

# UNRAVELING THE REFUGEE SYSTEM:

## BORDERING, RESCALING AND GOVERNANCE IN BULGARIA



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Unraveling the refugee system:  
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## Preface

When I started my master in 2014 my interest in the refugee issue in Europe got sparked by an article in De Groene Amsterdammer. A few months later I found myself in Bulgaria doing research while in Europe the refugee issue became a crisis. Like every thesis, the writing process hasn't been without setbacks and difficulties: finding an internship and moving to a country I knew nothing about was an interesting challenge. The process of finishing was long, but I learned so much. About myself, about Bulgaria and about the most interesting social phenomenon: borders.

There are some people who I would like to thank: without these people my research would not have been possible. First of all, my supervisor Olivier Kramsch: thank you for all your guidance and wise words during the writing process and also for all your patience and reassuring words when I doubted that I would ever end up in Bulgaria. I also need to thank you for unlocking the amazing world of borderstudies: I'm forever fascinated. Lilia: thank you for being my friend, my guide, my source of information as well as being my roommate in Sofia. Your hospitality was heartwarming and made my stay in Bulgaria amazing. I also want to thank Shubhash Wostey and all the other colleagues at the UNHCR in Sofia: you showed me the way in the Bulgarian refugee system. Julius, Iris thanks for the endless stream of coffee and libraries. Thanks to my family, friends and Reinier for supporting me in all my decisions. And all the men and women I have interviewed in Bulgaria, who shared their insights, opinions and sometimes friendship with me, without you I would not have been able to write this thesis.

To Rodi and Ahmed: that you may find a peaceful life.



## Table of contents

Preface	V
Table of contents	VII
1. Introduction	1
2. Theoretical Background	5
2.1 Borders are everywhere	5
2.2 Rescaling of the Nation State	9
2.3 Governance: the sharing of power	10
2.4 Linking rescaling and governance with issues of bordering	11
2.5 Encountering diversity	12
3. Research Methods	15
3.1 Methodology	15
3.2 Internship and volunteer work	15
3.3 Fieldwork	16
3.4 Language	18
4. The refugee system in Bulgaria	19
4.1 Bulgaria as a country	19
4.2 The refugee issue in Bulgaria	20
4.3 The refugee system in Bulgaria	21
4.3.1 The international refugee regime	21
4.3.2 Role of governments	24
4.3.3 Non-governmental organizations	25
4.3.4 Civil society	27
5. Bordering at the Bulgarian borders	29
5.1 The physical border and the government	29
5.2 EU support	33
5.3 Organizations at the border: Lobbying and monitoring	35
5.4 Refugees	37

5.5 Economic opportunity: corruption and smuggling	37
5.6 Local citizens	40
5.7 Returning to the theory	43
6. Bordering throughout the Bulgarian society	45
6.1 Government and politics	45
6.2 Media	47
6.3 Society	48
6.4 Counter-bordering by the UNHCR	50
6.5 Local initiatives: NGO's and civil society	51
6.6 Governance within the refugee system	55
6.7 Returning to the theory	57
7. Bordering though integration	59
7.1 Integration policy in Bulgaria	59
7.2 Other reasons for the lack of integration	62
7.3 Integration without the support of the state	63
7.4 Returning to the theory	65
8. Conclusion	67
Bibliography	71



## 1. Introduction

During the summer of 2015 the amount of people entering Europe reached unprecedented heights. It seemed like every day some new crisis was happening. From Hungary building a fence, to debates within the European Union about quota systems and from attacks at refugees shelters in Germany to thousands of refugees stuck in no man's land between Greece and Macedonia. What refugees and unwanted migrants show is global inequality at the local level. This disturbs the image of a harmonized society and raises issues about how to deal with these 'modernity's outcasts' (Trubeta, 2015). Migration and (European) borders never seemed more pressing and the granting of asylum, formerly a humanitarian and apolitical act, has never been so politically charged as in this time. (Lester, 2005)

One of the European external borders is the border between Bulgaria and Turkey. Everyday many refugees are trying to enter Europe by crossing this border and in recent years the amount of people grew enormously. In 2012 Greece build a fence along their land border with Turkey, a success story in the EU considering that the influx of people was reduced drastically (Smouters, 2014). But the migrants did not magically disappear. They just moved up a bit to the border between Turkey and Bulgaria, resulting in a huge increase in people entering the EU through Bulgaria in the last half of 2013. Bulgaria, being one of the poorest countries in the EU, was definitely not ready to cope with this. Since that time Frontex became active in Bulgaria, even though Bulgaria is not yet a Schengen country. The building of a 30 kilometre long fence was completed at the end of 2014 and this fence is planned to expand to cover around 160 kilometre of the border between Bulgaria and Turkey (Novinite, 2015).

The sudden increase in refugees crossing the border took Bulgaria by surprise. Did Bulgaria receive not more than 1000 refugees a year in the years before 2013, in the fall of 2013 this number grew to thousands a month. The system got overcrowded, there was no place to house the many people coming in and as a result the conditions in the shelters were horrible. In the beginning of 2014 the UNHCR called for an emergency status. The situation stabilized after the first months of 2014 and the emergency status was revoked, but many problems stayed. Conditions in the shelters are now bearable but not good, there is no integration program, rights get violated because the government does not seem to be capable to really improve its system and the refugee situation impacts the Bulgarian society (Amnesty International, 2014).

This research will focus on how Bulgaria handled the refugee crisis of 2013 and is still handling the situation. What happened in that autumn of 2013? The Bulgarian government was not able to cope with the situation and society stepped in. Many NGO's, local as well as international, the UNHCR and Bulgarian activists organized themselves, society and the crisis. And they continue to do so. This research will not focus on the refugees and migrants who enter the country but instead will turn to the system in which they end up. This system, consisting of so many different actors from different scale levels, from inside and outside Bulgaria. How do all these aid workers and journalist, police and politicians, activists and citizens interact, work and cooperate? How do they create the system in which they work? And what is their relation with each other?

The fact that in Bulgaria there seems to be so many different actors involved in the refugee issue fits with the way governments have been changing the past decades. In many European countries there have been a shift from a centralized government to a more decentralized government. The power is moving upwards to supranational levels and downwards to subnational levels (Brenner, 2009). At the same time the amount of actors involved in policy making increased because nongovernmental organizations and private actors were added to the playing field; a shift from government to governance (Kjaer, 2011). Drawing from theories concerning rescaling and governance, this thesis will investigate the multitude of actors involved in borderwork in Bulgaria. When accepting the notion of borders being everywhere, bordering has to be seen as more than only a matter concerning the state. Borderwork also concerns and involves citizens (and non-citizens) and other non-state actors (Rumford, 2013). Borderwork in this sense is carried out by a range of actors creating, shifting and deconstructing the border. These actors like the state, ordinary people, entrepreneurs and civil society (Rumford, 2006) are the actors involved in processes of rescaling and governance. Borderwork is used in this thesis to describe the process of making and negotiating borders in society. It is not only the drawing of the border on the map or in the landscape, it is also very much about the construction of the border in relation to the categories of difference and separation it produces. It determines the criteria of inclusion/exclusion, in this case that of the refugees in Bulgaria (Newman, 2006).

Combining the theories on borderwork with the theories of rescaling and governance and applying them to the refugee situation in Bulgaria leads to the following research question:

*In what way are processes of governance and rescaling in the refugee system influencing the process of bordering in the Bulgarian society?*

This question will be central to this thesis. To gather the data that could provide the answer to this question, a three month fieldwork was carried out in Bulgaria during the summer of 2015. The fieldwork was conducted from within the UNHCR, providing access to all kinds of parts of society concerned with the institutional borderwork.

The aim of the research is to provide inside in the workings of a society when confronted with issues like these. That all sorts of things and processes start happening when something like this refugee issue occurs became visible once again over the course of 2015. With the abovementioned refugee influx overwhelming Europe, a wave of developments concerning non-state actors started happening in many different countries. In Austria local citizens provided food and water at the train stations where the refugees arrived (Independent, 2015). In Germany initiatives were launched to house refugees at homes of citizens (Guardian, 2015). In the Netherlands universities provide access to schooling (NOS, 2015) and even Google got involved by developing a website to provide refugees with information (Volkskrant, 2015). The issue of non-state actors getting involved during a crisis situation is relevant more than ever and deserves attention from the academic world. This thesis tries to contribute to this debate in providing a case study example.

The first part of this thesis explores the theoretical background. It dives into the theories of borderwork, rescaling and governance. In the third chapter there will attention for the methodological side of the research. The fourth chapter will elaborate on the case of Bulgaria and

provide background information about the country and the situation against which the research has taken place, but also will focus on the different actors involved in the refugee system. The three chapters that follow will be dedicated to the presentation and interpretation of the data gathered during the fieldwork. They will focus on bordering at the physical border, bordering at the borders in society and on the specific issue of integration. The final chapter will draw conclusions based on the fieldwork and the theoretical foundation and will provide an answer to the research question.



## 2. Theoretical Background

The following chapter will elaborate on the theoretical background of this thesis. It will provide inside in the different theoretical concepts that were used throughout the research. In the first section of this chapter it is stated that borders are everywhere, but that they are never static. They are found throughout society and are constantly redrawn by everyone. The process of borderwork is a negotiation between different actors in society. That the importance of these actors changed in the past decades becomes clear in the second section of this chapter, in which the concepts of governance and rescaling will be examined. To use these concepts as a way to understand the process of bordering their entanglement is made clear in the third section. The chapter will finish by exploring a theory on how societies handle diversity, to better understand the reaction of the (Bulgarian) society.

