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KSENIA ATAMALI. NORTH AFRICA: MUSLIM MIGRATION TO EUROPE AND THE IMPACT OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC. Condensed Abstract.

Keywords: international migration, Maghreb, Europe, socio-economic development, integration of migrants, Muslim diasporas, terrorism, pandemic; COVID-19, radicalization, threats.

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T.I. Tyukaeva, PhD(Politics), Center for the Middle East Studies, [1] examines the problem of migration from the Maghreb countries to Europe. The author points out that the uncontrolled

flows of migrants are the source of major external and internal challenges for Europeans with regard to strengthening border security, combating illegal migration, as well as the issue of socio-economic and cultural integration of migrants. According to many studies on the problem of immigration from Arab countries to Europe, the major challenge for Europe is not illegal immigration itself or some associated risks, but the problem of integration of the descendants of immigrants, i.e. European citizens, whose connection with the Arab and Muslim culture is often a formality.

The author notes that Europe is a traditional destination of migrants from Morocco, Algeria and Tunisia. The Arab Spring and the subsequent military, political, social and economic destabilization in the Maghreb countries triggered a surge of migration (illegal, in particular) to Europe and an increase in the number of Libyan refugees. The migration crisis peaked in 2014–2017 when 170–180 thousand of illegal migrants from Libya annually arrived in Italy. Against the backdrop of yet another round of armed conflict, smugglers intensified their efforts to transport illegal migrants from African countries across the Libyan borders. In 2018, illegal migration flow from Libya dropped by 86 percent due to strengthening border control and coast guards. Other directions of illegal migration also became more active. Thus, in 2018, there was a sharp increase of migration directed towards Spain, mainly from Morocco; steps were taken to strengthen border controls. In 2020, illegal migration flow increased once again; for example, the number of people who arrived in Italy throughout the year tripled compared to 2019, reaching 34 thousand immigrants. Most of the migrants were Tunisian citizens, followed by Libyans and Algerians in second and third place, respectively. Spain also recorded a surge in migration, although not as dramatic as in Italy.

European coast guards and navies, in cooperation with the countries of the Maghreb, deported a significant number of migrants back to their homeland. The notably successful

European policies to combat irregular migration have resulted in plummeting of annual arrivals after 2017–2018, save for a surge in 2020. However, the number of irregular migrants from the countries of the Maghreb is extremely small compared to the number of those who arrive legally and subsequently receive a residence permit. Thus, in 2011–2017, over 545 thousand Moroccan citizens received residence permits in Europe, while only a little more than 16 thousand illegal migrants arrived during the same period.

The author points to the fact that a decrease in the number of migrants who actually reach Europe does not mean that fewer people aspire to relocate to the EU. Thus, migration flows will undoubtedly increase in the future, but a repeat of the mid-2010s crisis is highly unlikely.

In discussing the causes of migration from the Maghreb countries, the author draws attention to the fact that migration from Morocco, Tunisia and, to a lesser extent, Algeria is a historically and economically grounded phenomenon. The first agreements on labour migration between the Maghreb and certain European states were signed in the 1960s. Thousands of labour migrants arrived in Europe annually, making up for a shortage of low-skilled workers in the receiving countries and thus easing pressure on the economies of the Maghreb countries with traditionally high unemployment rate. Despite work visas restrictions, the flow of legal migration from the Maghreb countries has been steadily increasing. Over the last decade, there has been an increase in the share of highly skilled migrants and students.

The author notes that the seasonal and cyclical migration of Maghrebis is gradually becoming permanent. Aside from ‘family reunions’, a significant number of temporary workers arriving in Europe prefer not to return home after their work visas have run out. According to the 2020 opinion polls there is a significant share of those wishing to leave their homeland, especially among the youth. Polls show that 47 percent of Tunisians and 31 percent

of Moroccans aged 18 to 29 are willing to emigrate; the figures are slightly lower in Algeria and Libya, i.e. 23 percent and 21 percent respectively. Moreover, about 40 percent of the respondents are considering illegal emigration. The main reason for emigration is socio-economic grievances. Traditionally high unemployment rate in the Maghreb countries have been increasing over the past few years, especially among young people, rising to 22 percent in Morocco, 29.5 percent in Algeria and 36.3 percent in Tunisia at the beginning of 2020. The share of unemployed university graduates is also increasing, and so does the rate of informal employment. Thus, a considerable share of the population of the Maghreb countries is either unable to find a job, or is forced to eke out a living in conditions of financial instability and social insecurity, working in the informal sector. All this leads to marginalization of the population, with the highest marginalization rates concentrated in rural areas, which lag behind cities in terms of development. In turn, marginalization either radicalizes people or makes them emigrate or both.

The author emphasizes that both low-skilled workers and highly qualified professionals are paid extremely low wages. Consequently, people travel to Europe in hope of a decently paid job. Most migrants refer to the success of their friends or relatives as an incentive to emigrate. As for low-skilled cyclical migrants, they make decent money in Europe and start a stereotype of seeing emigrants as the winners. A vast number of Maghrebis choose seasonal migration, but as many people have no intention of returning home, not least because of the systemic political and economic crisis.

In addition to economic, military and political challenges, climate change may also give rise to migration over the medium term; the average annual temperature is rising and precipitation decreases, causing a shortage of water resources, which in turn would hit most sectors of the economies of the Maghreb countries and reduce quality of life of people living there. By 2040, Libya, Morocco, Algeria and Tunisia will be among the most water-scarce

countries; at present, however, large parts of the population of the Maghreb (from 40 percent in Algeria to 80 percent in Tunisia) lack regular access to water. Thus, the underlying causes pushing Maghrebis to migration are complex and will not disappear in the foreseeable future.

