (22.11.2019).

[22]   **EU court dismisses complaints by Hungary and Slovakia over refugee quotas**. 2017. – The Guardian, September 6. https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/sep/06/eu-court-dismisses-complaints-by-hungary-and-slovakia-over-refugees (22.11.2019).

[23]   **Erdogan: Turkey could open the gates of Europe to refugees** 2019.

Growing terrorist threat. Nenad Taneski has rightfully claimed that, since the beginning of 2014, there has been an increase in terrorist activities in Europe with the perpetrators being returnees from crisis regions[24]. However, the situation seems to be improving. The 2018 Global Terrorism Index, recently released by the Institute for Economics and Peace, demonstrated that Europe had the most significant year-on-year percentage improvement, with total deaths falling by 75%.[25] The decreased activity of ISIS and other jihadist groups in Europe has occurred alongside significantly stricter counterterrorism and security measures implemented throughout Europe, as well as territory lost in Iraq and Syria.[26] It is difficult to predict if the situation will improve in the near future, but the outlook is positive.

Growing intolerance in Europe. As Nenad Taneski claims, "the EU has failed to create a vision of how people should think about Islam in Europe, or to differentiate the terms such as 'refugees' and 'settlers' from 'terrorists' and 'criminals'".[27] The fundamental human right to asylum is upheld poorly, and one of the possible reasons is that communities perceive asylum seekers as a threat.[28]

Increasing crime rates. Germany is an excellent example of this trend. According to the annual report of the German Ministry of the Interior, there were 27 murders (either committed or attempted) by illegal migrants in 2017. In contrast, the German far-right party Alternative for Germany (AfD) has claimed that illegal migrants were responsible for 447 murders or attempted murders. However, national police statistics indicate that this number applies to all asylum seekers and refugees who are in Germany legally.[29] What is

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[24] **Taneski, Nenad** 2016. Hybrid Warfare: Mass Migration as a Factor for Destabilization of Europe. – Contemporary Macedonian Defense / Sovremena Makedonska Odbrana, Volume 16, Issue 30, pp. 73–84. [**Taneski** 2016]

[25] **What the Global Terrorism Index results mean for Europe**. 2018. – Vision of Humanity [The Institute for Economics and Peace]. http://visionofhumanity.org/news/global-terrorism-index-results-mean-europe/ (12.10.2019).

[26] **Global Terrorism Index 2018**. Measuring the impact of terrorism. Institute for Economics & Peace. November, Sydney. http://visionofhumanity.org/app/uploads/2018/12/Global-Terrorism-Index-2018.pdf (15.10.2019).

[27] **Taneski** 2016, p. 83.

[28] Chapter **"European Union"** in **Human Rights Watch 2019. World Report 2019 – Events of 2018**. https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2019/country-chapters/european-union (21.11.2019).

[29] **Police Crime Statistics Report 2017**. 2018. Bundeskriminalamt (Federal Criminal Police Office of Germany). https://www.bka.de/EN/CurrentInformation/PoliceCrimeStatistics/2017/pcs2017_node.html (12.11.2019).

more, the overall crime rate in Germany is on the decline, reaching its lowest level since 1992. At the same time, crime among migrants has increased. An analysis of statistics by the government of Lower Saxony, which ranks fourth in the number of refugees accepted, indicates that between 2014 and 2016, violent crimes increased by 10.4%.[30]

6. Conclusions

Weaponised migration occurs when a challenger – a state or a non-state actor – takes advantage of large-scale population movements – either voluntary or forced – to achieve political, military, and/or economic objectives. Russia and Turkey are the main beneficiaries of the weaponisation of migration. Russia's main objective is to weaken the EU and reap the resulting geopolitical benefits, whereas Turkey is seeking to extract more financial resources and – even more importantly – acquiescence for its activities against the Kurds.

The geopolitical benefits arising from the weaponisation of migration may not be immediately obvious since they are the kind that will bear fruit in the long-term. However, it is quite clear that refugees pose a challenge to the existing social, labour, and security environment in EU countries. What is more, in some cases these processes have led to increased intolerance and anger, as well as appeals to close borders and retreat into isolation, even if just to avoid facing these challenges. As a result, far-right political movements (often sponsored by Russia, e.g., National Rally in France) have recently enjoyed an upsurge of electoral success in several EU countries. However, we must also bear in mind that democratic values – the values of freedom and human rights – are the ultimate target of these hybrid attacks and general animosity, with the refugee crisis exacerbating underlying feelings of insecurity, fear, and xenophobia.

The typology developed by Greenhill covers seven types of weaponised migration – coercive, dispossessive, exportive, economic, the fifth column, militarised and political. This typology seems to provide a suitable methodological framework for further analysis of this problem. We must admit that the two principal beneficiaries discussed in this paper – Russia and Turkey – have very different strategic goals, which also means that they

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[30] **Проверка фактов: правда ли, что преступность в Германии растет за счет мигрантов?** – BBC News, 13.09.2018. https://www.bbc.com/russian/features- 45515756 (15.10.2019) [English version: **Reality Check: Are migrants driving crime in Germany**? – BBC News, 13 September 2018. https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-45419466].

employ different sub-types of weaponisation. When seeking solutions to these challenges, it is crucial to understand the differences between the types of weaponised migration and to be aware of the roots of the problems caused by forced population movements.

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