### 2.1 Borders are everywhere

Even though we live in a globalizing world, borders remain important. Borders are no longer only seen as lines enfolding a territory. Borders are found everywhere throughout society. This is part of Balibar's notion of diffuse borders. People cross many different borders in everyday life (Anderson & O'Dowd, 1999) (Rumford, 2006). An example is the way border controls are not only taking place at the territorial limits anymore, but increasingly at different points in society. This leads to a sort of privatisation of border security when states ask their inhabitants to check passports at hotels, internet cafés and airlines (Rumford, 2006). The presence of borders throughout society has resulted in a world where people are accustomed to borders; experiencing them as part of their daily life with new borders being constructed everyday while others are erased. At the same time they expect that borders are things that can be crossed and negotiated. The crossing of borders has become a routine part of our daily lives (Rumford, 2008) and it is becoming more and more easy to cross them, making borders almost non-boundaries. An example are the inner borders of the European Union. At the same time the awareness of the 'hard' borders on the outside of the EU grows with the establishment of organizations like Frontex, even when they are increasingly failing to keep the 'unwanted', like illegal migrants, terrorists and traffickers, out (Rumford, 2006). The European land borders are becoming increasingly important when the ways to access Europe are being limited by visa regulations and airport controls. Land borders are becoming highly securitized but offer the best chance of entering (Rumford, 2006).

Not every border is alike, in fact every border is different and is of different significance, making them more or less easy to cross. This meaning and significance of borders changes overtime (Anderson & O'Dowd, 1999). Also, borders are experienced differently by different people, because borders do not treat everyone the same way. How we experience and think about borders depends very much on our personal circumstances (Rumford, 2006). Borders have increasingly become asymmetrical: they are allowing certain goods and people to cross while restricting the movement of others. Take for example Frontex, for European citizens Frontex is a way Europe responds to the threat of illegal migrants, but for Africans Frontex represents an insurmountable barrier. Borders can be barriers and borders can be gateways depending on who you are. They protect but also imprison, they provide contact and conflict, co-operation and competition (Anderson & O'Dowd, 1999)

(Rumford, 2008). This is in line with the traditional function of borders; being barriers and protecting what is inside (Newman, 2006).

Contemporary border studies perceive borders as socially constructed: there are no natural borders. Though it is possible that the construction of borders is made easier because of certain characteristics that can be used as cut-off points. Those can be geographical (mountains, rivers etc.) but also societal like age groups, religious groups, economic status etc. (Newman, 2003). Borders as social construction are understood as processes, no longer examining boundaries but seeing the border as a verb in the sense of bordering. This bordering, the social construction of borders, focuses on the way borders are made in terms of symbols, signs, representation and stories (Van Houtum, 2005). In the past decades scholars in the field of border studies have reached the understanding that it is not the border per se that affects the daily lives of people, but it is the bordering process (Newman, 2006). This is why some scholars believe that the outcome of the process of bordering should get less attention than the actual process (Newman, 2006, pp. 148). However not every border academic will agree with this statement; many find the outcome of the bordering process, the actual division between the Us and the Them equally or even more important. This research will focus on the process of bordering as well as on the outcome of this bordering process. Border narratives show the meaning of the border for the people who are surrounded by them or are crossing them. They are constructed by the way people perceive and experience the border (Newman, 2006). Seeing borders as socially constructed means that they are maintained by constantly reproducing them through practices and discourses emphasizing the 'other' (Anderson & O'Dowd, 1999). Borders in this sense can be used to create differences between 'the us' and 'the them'. By creating this otherness, identities are constructed: identities for the self and identities projected as the other (Newman, 2003). The other is then perceived as a threat. The fear of the unknown and the 'there' causes borders to exist in our minds and makes us stay at 'our' side of the border (Newman, 2003). Borders can also be seen as places of becoming, rather than places of dwelling. By perceiving the border as becoming, emphasis is placed on the process of borderwork. Becoming means that there is a constant change (Radu, 2010). Focusing on border narratives and the way borders are presented in society through the use of literature, media, maps and art can give us a deeper understanding of borders and the process of bordering. The representation of the borders in society are part of the socialization process through which the us/them divide becomes part of the political, social and cultural imaginations (Newman, 2003).

Some border studies recognize borders as institutions and just as every other institution borders have their own set of rules that determines their behavior, usually resisted to change. Border institutions govern the extent of inclusion and exclusion and the possibilities to cross. To formally change the way the border institutions govern the border, transboundary interaction on the ground of norms and regulations has to be established. Borders separate the self from the other by functioning as a barrier, protecting the inside and permitting the unwanted to enter (Newman, 2003). The process of the demarcation and management of borders is central to the notion of borders as processes and borders as institutions. The process of demarcation determines how the management of the border is put into effect. Demarcation is not only the drawing of the border on the map or in the landscape, it is also very much about the construction of the border in relation to the categories of difference and separation it produces. It determines the criteria of

inclusion/exclusion, in the case of this research it will focus on the way these criteria are constructed in relation to the refugees entering the Bulgarian society. The demarcation process is dominated by the political and social elites who use the construction of borders as a way to order society. The groups who construct this borders also determine the extent to which they can be opened, closed or crossed. Management procedures, like visa regulations and border police, are central to the process in which borders establish control by creating order (Newman, 2006). In our globalizing world economic interest calls for the opening of borders, at the same time the sense of fear for the outside has led to the development of a securitization discourse which calls for the closing of borders. When those two movements clash, it is usually the securitization discourse that dominates, resulting in the (re)closing of borders (Newman, 2006).

In the contemporary global system the capacity to organize space and borders remains a key to power. For example, if you are poor and non- white, borders into the western world are becoming increasingly difficult to cross. The way in which borders are developing within the EU, with more cooperation and with stricter and uniform immigration policies, also shows that territorial borders remain significant and that they are still used to exert power and control (Anderson & O'Dowd, 1999). This is partly the result of the process of securitization that took place after 9/11. The feel of 'being under threat' has resulted in a rebordering of nation-states wishing to keep out threats and better control who enters (Rumford, 2006).

Borders and border regions are the places where the state demonstrates its power over its territory, usually through the security apparatus at the border (Radu, 2010). It are also the places where the sovereignty of the state has to be defended, resulting in a place where state control is strong. At the same time borders are usually far from the centre making it (geographically) marginal places (Anderson & O'Dowd, 1999). A common influence on state borders is globalization: changes in the world in economic, political and cultural fields. Through the continuing rescaling of the state upwards to the supranational and downwards to the subnational level and the emerging system of multilevel governance in which (trans-national) non-governmental organizations have gained importance, state borders change in importance and meaning. Political territoriality has undergone major changes because of these developments (Anderson & O'Dowd, 1999). Even so, borders remain important for state- territoriality, resulting in reluctance of governments to relinquish control of their borders. Pressure from outside (through globalization of from below (through localization), can force them to (partially) hand over this control. This is why it is important to focus on both the bottom up processes of change coming from the ordinary people living in the borderlands and the top down approach and the role of institutional actors which are not only governments actors (Newman, 2003).

When accepting Balibar's notion of borders being everywhere, bordering has to be seen as more than only a matter concerning the state. Borderwork also concerns and involves citizens (and non-citizens) and other non-state actors (Rumford, 2013). Borderwork in this sense is carried out by a range of actors creating, shifting and deconstructing the border. Societal actors are able to redefine and use borders. These actors are the state, ordinary people, entrepreneurs and civil society (Rumford, 2006) (Radu, 2010). The borderwork these actors are involved in, is not only taking place at the edge of the nation-state, but also very much at the borders throughout society. This borderwork is not only about security but is also about creating political and economic opportunities for some while

disempowering others, for example migrants or, in the case of this research, refugees. Thinking about borderwork in this broader sense, allows for a closer examination of who is responsible for changing borders since it is not automatically assumed that it is only the responsibility of the state (Rumford, 2013). Borderwork is therefore very much the business of citizens, of ordinary people. They take part in the constructing and contesting of borders (Rumford, 2008). People who live in border regions not only design their own lives in relation to a border, but are actively involved in borderwork through their lives at this border (Radu, 2010). They help shape the meaning of the border, through for example cross-border relations. This happens while interacting with external factors and the wider geo-political environment (Anderson & O'Dowd, 1999). When accepting the idea that borders are found throughout society, in a way everyone lives in a border region and is therefore involved in borderwork.

There are different ways in which citizens can take part in borderwork. One example is through gated communities. Citizens who, from a sense of fear and insecurity, try to replace the state border with local borders to increase a sense of security. They no longer look at the state to provide this sense of security. The borders they create are asymmetrical: they want protection but also freedom of movement. It allows them to engage with the world on their own terms from a position of safety. A different way citizens can become active in borderwork is through the notion of (global) civil society. People power can have influence on geopolitics and on borders. At the same time some civil society actors aim at eroding borders while others aim at reinforcing or creating borders. Transnational movements work across borders, but do not always have something to do with the actual border work, others do (Rumford, 2008).

Not only civil interest are engaged in borderwork, business interest can also take part. For example through lobbying at EU institutions for rights to certain markets or to get a local product like champagne or Parmaham exclusive production rights (Rumford, 2008).