The author believes that a pressing need makes most of the migrants relocate to Europe, although on rare occasions radical elements may enter Europe with the flow of migrants.

Migrants from the Maghreb typically choose countries with traditionally large Moroccan, Tunisian and Algerian diasporas, i.e. France, Belgium, the Netherlands, Italy, Spain and Germany. Despite programmes for social integration, immigrants and their children and grandchildren born in Europe are perceived by Europeans as 'outsiders'. Islamophobic attitudes in Europe merely serve to further aggravate the situation, since Islam is often perceived as alien to European values. However, Arab and Muslim cultural background is not always an integral part of the identity of immigrants and their descendants. It should be noted that marginalization is most noticeable at the ethno-cultural level. According to a Paris study, successful second-generation immigrants from the Maghreb are often shunned by the French only because of their non-European looks and name. As a result, many members of migrant communities stay in areas densely populated by immigrants, hampering integration.

The author draws attention to the fact that social and cultural rejection by Europeans, coupled with an acute sense of injustice, may trigger an identity crisis among the children of migrants, causing them to feel alienated from both European and Arab culture. All this nurtures radicalization of young members of migrant communities, who are highly susceptible to Islamist propaganda. The author cites Olivier Roy, a French political scientist, who argues that today 'Islamization of radicalism' seems to take place, where Islam serves as an 'ideological framework' for a global protest against both European and Arab

Islamic societies. Descendants of migrants who are at odds with the law are most likely to use Islamic doctrine to justify violence.

The author concludes that the major challenges to European internal security are not those brought about by a large-scale flow of illegal migration, but those caused by alienation of a significant share of migrant diasporas. For example, according to a 2020 poll carried out in France, 57 percent of young Muslims believe that Sharia law overrides the laws of the Republic. This indicates their inevitable radicalization and provides a breeding ground for the activities of Islamist organizations.

Yu.S. Kolesnikova, PhD(Economics), the Institute for Demographic Research RAN, and S. Boudjenah, Kazan Federal University [2] study the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on international migration and associated threats. The authors present an overview of migration from North African countries, listing Algeria, Egypt, Libya, Morocco, Sudan and Tunisia as transit countries and the source of the migrant flow from Africa. Most emigrants from Algeria, Morocco and Tunisia settle down in Western Europe, while emigrants from Egypt, Libya and Sudan head for Western Asia.

The authors note that the number of international migrants has increased over the past five decades, growing from 153 million in 1990 to about 272 million in 2019. North Africa accounts for 9.4 percent of the total number of international migrants.

Turning to the subject of COVID-19, the authors emphasize that countries all over the world are striving to cope with the economic crisis caused by the pandemic. UNDESA expects a contraction in the global economy by 3.2 percent and a reduction in growth rates in North Africa to 1.8 percent. The possible economic revival depends on whether the measures taken by governments are successful.

The North African economies are influenced by the COVID-19 pandemic in two main areas. First, there is a slowdown in economic activity because enterprises are being

shut due to the pandemic and hundreds of thousands of people are losing their jobs. Tourism and transport are the hardest-hit industries in North Africa, with disrupted supply chains affecting manufacturing. Second, there is a drop in world prices for commodities, primarily oil and gas, resources of great importance for countries that heavily depend on oil. In March 2020, fuel prices plummeted by almost 50 percent, dealing a huge blow to the economies of Algeria, Libya and Sudan. Being employed in critical sectors, migrants proved to be the most vulnerable group affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. According to the UN, migrants make up at least 4.5 percent of the population in twelve out of those twenty countries with the highest number of confirmed coronavirus cases, and in eight of these countries the share exceeds 10 percent. About 20 percent of North African immigrants live in relative poverty in the OECD countries in comparison to Europeans. Poor living conditions and overcrowding add to the risk of contracting COVID-19.

The authors point out that labour markets in North Africa suffer from particularly high rates of labour underutilization, which has a clear gender dimension. Overall, 40.1 percent of women encounter some form of labour underutilization compared to 19.7 percent of men. In addition, there is a small chance of remote work for migrant workers, since in most cases they are involved in such areas of work where it proves to be impossible. Migrants, especially temporary and illegal workers, often have very limited access to social security systems, including health care. Moreover, immigrants with an insufficient command of the language spoken in the host country may find it difficult to understand information updates on COVID-19.

Discussing the health care in North Africa as a whole, the authors conclude that the subregion is unable to cope with the rapid spread of the COVID-19 pandemic. Healthcare systems in North Africa are inadequate, have a shortage of staff and hospital beds. The COVID-19 pandemic has revealed the weaknesses of the social security and healthcare systems, emphasizing the

necessity to step up the efforts to halt the spread of COVID-19 after the gradual lifting of restrictions.

In social terms, the most vulnerable categories of people – illegal and low-skilled workers, young people and women – are at risk. The loss of jobs and income makes social imbalance within the country only worse. The leadership of the countries are working to avoid the collapse of the economy, providing financial support to enterprises and workers.

In conclusion, the authors reiterate that migrants are especially vulnerable to the risk of contracting COVID-19, since they work and dwell in crowded places. Several studies in a number of countries have shown that migrants are at least twice as likely to contract COVID-19 as local residents. Mobility also is not bouncing back to its earlier level for some time due to low demand for labour force, restrictions on movement and widespread teleworking.