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The Balkan migration route following the closure of the Hungarian-Croatian border

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Overnight between 16 and 17 October, Hungary refused to accept migrants from Croatia, thus closing the immigrant transfer corridor to Austria and onwards to Germany. As a consequence, the Croatian authorities began to transport migrants to checkpoints on the border with Slovenia. At first, Slovenian government attempted to accept only 2,500 people daily, referring to Austria's decision to limit the number of migrants crossing the border with Slovenia to 1,500 people daily (this information has been refuted by the Austrian Ministry of Internal Affairs). The Slovenian side lifted these restrictions under strong pressure from the migrants. In effect, around 21,000 migrants entered Slovenia between 17 and 20 October.

Commentary

- The Hungarian government claims it has shut the 'migration corridor' due to the European Council's failure to pass decisions on 15 October that would have helped patch the porousness of the Greek-Turkish border. Hungary has succeeded in blocking the flow of migrants by shifting the burden of receiving them on its neighbours. According to Budapest's calculations, the parliamentary election in Croatia scheduled for 8 November may also play a certain role. The Hungarian government has openly voiced its support for the opposition right-wing Croatian Democratic Union (HDZ). Since the closure of the border, the left-wing government, which has not concealed its dislike of Hungary, will find it more difficult to handle the migration crisis, and this will play into the hands of the coalition focused around HDZ ahead of the election. However, it cannot be ruled out that Hungary's policy will have the opposite effect and will cause a consolidation of the ruling parties' electorate.
- Since Hungary's decision, the wave of migration is backed up in Serbia, Croatia and Slovenia, and the already bad situation in the places with a high concentration of migrants has become even worse. The countries located along the Balkan migration route have made unilateral attempts to restrict in the influx of refugees by reducing the number of migrants accepted at the official border checkpoints and by making the border outside the checkpoints less permeable. The Slovenian parliament vested the army with additional powers on border protection for three months. The governments of Croatia

and Slovenia have appealed for the European Union's support, and are not ruling out that border fences will be built. However, more effective control of the unguarded border sections should not really be expected. Increasing numbers of people may try to cross the border outside the routes set by the state authorities.

- Distrust has been growing and co-operation has been deteriorating between the countries in the region. They fear that Germany could impose limitations on the number of migrants its accepts, meaning that they would have to offer shelter to thousands of people. There are already 11,000 people staying in camps in Slovenia and around 2,500 in Croatia. As a consequence of this, the governments of individual countries are making efforts to take migrants to the borders with neighbouring countries as soon as possible and often without consulting their neighbours. This is causing additional tension in bilateral relations.
- Migrants are not discouraged by the new impediments on their route via the Western Balkan countries. The number of people arriving in Greece has recently increased significantly – to 7,000 daily (around 4,500 in September), which is most likely the result of their desire to reach Europe before the winter season and probably also of their fear that EU member states, especially Germany, might adopt a stricter migration policy.