The idea of borderwork is that bordering is being conducted by actors other than the state. It describes the ways non-state actors engage in the process of bordering. Borderwork is experienced as bordering coming from within society, not as something that is imposed from outside or above, resulting in a welcoming attitude towards border management in order to feel safe and secure and in control. Borderwork in this sense is carried out from bottom up, through grassroot politics (Rumford, 2013).

What a border is, is always contested. Borders are inherently contradictory and ambiguous. This is what makes them such an interesting area of research (Anderson & O'Dowd, 1999). Any border research should take into consideration a few basic questions about the border it is investigating. Questions like: border for whom? Who benefits from the border and who loses? Who are the ones being enclosed? This leads to questions of power and power relations: who is creating the border, who performs the borderwork? Who are the groups in society that desire the border? And what are the decision making and law enforcement processes that enable those groups to enforce the border? (Newman, 2006). These questions are exactly the questions that will be central to this research. How is this process of bordering influenced by processes of rescaling and governance? To be able to answer these questions based on the research in Bulgaria it is important to look closer at power



relations in society. The next sections will focus on how power relations are shifting in the sense of rescaling and governance.

## 2.2 Rescaling of the Nation State

In the last decades a large body of academic literature is produced on the subject of rescaling of the state. In the post-Fordism era scholars have noticed the 'reshuffling of the hierarchy of spaces' (Lipietz in Brenner, 2009, pp. 125). In contemporary capitalism, in which this reshuffling takes place, many processes of rescaling can be detected, like the rescaling of urbanization and the rescaling of capital accumulation. One of the major processes of rescaling is the rescaling of the state in which the role of the state changes and the state power is redistributed (Brenner, 2009). In this 'recomposition of political space' (Keating, 1997, pp. 390), power is shifting from the national level, dominant in the post-war period, to subnational levels as well as supranational levels (MacLeod, 1999). The discourse around rescaling emerged because of the perceived hollowing out of the state that went together with the new way of capitalism. This new way of capitalism resulted in the restructuring of the institutional national level upward to the supranational level and downwards to the local and regional level. This is often referred to as glocalization and is not only happening at the institutional level but is also very visible in the private sector and throughout society. One example of the rescaling upwards is the creation of the European Union, in which member state sovereignty is a continue point of much discussion, with the EU contesting the power of the nation state. Within the EU there is an important role for the region which emphasizes the downward rescaling of the state. The ongoing decentralization in many European states supports this shift even more (Durand & Nelles, 2014).

Through the process of rescaling power is redistributed and new scalar orders are established. Rescaling leads to the formation of new levels of governance and the creation of new institutions who have the legitimacy to act. Rescaling results in the creation of new political and territorial actors and their empowerment (Durand & Nelles, 2014).

Scale can be defined as a hierarchy of spaces, in which those spaces can differ in size and are entangled with each other. A very large number of scales can be identified in society, but only part of them is institutionalized and becomes visible (Jessop, 2005). The creation of new institutions is part of the scalar division of labour. The power moves within a vertical hierarchy of scale. What follows are three levels of scale: dominant, nodal and marginal scales. Which scale is part of which level is determined by the amount of power it can exercise over other scales. Moving up in the hierarchy is made possible by strategically using the specific features of the scale. This results in power struggles called politics of scale, making the hierarchy unstable and subject to change. Marginal scales can become sites of problems and resistances (Jessop, 2005). In the academic literature about the rescaling of the state, there is a lot of debate concerning the importance of the national level. Jessop (2004) applies his relativisation of scale' on this dilemma. He states that in contemporary capitalism the national scale does not hold its dominant position anymore, but this does not mean that now another scale level has become the dominant one. Rather he points to the competition among different scale levels over capital accumulation, state power and identity formation, leading to complex entangled hierarchies (Jessop, 2005)( MacLeod, 1999). The national as a scale level is not hollowed out, but redefined in relation to other scales (Brenner, 2009). Brenner (2003) adds to this

version of the importance of the national, that the national scale actively produces, reproduces and reshapes the landscape in which the rescaling of the global, national and local takes place (Brenner, 2009).

Jessop (2004) signals three trends in the way state restructuring is carried out. The first one, the denationalization of the state, is about the reorganization of state capacity territorially as well as functionally. The destatization of the political system is the second trend and indicates the shift from government to governance, which will be discussed in the next section. It emphasises the increasing importance of non-state actors and public-private partnerships in policy making. The last trend is the internationalization of policy regimes and indicates the global and international context within which states operate and the growing significance those international communities (for example within the refugee regime) play (MacLeod, 1999) (Brenner, 2003). Jessop also stresses that these three trends go hand in hand with counter trends who emerge as a reaction. States try to control the transfer of power to different scales as a counter trend on state denationalization. The emerging meta-governance strategies is a counter trend for destatization; states try to control and supervise the relations with non-state actors. The final counter trend as a reaction to the internationalization of the state concerns the interiorization of international constraints within domestic policy (Brenner, 2003).

### **2.3 Governance: the sharing of power**

When talking about Jessops destatization of the political system, what is meant is the shift from government to governance. This governance can be seen as the changing boundaries between the state and (civil) society (Kjaer, 2011). The past decades a redefinition of the role and functions of the state has taken place. The state is reconceptualized and its relation with the economy and the society has changed. The state is no longer seen as a top-down agency responsible for the common good, but now much more as a stimulator of capable forces within the society. This has given room to a variety of public and private actors, who are now more and more involved in the process of governing (Loughlin, 2007). These changes happened because governments were applying more and more managerialism. Meaning that government tasks were outsourced to the private sector, resulting in a broader range of actors being concerned with governing and public goals (Kjaer, 2011). The retreat of the state implies a shift from government to governance, to self-organized networks of public agency. What arises are the non-territorial forms of political power that are formally independent of state borders. This governance system provides opportunities for new types of policy actors to appropriate policy competencies and resources (Perkmann, 2007).

There are different ways of defining governance. The narrow way can be to define governance as inter-organizational networks between different levels of government and between the government and other actors. There is also a broader definition in which governance refers to the changing boundaries between the state and (civil) society. In this research the broader approach is used because it gives opportunity to explore how different modes of governances, hierarchies and networks can co-exist and how this can bring tension and dilemma's (Kjaer, 2011).

The way governance is structured is not universal, it is structured and restructured differently over time and place. To understand governance structures within a certain nation-state it is important to

understand the context of the political system and the beliefs and traditions of that particular country. The way governance structures work within a country have tremendous effects for policy outcomes as well as for the outcomes of bordering processes. They are no longer the product of the actions of the simple centralized government. Now, they are the product of the interactions between the national government and all kinds of other parties, like local governments, the private sector, the voluntary sector, NGO's and different levels of government, local and supranational (Kjaer, 2011).

These governance and rescaling processes also appeared in the policies of European governments concerning refugees in the past decade. On the one hand at the level of the European Union rules and regulations are drawn up and European states have to comply with these rules. These rules and regulations are part of the Common European Asylum System (CEAS), which was build over the years starting in 1999. The goal of CEAS is to assure that asylum-seekers are treated in the same way in every member state; concerning the asylum process but also concerning reception conditions for example (European Commission, 2014). To help member states in achieving the European standards the European Asylum Support Office was established (EASO). EASO provides information, supports member states and promotes cooperation. On the other hand, states are transferring their responsibilities concerning the care for refugees towards lower levels of governments and other actors like private companies and voluntary and charitable agencies. That these agencies are now charged with the care of the refugees entering the territory of the nation state, is a concrete example of how governance and rescaling works (Dwyer, 2005).

## **2.4 Linking rescaling and governance with issues of bordering**

In the former sections of this chapter three different concepts that are central to this research were further explored. However, to use them in making sense of the data gathered in the research their coherence must be understood. Central to this research is the idea that borders are social constructions and that because of this they are continually negotiated by a myriad of actors. These borders are not only found at the edges of political territories but very much also within societies (Rumford, 2006). These borders are used to create order by constructing categories of difference and separation, usually by political and social elites (Newman, 2006). The construction of these border is called borderwork or bordering: the contesting, (re-)negotiating and drawing of borders by many actors (Van Houtum, 2005). Rumford (2013) uses this broad notion of bordering to point out that it is no longer automatically assumed that borderwork is only the responsibility of the state. Instead political territory has changed with now more (non-governmental) actors involved with borderwork and policy making (Anderson & O'Dowd, 1999). Who these new actors are is partly determined by processes of rescaling and governance.

The shift to multi-level governance structures has resulted in the involvement of a wide range of non-governmental actors in processes of bordering. They are influencing bordering through their involvement in policy making or through their own activism. The boundaries between the state and civil society have changed and is now more entangled (Kjaer, 2011). This, as well, has its effects on bordering processes. Brenner's and Jessop's rescaling of the nation state, with the transfer or elaboration of power to other scale levels than the national influences the bordering process as well. The establishment of an organization like Frontex is an outcome of this process. In a way states seem to have transferred power to a supranational organization.

Rescaling and governance thus seem to influence the bordering process. However we should not forget that at the same time borders are also places where power and politics are contested and negotiated (Kramsch, 2011). These processes should therefore not be seen as linear, rather as intertwined. The aim of this research is to provide a case study example of how these processes are intertwined and how they contest and influence each other. This case study is taking place when a nation state is confronted with diversity coming over their borders. To understand better how diversity is experienced in societies the next section will provide a theoretical perspective on encounters with diversity.

## 2.5 Encountering diversity

When Bulgaria and Europe were confronted with the influx of refugees, many different reactions became visible. Refugees are global inequality becoming visible at the local level. Their presence and images disturb the idea of a harmonized society and raises the question of how to deal with modernities outcast. When extreme social deprivation becomes visible this can lead to different reactions of the immediate environment. Local citizens can spontaneously start to provide aid, especially when local authorities are or seem to be inactive (Trubeta, 2015). Another reaction can be to look away, or to protest the group causing the deharmonization.

To understand what determines the reaction of citizens or a society when they are confronted with diversity the phenomenological approach of Van Leeuwen (2008) can be used. He describes the ambivalence of living with and encountering cultural diversity; in the case of this research the encounter with refugees. Van Leeuwen uses the concept of common sense: the background of automatic assumptions about the social and natural world against which we perceive the world. When encountering cultural strangeness the common sense is challenged. The way in which this challenging of our common sense is experienced is ambivalent; it can be a positive and a negative experience. A positive experience comes from fascination and a longing for different realities, a longing to be part of something that “transcends the individual”, giving meaning to our lives (Van Leeuwen, 2008, pp. 156). An encounter with cultural strangeness can give this meaning because it is not possible to fully grasp and understand the difference. However encounters with cultural difference can also form a negative experience when the difference is experienced as a threat and turns into fear for our own safety. Turning it around it means that people can only experience diversity as something positive when their safety-requirement is met. When the safety requirement is not met, the experience becomes negative. This can occur when the psychological, vital and/or national integrity is perceived to be under threat. The psychological integrity has to do with how much a person's personal identity is dependent from confirmation from a broader context. It is determined by one's confidence about one's own identity. When this is lacking an encounter with cultural difference can challenge the common sense so much that it cannot be experienced as a positive encounter. According to Van Leeuwen the vital integrity is challenged when refugees are experienced or perceived as a threat to vital self-preservation, as an extra competition in the struggle for primary goods, such as housing and jobs. The vital integrity is also under threat when the presence of refugees is linked to crime or (religious) violence. The last sphere is the national integrity. This is perceived to be under threat when there is already a strong nationalistic belief in the country. Refugees are then seen as not belonging and threatening to the nation state. However these three spheres are not something that naturally occurs. They can be manipulated and influenced, the extent

of which progressively increases from the first to the last sphere (Van Leeuwen, 2008). The extent to which an individual or a society as a whole has the feeling to be under threat determines the way they react to refugees entering the country, but this feeling is largely politically manipulated. When encounters with refugees are seen as something meaningful and the focus is on the positive experience, individuals or parts of the society can organize themselves in helping the refugees.



### **3. Research Methods**

This chapter will consist of an overview of the methodological side of the thesis. It will start by explaining which research methods were used and then move on to how these methods were incorporated during the fieldwork and the internship.

#### **3.1 Methodology**

To be able to answer the research question, the researcher chose to use qualitative research methods. Qualitative research methods are usually used to answer questions concerning social structures or individual experiences (Hay, 2010). It is used when researchers want to know how and what meaning people give to their social reality. Doing qualitative research means the researcher has to be open to what is happening in the research field. Therefore literature research is used more as a background not as a way to define the research subjects. These are determined during the fieldwork (Boeije et al, 2009).

During the research different methods of qualitative research were used. The most prominent method was that of participant observation or ethnographic research. The research focused mostly on the social structures of the refugee system in Bulgaria and the ethnographic research method was used to gain insight in this system. During participant observation the researcher does not only observe, she also takes part in and helps out with certain activities, follows people, has many informal meetings and conversations (Boeije et al, 2009). 'The goal of participant observation is being part of the spontaneity of everyday interaction' (Hay, 2010, pp. 245). To be able to really take part in the refugee system the researcher worked as an intern for the UNHCR, which is a central organization in the refugee system in Bulgaria. At the same time she volunteered for a local organization of the refugee system. Both jobs gave many opportunities to not only observe but also participate.

In addition to the participant observation the researcher used a second qualitative method: interviews. A qualitative interview is a way to ask questions about certain topics in a very open way. The respondent gets much room to share his or her own opinions about and views on these topics (Boeije et al, 2009). The interviews were used to gather a broad range of meanings, opinions and experiences of a diverse group of people. During the interviews a topic list was used, however, this topic list was used in a dynamic way throughout the research. During the three month fieldwork period the topic list changed: some questions were skipped, others were added and some were reformulated. The general focus point remained the same but the list was adapted with new insights and to specific respondents (Hay, 2010).

#### **3.2 Internship and volunteer work**

During the fieldwork period of the research the researcher was enrolled in an internship at the UNHCR office in Sofia. Being part of the UNHCR provided much information and access. During the week there was a workspace available in the office which provided not only a good place to work but also much insight into the workings of the UNHCR office in Bulgaria. The use of an UNHCR-email address and the network of the UNHCR colleagues gave access to many actors working in the

Bulgarian refugee system. The UNHCR provided the researcher with letters addressed to the head of the border police and the head of the State Agency for Refugees (SAR) which ensured not only access to all the centers and access to the border areas, it also led to an invitation for an interview with the head of the social department from the State Agency of Refugees. During the internship the researcher traveled twice with colleagues of the UNHCR to the border area with Turkey, made many trips with the UNHCR to different centers in Sofia and traveled also twice with a partner of the UNHCR (Bulgarian Helsinki Committee) to other border areas. The internship at the UNHCR provide much background in the refugee system of Bulgaria and gave many opportunities to check information gathered during the fieldwork with the UNHCR colleagues.

The researcher realizes that being part of an organization like the UNHCR during the fieldwork also created certain barriers. Almost all respondents and informal contacts knew that the researcher was an intern at the UNHCR, they might have seen her as part of the organization. This could have led to answers that respondents thought the UNHCR wanted to hear. How many people gave UNHCR acceptable answers cannot be predicted but based on the critical notes towards the UNHCR some in some interviews, certainly not everyone was impressed by the UNHCR-email address. At the same time the researcher verified information and observations with the UNHCR colleagues this might have led to a certain, UNHCR-based view on the refugee system. In general however, the researcher feels that being part of the UNHCR opened more doors than it closed.

During the fieldwork period the researcher also volunteered one day a week for 'The Refugee Project'. A project that organize many different lessons for children and adults in the reception centers, like music, English, sports, art etc. This gave the opportunity to talk informal to refugees, volunteers and SAR employees in the centers. But it also gave insight in the results of bordering in Bulgaria in the life of the refugees.

### 3.3 Fieldwork

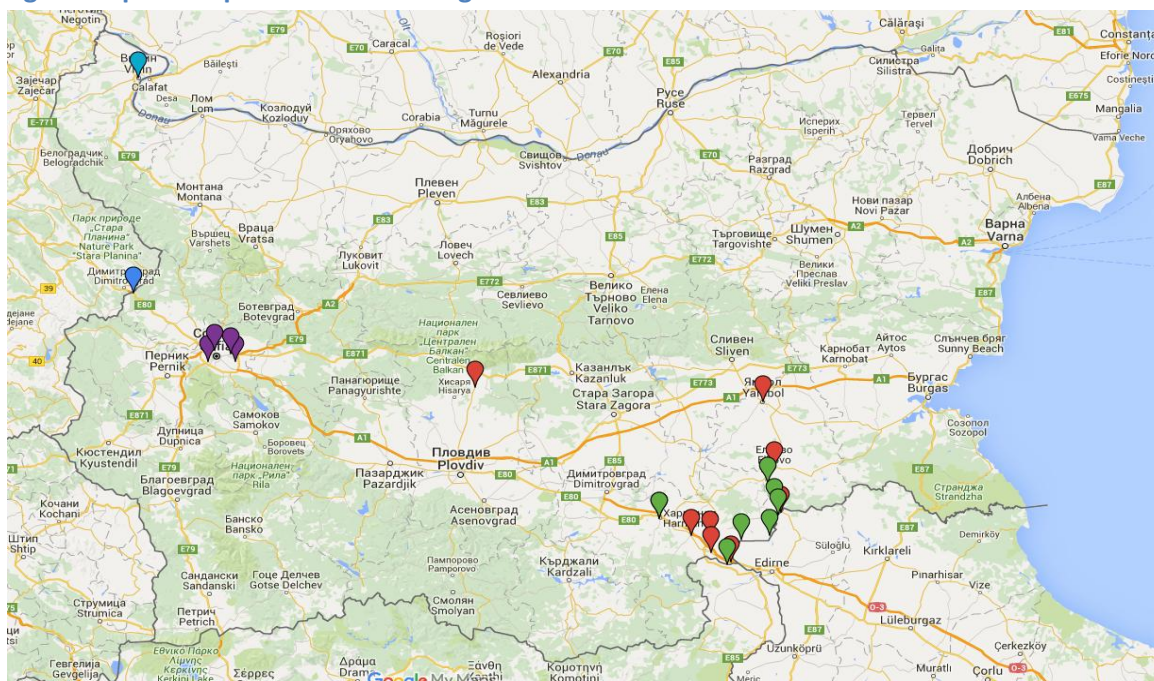
The fieldwork of this thesis took place in Bulgaria between 15 June 2015 and 15 September 2015. The fieldwork consisted of many interviews, fieldtrips to different border regions, volunteering in one of the reception centers in Sofia and numerous (informal) conversations about the research topic with all kinds of people. During the fieldwork 15 interviews were conducted and recorded. Most of these interviews were with the heads of different non-governmental organizations (Table 1). In addition to these official interviews there were many informal and/or spontaneous encounters with different people like border guards, Bulgarian citizens living near the border or living Sofia, Bulgarian and international volunteers, refugees, directors of detention centers and reception centers, SAR employees, Frontex employees etc. These conversations were not recorded due to several reasons. Sometimes it were spontaneous encounters, sometimes it were lunches, dinners or coffee meetings which made it not appropriate to record and sometimes the researcher expected to get more information when the interview was not recorded. All these informal encounters were written down as fieldwork notes immediately after or at the latest the following day. Due to ethical reasons every respondent was given notice about the research and the position of the researcher as an intern for the UNHCR beforehand.



Table 1: List of Official Interviews	
Bulgarian Red Cross	NGO
The Refugee Project	NGO
Caritas Bulgaria	NGO
Council for Refugee Women	NGO
International Organization for Migration	NGO
Foundation Access to Rights BG	NGO
Center for Legal Aid	NGO
MultiCulti Collective	NGO
Journalist	Media
Journalist	Media
State Agency for Refugees	Governmental Agency
UNHCR, Communication Unit	UNHCR
UNHCR, Integration Unit	UNHCR
Citizen in Sofia	Citizen
Citizen in Sofia	Citizen

During the research different fieldtrips were made to different border regions (figure 1). There are two types of border in Bulgaria; exit-borders: a border where migrants try to exit the territory of Bulgaria, and entry-borders: a border where migrant try to enter the territory of Bulgaria. Two of the exit borders were visited: Dimitrovgrad which is the exit border with Serbia and Vidin which is the exit border with Romania, but is also close to the Serbian border. At both these border crossing informal interview were held with the directors of the border police stationed there.

**Fig. 1: Map of the places visited during the fieldwork**



Blue: visits to exit borders, red: visits with UNHCR, green: self-arranged visit, purple: visits within Sofia

(Source: Google Maps/Author)

The entry-border region with Turkey was visited three times (figure 1). The first two times the researcher joined colleagues of the UNHCR on their weekly visits. These visits lasted four days in which different border police stations, reception centers and detention centers were visited. During the first fieldtrip the researcher visited: Harmanli (the biggest reception center in Bulgaria), Lubimets (one of the two detention centers), the border police station in Kapitain Andreevo, the allocation center in Elhovo, the border police station in Elhovo, the physical border and the fence, and the checkpoint Lesovo. The second fieldtrip consisted of a visit to the reception center in Pastrogor, to Sviligrad (border town), to the allocation center in Elhovo and to the reception center in Bayna. These fieldtrips were very useful because of all the places that were visited and the time spend talking with the UNHCR colleagues who could not only explain everything but also translated when they had the time. Being a foreign, female student often helped the researcher in the contact with especially directors from border stations or from the detention and reception centres, who were almost always men. However during these visits there was not much time to go freely out into the border area. The third trip therefore, was made without the UNHCR and with a hired guide/interpreter and lasted two days. During these two days the researcher visited the village of Kapitain Andreevo (where there is an official border checkpoint) and many other smaller villages along the border and the border itself. The second day of this trip the village of Lesovo (where there also is an official border checkpoint) was visited as well as the line of trucks waiting to go into Turkey. The trip ended in the town Harmanli. During this fieldtrip the focus lay on exploring the border area and encountering as much local Bulgarian citizens as possible.

In addition to the visits to the different border region the research took also place in Sofia. The three reception centers and the detention center in Sofia were all visited regularly during the fieldwork. Sometimes with the UNHCR, other times with 'The Refugee Project'. During these visits there were many opportunities to speak to asylum seekers, social workers from the Red Cross and social workers from the State Agency for Refugees (SAR), medical personnel, (deputy-) directors and SAR personnel responsible for registration. In the detention centers (in Sofia as well as the one close to the border with Turkey) the researcher was only allowed into the administrative building, never in the detention facility itself.

### 3.4 Language

The research took place in Bulgaria and for the researcher this was a completely new country. In Bulgaria not many people, especially outside Sofia, speak English. Therefore one must realize that during the research a language barrier was often encountered. Understanding border narratives when you do not speak the language is a difficult task. The respondents either had to speak with the researcher in a, for them, foreign language (for some this was more challenging than for others), or respondents spoke through an interpreter. Due to limited resources the researcher could not hire official interpreters and had to rely on UNHCR colleagues or hired students. However, using Bulgarians to help with the translation also provided the opportunity to directly receive background information of the local situation.

## 4. The refugee system in Bulgaria

Central to this research is the refugee system in Bulgaria. In this chapter background information about this refugee system will be provided as well as an overview of the organizations that are part of this refugee system. However the chapter will start with a short introduction in Bulgaria as a country.

### 4.1 Bulgaria as a country

Bulgaria is a European country located in the southeast part of the Balkans. The eastern part of the country is the coastal area with the Black Sea. It borders five countries: two European member states: Greece and Romania and three other countries: Macedonia, Serbia and Turkey (Figure 2). Bulgaria is a member state of the European Union since 2007 and part of its borders form part of the outer border of the European Union. Bulgaria is not yet part of the Schengenzone, even though it has been a candidate state since 2008 (European Union, 2016). It is one of the poorest country in the European Union with a GDP per capita in 2014 of 5800 euro in 2014 (in comparison the EU-28 GDP per capita average is 27300 euro in 2014) (Eurostat, 2015).

The country has a population of around 7,2 million people; 1,4 million people live in the country's capital city Sofia. Bulgaria is a monoculture society with 76,9 percent of its population being Bulgarian. The two biggest minorities are the Turkish (8 percent) and the Roma (0,7 percent). The net migration rate is -2,89 migrants/1000 population, meaning that more people are migration out of the country than migrating into the country. Bulgaria has a population growth rate of -0,83 percent, meaning that more people die than that there are born. The negative population growth and the negative migration rate in the country result in a declining population (The World Factbook, 2016).

In the past Bulgaria was under Ottoman rule for 500 years and this is still very much present in contemporary Bulgaria. This period is often referred to as the 500 years of slavery. It dictates the relationship with the Turkish minority living in Bulgaria. There was a time during the 1980 that there was an active policy to assimilate the Turkish minority. Many of them were forced to leave the country and flee to Turkey, a country they hadn't lived in for centuries. At that time the border between Turkey and Bulgaria was crossed into the direction of the Turkish side, instead of the direction the flow of people is taking nowadays (Kooijman, 2006).

Fig. 2: Location of Bulgaria



(Source: Google Maps)

**Fig. 3: The old and the new**



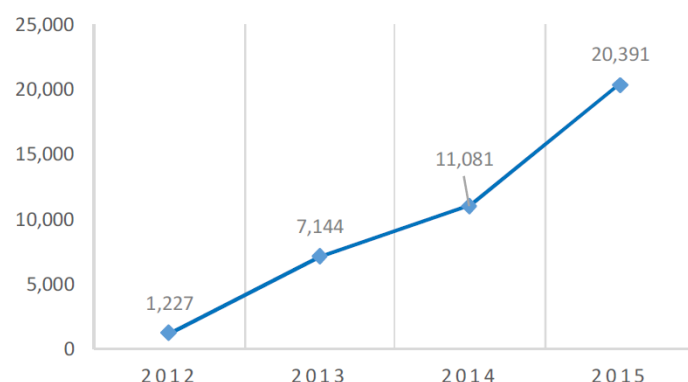
(Source: Author)

After the Second World War Bulgaria was part of the communist bloc and a satellite state of the USSR. During that time the border with Turkey was the external border of the communist bloc, part of the Iron Curtain. Just as today the border was heavily guarded, but with the goal to keep people in, instead of out as it does today. Many people, especially from East-Germany, wanted to cross the border into Turkey then back through Greece into West-Germany. Many of them died in their attempt to cross the border. Parts of this border are still visible in the border area, mostly in the form of watchtowers and old barbed wire fences. Sometimes the old and new fence stand together (Figure 3).

## 4.2 The refugee issue in Bulgaria

Before 2013 refugees were coming to Bulgaria only in very small numbers. From the second half of 2013 numbers started to rise (Figure 4). In October 2013 alone there were 3626 new arrivals. In 2013 a total of 7144 people applied for asylum in Bulgaria in comparison to 1227 applications in 2012. The increase continued with 11081 applications in 2014 and 20391 applications in 2015 (UNHCR Central Europe, 2016). Following the increase in asylum-seekers the UNHCR called for a temporary emergency situation in the first weeks of 2014. The Bulgarian government wasn't able to handle the situation and the UNHCR noted systematic deficiencies in the asylum procedure and the reception conditions. It called for a temporary halt of all transfers of asylum-seekers to Bulgaria under the Dublin regulation. In April the situation was reassessed and many improvements were identified, the UNHCR concluded that the

**Fig. 4: Asylum application history 2012-2015**



(Source: UNHCR Central Europe, 2016)



suspension of Dublin transfers was no longer justified, however they urged other EU member states to conduct individual assessment on whether a Dublin transfer to Bulgaria would be compatible with the states responsibility to protect the individual, in particular individuals belong to vulnerable groups. The situation might have been improved in that first half year of 2014, the UNHCR still saw a lot of concerns in different areas concerning asylum-seekers (UNHCR, 2014).

To handle the increase in arrivals at the Bulgarian territory the Bulgarian government send 1500 police officers to the border with Turkey in November 2013. After that the numbers started to decrease. At the same time preparation started to build a fence from Lesovo to Kraynovo (30km). In their report from April 2014 the UNHCR voiced its concerns about these measures that prevent people from entering. They stated that this way many people in need of international protection do not have the chance to ask for this protection. They also voiced their concern about the 'push-backs' that were happening at the border (UNHCR, 2014). On 29 December 2015 (after the fieldwork was completed) the Dutch news program 'Nieuwsuur' covered the push-back issue in Bulgaria, showing many statements of asylum-seekers and refugees that had experienced the often violent push-backs. In the same item the Bulgarian deputy minister of internal affairs stated that these push-backs are not happening: "I think we are complying with the European rules very well and we are maintaining the external borders of the European Union" (Nieuwsuur, 2015).

In the period after the numbers started to rise the Bulgarian government improved its asylum and refugee system, with the help of many organizations like the UNHCR and EASO. They build/opened new centers and improved the asylum procedure. In 2014 there were seven reception centers with a total of 6000 places (UNHCR, 2014). During the fieldwork one of these centers was already closed, leaving six centers; three in Sofia and three in the area closer to the Turkish border. Even though the circumstances improved much since the crisis moment in 2013/2014, during the fieldwork period there were still many issues going on. Translators for example were a big problems, especially in the centers and border stations outside Sofia, there were not enough and they hadn't been (fully) paid for several months (UNHCR Sofia, 2015a). The same issue was experienced by the medical personal in the center (UNHCR Sofia, 2015b). Asylum-seekers were receiving 65 lev each month, but in the spring of 2015 this 65 lev was canceled, because the State Agency for Refugees (SAR) was providing three meals a day. At the start of the fieldwork in June 2015 this was scaled back to two meals a day (UNHCR Sofia, 2015c).

The above short overview of the refugee issue in Bulgaria formed the background in which the fieldwork was conducted. Many different parties were trying to improve and change the system, for many different reasons. In the next section of this chapter these different actors involved in the refugee system in Bulgaria will be explored.

## **4.3 The refugee system in Bulgaria**

In this section the different actors in the refugee system will be discussed. Every actor group will be first examined from a theoretical standpoint after which the focus will shift to the specific situation in Bulgaria. The actor groups are listed from the highest to the lowest scale level.

### **4.3.1 The international refugee regime**

The first group of actors in this research consist of international organizations. This is a very diverse group of actors and putting them together in the same category feels somewhat artificial. However

they are put together in this category because, as will be argued in this section, they all are part of the regime complexity taking place in and around the refugee regime. Before elaborating on the different organizations, the refugee regime will be explored.

After the Second World War the problem of people fleeing their countries became very pressing. The international community decided to do something about this and in 1951 the convention relating to the status of refugees, known as the 1951 Refugee Convention, was drawn up. In the 1967 an additional protocol defined the way refugees are protected still in the international society today (UNHCR, 2016). According to the first article of the convention a refugee is:

*A person who owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of his former habitual residence as a result of such events, is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it (Convention on refugees, Article 1.A.1, 1951)*

Together with the organization trusted with the responsibility to oversee states' implementation of the Convention, namely the office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the convention forms the refugee regime (Betts, 2010). The refugee regime consists of a set of norms, rules, principles and decision-making procedures, to ensure that refugees receive access to protection. This protection consist on the one hand of a set of rights (political, economic, social) accorded to refugees and on the other hand durable solutions which can be either repatriation, local integration or resettlement. States can contribute to the refugee regime by granting asylum to the refugees on their territories and by burden-sharing, which means helping other states with the refugees on their territories. States are usually complying with the refugee regime for the same reasons why they generally comply with international law: they value the overall existence of the regime and it gives them legitimacy, in the sense that part of being a 'civilised state' is compliance to the long established rules concerning asylum (Betts, 2013).

At the time of its establishment the refugee regime was almost the only institutionalised cooperation concerning human mobility. However since that time many other regimes concerning mobility have emerged, for example the travel regime or the international labour regime. At the same time many other regimes that did not specifically focused on human mobility, but are close to the refugee regime in other ways, also emerged. Examples of these are the human rights regime and the security regime. This institutional proliferation and the increasing range in available forms of international cooperation at different scale levels resulted in a complex and a wide range of actors concerning different aspects of human mobility and refugee protection. When two or more institutions intersect in their scope and purpose this is referred to as regime complexity (Betts, 2010, 2013). Regime complexity can be either a good thing or a bad thing. Some of these other institutions complement and reinforce the refugee regime, others may contradict or undermine. The broad range of different institutions in different international regimes gives states the possibility to be picky about which regime or institution to use; they can chose to approach a certain issue through the institution that best fits their interests (Betts, 2010).

One of the regimes that overlaps with the refugee regime is the travel regime. The overlap becomes particularly visible in addressing the issue of the spontaneous arrival of asylum-seekers. In the most part of the world getting asylum requires the refugee to independently turn up on the territory of a country where they then can make an asylum claim. With the increasing amount of international cooperation in the travel regime, the regulation of the movement across borders has been regulated. In the last decades borders have become highly securitized and new technologies increased border control. One example of this international cooperation in the travel regime is the establishment of Frontex by the European Union. This European Agency for the Management of Operational Cooperation at the External Borders of the Member States of the European Union was established in 2004 to reinforce and streamline cooperation between national border authorities. Frontex promotes, coordinates and develops European border management in line with the EU fundamental rights charter applying the concept of Integrated Border Management and helps border authorities from different EU countries to work together (Frontex, 2016). The strengthening of the travel regime is increasingly making it more difficult for asylum-seekers to reach the territory of, especially northern and western European countries where they can apply for asylum. This is where the travel regime and the refugee regime overlap. By addressing the issue of irregular entry through the travel regime, states are able to bypass the refugee regime and reduce their obligations in this regime. By focusing more on the burden-sharing aspects of the refugee regime states have redistributed the costs without actively negotiating the regime (Betts, 2013).

By determining which actors are involved in the refugee issue in countries, and in this case Bulgaria, means having to look to different international regimes of cooperation and their overlapping fields. Important regimes for this research are the refugee regime, the travel regime and the Human Rights Regime. Actors that emerge from the different regimes are the UNHCR from the refugee regime, the International Organization of Migration (IOM), Frontex and EASO of the travel regime and Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International from the Human Rights regime. Four of the organizations important in the Bulgarian refugee system are explored below.

### *UNHCR*

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees is the organization tasked with the implementation and monitoring of the Convention. It was established in 1950 and is mandated to coordinate international action concerning the protection of refugees and resolve refugee problems worldwide. They are mainly focused on safeguarding the rights and well-being of refugees. The UNHCR especially aims to ensure that everyone can exercise the right to seek asylum and find safe refugee in another state (UNHCR, 2016).

### *IOM*

The International Organization for Migration (IOM) is an intergovernmental organization working in the field of migration established in 1951. The IOM is, according to their mission statement, dedicated to promoting humane and orderly migration for the benefit of all. Their mission is much broader than the mission of the UNHCR. The IOM targets migrants in general, refugees are a subgroup. They work with governments, intergovernmental organizations and non-governmental organization. They give advice to governments as well as to migrants (IOM, 2016). In contemporary

time the IOM mainly plays a role in resettlement programs for refugees and voluntary return programs.

### *Frontex*

In 2004 the European Union established the European Agency for the Management of Operational Cooperation at the External Borders of the Member States of the European Union (Frontex). The aim of the organisation is to reinforce and streamline cooperation between national border authorities. When in 1995 the Schengen convention entered into force, the need arose to streamline cooperation on border controls at the external borders of the Schengen area. The intergovernmental cooperation going on in this area was incorporated into the European framework with the treaty of Amsterdam in 1999. Since that time different steps were taken to strengthen the cooperation in the areas of migration, asylum and security (Frontex, 2016). This was necessary because with the creation of Schengen, internal EU borders became weaker, the need to strengthen the outside borders arose. It became important that border authorities from different member states applied the same set of rules, while preventing any threats to internal security. Therefore, national rules had to come together under the EU legislative framework. The operational coordination of the implementation of the common rules on border control is supported by the establishment of Frontex in 2004 (Mungianu, 2013).

### *EASO*

Frontex was not the only organization established to make sure national regulations from EU member states would come together. In 2010 the European Asylum support office (EASO) was established, an organization focused on the implementation of the common European Asylum System. The aim of EASO is to increase the practical cooperation on asylum matters between member state and to help these member states fulfill their European and international obligations concerning asylum-seekers and refugees (EASO, 2014).

#### **4.3.2 Role of governments**

Even in our globalized world, the nation-state remains one of the most important players concerning policies towards refugees entering the territory of the nation state. However they are influenced by different actors with different demands. The refugee regime for example can pressure governments through diplomatic ways and negative publicity. The population who receives the refugees and is thus the most affected also puts pressure on the government. Another group are the refugees themselves. However, where the refugee regime pressures the government into a positive attitude, the local community can pressure both ways. There will be groups who want their government to stop the influx and there will be groups who want the government to help them welcome the refugees entering their community (Jacobsen, 1996).

Governments can generally respond in two ways when they are confronted with a large influx of refugees entering their territory. They can either prevent them from entering and treat them harshly or they can welcome them and provide them with assistance. When a government does not react to a large influx of refugees this can be a sign that they either lack the capacity to react properly, or are unwilling to react properly. It can also be that they do not consider the issue as important enough. The moment the government comes into action is usually when the government feels the national



security is being threatened or when the amount of refugees is overwhelming the local capacity to deal with the issue (Jacobsen, 1996).

States can have a negative policy in which they try to keep the refugees out, or they have a positive policy in which they let them in. Both policy options of course come in various gradations. For example states who let refugees enter can be very welcoming or only tolerate them. When they keep them out they can build fences and walls or try to direct the refugee influx to neighbouring states. In recent years many of the states who do let refugees enter their territory have moved their responsibilities to care for them to other levels of government or to other actors like the private sector, voluntary agencies and charitable organizations (Dwyer, 2005).

Bulgaria is using different policies to deal with the refugee issue. On the one hand they are securing their border trying to keep the refugees out. On the other hand they have to deal with the refugees that do enter the country. In Bulgaria there is one state institution responsible for asylum-seekers and refugees and that is the State Agency for Refugees. At the borders however the border policy takes on the first care, supported by the army. Also involved, but not really visible is the National Security Agency, who are responsible for the safety of the country.

#### **4.3.3 Non-governmental organizations**

The third group of actors in this research consist of non-governmental organizations (NGO). A non-governmental organization is a 'non-profit, legally constituted organization that operates on behalf of citizens independently from any government' (Gregory, D. et al, 2013). This section provides some background on their theoretical position within countries and within the refugee regime.

The last decades the non-governmental sector concerning refugee protection, as well as the amount of Humanitarian and Human Rights NGO's has expanded rapidly (Lester, 2005). This increase in NGO's is part of the broader process of the restructuring of the welfare state in which many social policies are cut. All over the world NGO's have become responsible in securing social and economic rights for refugees (Sxepanikova, 2010). They are important on all levels of government whether it may be in providing assistance on the ground, helping with the formulation of policy goals and all levels in between, both publically and behind the scenes (Lester, 2005). The growth in NGO involvement in the refugee sector can be linked to several developments. There are states that try to distance themselves from the responsibilities that come with the refugee regime. They find it easier to fund NGO's, making them into subcontractors, for lower cost than that the states could provide these services themselves. Another development leading to the increase in NGO's in the refugee sector is that governments are increasingly failing to comply to the international standards set in the refugee regime because it gives them domestic political advantage. Citizens who are against this trend establish new lobby groups and NGO's to provide the gap in services the governments deliberately create (Lester, 2005). This illustrates also rescaling and governance processes going on in recent years. Governments increasingly try to transfer their responsibility to provide welfare for refugees onto NGO's. They are now charged more and more with the role of care provider, where they used to have more of an campaigning role (Dwyer, 2005). On the other hand, NGO's can only emerge when they are given political space, resources and attention. They can only be part of politics because institutions decide whose voices count, who can mobilize and organize and who can access the policy making process. The state is the key supplier of the rules that govern NGO's, but they

might be hesitant to let them into the political space. NGO's have the power to upset the political status quo, create political uncertainty and generate new sets of political winners and losers. Therefore countries usually have a set of regulatory measures towards NGO's; the way governments use these regulatory approaches varies. On the one hand these regulation shape the behavior of actors in the political space by prescribing, permitting or prohibiting certain actions. On the other hand these regulations can encourage NGO participation by providing them with institutionalized access to political forums and economic resources. The more restricted NGO's are, because of regulations, the less they can do in the mitigation of societal problems (Bloodgood et al, 2014).

Most governments recognize that NGO's are important in communities and that they can achieve results that are hard to achieve for governments or large international organizations. Partly because they usually stand much closer to the communities and partly because they are longer active in these communities (Lester, 2005). Governments can also view NGO's as necessary actors in political processes. For example, they can provide access to information valued by the government (Bloodgood et al, 2014). However there can also arise friction between governments and NGO's because they have different views. Most NGO's work very closely with the communities they represent. Government officials can feel that NGO workers are out of touch with the real political situation, while NGO's state that many civil servants have no idea about what is going on at the ground (Lester, 2005). In some countries the relationship between NGO's and the governments is better than in others, when both sides come to a certain level of respect and trust they can work together, even if they not always agree. Other governments are much less willing to cooperate and go sometimes as far as to prevent criticism on their policies by legislation and other restrictions (Lester, 2005).

Focusing more on NGO's in the field of refugee protection, NGO's can be seen as important actors in the lives of refugees and in the way society sees them. They act as a sort of representative, place themselves in the position of agents for the refugees. They are mediators of individual refugees relations with the state by representing them in court and providing them with information. They organize all sorts of activities to put refugees in a positive light with the public and organize money at the same time. This is strengthened because of the contact point NGO's usually are for media and researchers. They want to counter the dehumanising labels of governmental and media rhetoric. They do so by acting on behalf of the refugees and using their frame of visibility (Sxcepánikova, 2010).

The increase in NGO's working in the field of refugee protection has made them an integral part of the refugee regime. However, because of the diverse work these NGO's do it is impossible to state what their general contribution is. The NGO's work on different area like monitoring, lobbying, assisting and reporting, and have a diverse range of mandates, interests, structures and resources. On an international scale NGO's are coming together in coalitions to try to let their voices be heard in an international context. For example in Europe there is the European Council on Refugees and Exiles, with more than 90 members all working with refugees across the European continent. It gives them a more global reach for their interest group (Lester, 2005) (ECRE, 2015).

In Bulgaria there are many NGO's active in the refugee system. There are the bigger, well-established NGO's with international equivalents like the Bulgarian Red Cross, Caritas Bulgaria and the Bulgarian

Helsinki Committee. These organizations are also partners of the UNHCR. There are also the smaller, local organizations like the Council for Refugee Women, the Refugee Project and the MultiCulti initiative. On the legal front there is the Center for Legal Aid and FarBG (Foundation Access to Rights in Bulgaria).

#### 4.3.4 Civil society

The last actor group concerned with refugee issues is the civil society. As discussed in the theoretical chapter societies can react in different ways to encounters with diversity, depending on factors concerning the safety-requirement (Van Leeuwen, 2008). When encounters with refugees are seen as something meaningful and the focus is on the positive experience, individuals or parts of the society can organize themselves in helping the refugees. The first reaction usually comes from solidarity and when governments fail to deal with the issue. Civil society then can start to mobilize in a more systematic form. Organizing into more professional forms also brings the social activism into the area of laws and rules (Trubeta, 2015).

In Bulgaria the civil society showed both negative as well as positive reactions when confronted with the refugee issue in 2013. Some of the positive, grass-root initiatives still exist today and there are also still many people that want to help and do volunteer work. The Bulgarian Facebook group 'Friends of the refugees' is the most clear example of this.

The workings of the refugee system in Bulgaria will be explored in the next three chapters that are based on the data gathered during the fieldwork. The next chapter will focus on bordering issues at the Bulgarian borders. The following chapter will explore bordering issues in the Bulgarian society and the last data-chapter will describe the specific issue of integration in the Bulgarian society.



## 5. Bordering at the Bulgarian borders

In the next three chapters the data that was gathered during the fieldwork in Bulgaria will be presented and analyzed. This chapter will address the different ways the physical borders surrounding Bulgaria are used by different actors. It will elaborate on the way these different actors carry out border processes. The next chapter will address the way this bordering process also takes place at the invisible borders within the country and the Bulgarian society. The third data chapter will focus on how the Bulgarian government uses integration as a way to border.

As explained in the theoretical chapter, this research sees borders as social constructions that are constantly negotiated by different actors. The visible borders surrounding Bulgaria may not be negotiated in the sense that their geographical location changes, but the meaning of this border and the rules of inclusion and exclusion they follow are indeed subject to the bordering process. This bordering process is carried out by different actors and this chapter will explore many of them.

### 5.1 The physical border and the government

Chapter three gave a general overview of the borders surrounding Bulgaria. This section will elaborate on the border process that is carried out at these borders by the Bulgarian government. The most prominent border concerning the refugee issue is the border with Turkey. Since 2013 many measures have been taken to improve the protection of this border. These include installing an advance border system consisting of a 30 km (and expanding) fence, infrared cameras, motion and seismological equipment and using a high number of border guards (Figure 5). During the fieldwork the fence was visited with the deputy-director of the border police stationed in the town of Elhovo. In their border station there are rooms with many screens, which are monitored 24 hours a day. The whole area surrounding the border in this region is monitored with cameras this way. There is special attention for the Lesovo checkpoint (figure 6). The fence starts very close to this checkpoint. Between the fence and the checkpoint many guards are posted, approximately every 10 meter. The deputy director explained that many asylum-seekers try to cross the border just next to the checkpoint. This is why there are so many guards in this area. When asylum-seekers are detected by the cameras and the control center, it takes about 15 minutes for a border patrol car to reach them, depending on the location. According to this deputy director the fence has been built

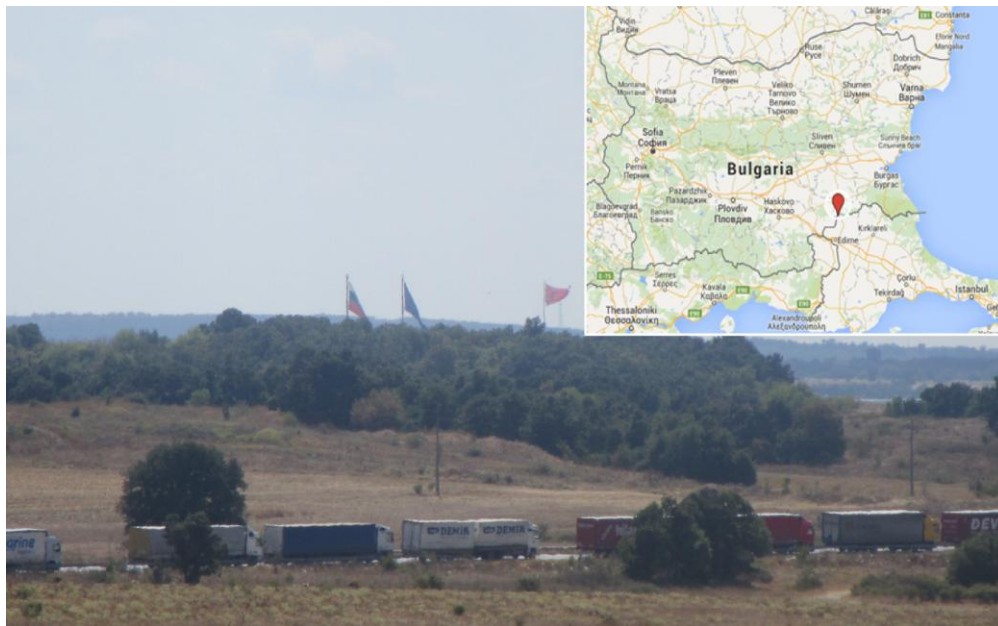
Fig. 5: Modern 'watch'tower



(Source: Author)

because this part of the border is very dangerous and the border police used to spend a lot of the time rescuing asylum-seekers who got lost or injured somewhere in this desolate area. By closing of this part of the border refugees are forced to pass through safer areas. To prevent injuries and accidents the border police works with the Bulgarian Red Cross, who have given the border guards medical training, since ambulances cannot reach all parts of the border. “Our main priority is of course the safety of our staff and of the migrants”, according to the deputy director.

**Fig. 6: Lesovo checkpoint**



(Source: Google Maps/Author)

When the Bulgarian border police spot people trying to reach the Bulgarian border while they are still on Turkish territory, they warn their Turkish partners. The Turkish do not have a border police and use their army for the protection of the border and the gendarmerie for the inlands instead. When the Bulgarians detect movement they call the nearest Turkish regional town during the day and at night they call directly the closest Turkish border station. The responsible person is the mayor of the closest town and he is then responsible for preventing that the spotted asylum-seekers cross the border. The country director of the IOM explains that as part of an IOM project three representative groups consisting of high level Bulgarian, Greek and Turkish border officials were created, in order to improve the cooperation between the three countries on the border issue. “On an annual basis we have several workshops or meetings in Bulgaria, Greece and Turkey on the border regions. This kind of activities, facilitate the process of communication between different border authorities and the capacity of their staff in general” (IOM, 21 July 2015). The cooperation at the Serbian border is much better according to the director of the border checkpoint in Vidin. He explained that they work with their Serbian counterparts on many different issues, for example they have mixed patrols and help out when people get lost in the forest at the border or when livestock crosses the borderline. The cross-border cooperation seems to be much more satisfactory at this border.

At the checkpoints, where cars and mostly trucks enter Bulgarian territory, the border police is very present and visible. Every truck gets checked with special equipment like heartbeat and carbon monoxide detection. It takes 5 to 10 minutes to check a truck which creates a long line of trucks waiting to cross into Bulgaria.

When someone is caught at the border the border police can detain that person for 24 hours. When that person wants to apply for asylum the border police has to screen, debrief and register him or her within this same 24 hours. At the border checkpoint there are almost no translators, so one can imagine that this process is not so easy and cannot be completed within 24 hours. The Bulgarian Red Cross tries to provide food and other supplies for the detainees when their stay is longer than 24 hours. The border police only has funds to take care of them for 24 hours. After the refugee crisis started at the end of 2013 the Bulgarian government opened an allocation center in Elhovo close to the border with Turkey. Since the process of registering them as asylum-seekers cannot be done within the 24 hours the border police can detain them, they are brought to this center to be registered here. The asylum-seekers stay there between 10 and 14 days. This is a closed camp, making it in reality an extension of the detainment. The conditions in the allocation camp are horrible. It is extremely dirty, crowded and there is no privacy at all. Women, children and men are all in one place with only one toilet/bathroom per hallway. The first time the center was visited by the researcher there was an outbreak of hepatitis, which meant that a group of asylum-seekers was placed in quarantine. Because of this they had to stay even longer in the allocation camp than the usual two weeks. After the detainment in the allocation center the asylum-seekers are moved to one of the open centers, called reception centers, where they are registered and stay for the duration of their procedure. Some of the asylum-seekers who already know that their asylum claim is most likely going to be rejected try to escape before they give their fingerprints. An UNHCR-colleague told the story of asylum-seekers trying to escape upon arrival at the open camp, but before registration. They tried to crawl through the windows of the waiting area.

At the border station the men of the Bulgarian National Security Agency are also present. They are responsible for screening asylum-seekers on potential terrorist threats to protect national and European security interest. They operate completely independently, have their own translators (even when the border station does not have any) and are very visible and slightly intimidating. Their presence reveals the fact that this border is highly securitized; which might be expected from an outer European border. Even though this agency is visible at the border station, they are not present anywhere else. No organization, NGO or colleague mentioned them during the fieldwork. They seem to work in a separate world, even though their work concerns the same people and can have great impacts on their lives. The exclusion clause in refugee law excludes persons who are suspects of terrorism from refugee protection.

Some border crossers decide not to apply for asylum. Instead of being transferred to the allocation center, they are transferred to the detention center for foreign nationals in Lyubimetz (close to the border with Turkey) or Buzmantzi (in Sofia). According to the UNHCR colleagues many of them change their minds about applying for refugee status when they realize that these detention centers are really just prisons. When visiting Lyubimetz, for example, there were two very angry detainees that were very angry, who wanted to get out of the detention center after filling out the forms for

requesting asylum that morning. However, it can take some time for the forms to be processed and they had to wait for this to happen. Talking to the director of the camp it became clear that this man was influential and had a clear vision. According to an UNHCR colleague he runs the camp very well. For example he lets the detainees visit the market so they can buy some food and cigarettes. However, because they started to sell these products when they were back in the camp he had now stopped allowing this. His camp is clean and well-organized, but “in the end he works for migration and the UNHCR has a humanitarian goal” (UNHCR Protection Unit, 7 July 2015).

The fence has been built on the Turkish-Bulgarian border since most people enter Bulgaria at this border. The border with Greece is not mentioned frequently by any of the actors concerned with this issue. It is used rarely by refugees because of the high mountains and inhospitable environment. Other borders of Bulgaria are with Serbia and Romania. These borders are called exit borders. The people who are caught by the border police at these borders are people who are trying to leave Bulgaria on their way to Western Europe. There is a lot of attention for the Turkish border and not so much attention for the exit borders. During the fieldwork two of the exit border points were visited. One close to Sofia on the border with Serbia and one in Vidin from which both the Romanian and the Serbian border are guarded. The conditions at these border stations are worse in comparisons with stations at the Turkish border. There is less staff and less equipment. The border station in Vidin has no translators at all; no translator wants to travel four hours by bus from Sofia to Vidin for a salary of 25 euros an hour. It is up to the creativity of the local director to deal with issues like these. In Vidin the border director asked someone he knew to write down all the numbers in Arabic. This way he can determine someone’s date of birth by pointing. The director there also explains that the resources he has to run the place are the same as before the crisis of 2013, but actually he has less because the border station was split in half and now has a department for the Serbian border and a department for the Romanian border. For example, this made it necessary, to turn the resting area for the staff into a waiting room for women and children. One of the most frustrating things for the border police on the exit border is that because of the lack of resources they sometimes do not even have enough gas to patrol the whole border area. In spite of this, they too have to drive their detainees to the allocation center in Elhovo after 24 hours of detention. From Vidin, it is approximately a seven hour drive to Elhovo. The same complaint was voiced by the border chief at the border checkpoint with Serbia, an hour from Sofia. He expressed his hopes that they will soon build an allocation center in or near Sofia. On the visit to this particular border checkpoint the researcher accompanied someone from the Bulgarian Helsinki Committee (BHC). He was checking the situation at this station because they had an asylum-seekers who was beaten and the BHC wanted to know what happened. The border chief responded by telling that the work was very hard for the border police here. They do not have resources or translators. The colleague of the Bulgarian Helsinki Committee later explained that violence at the exit borders rarely happens; there is no need for push-backs. According to him, violent incidents usually occur at the Turkish border where the guards have probably been informally instructed to carry out push-backs (sending migrants back to Turkey without giving them a chance to apply for asylum).

This section of this chapter is dedicated to addressing the physical borders surrounding Bulgaria and the role of the Bulgarian government. As explained above the government is visible at these borders in the building of the fence and the surveillance system, there is the border police and the National



Security Agency. Absent, however, are the regional and local authorities. During the fieldwork there were no encounters with representatives of regional or local authorities at all. In Bulgaria, they do not seem to be actively engaged in issues concerning the protecting of the borders. The national government seems to be the only Bulgarian governmental authority concerned with the border. However, during the first visit to the border station at the Turkish border the director shared that he was not expecting that the expansion of the border fence would start soon due to the local government elections in the beginning of the coming fall. He based his opinion on the fact that Mr. Boyko Borisov (prime minister of Bulgaria) had stated that he didn't want to answer uncomfortable questions about expenditures in the run up to the elections. It seems that even though the local government is not involved with the issues concerning border protection, it does play a role in the local elections because local parties and national parties are very much intertwined. The local authorities do not have a physical presence at the border and do not want to be involved, however when politics are involved they do affect the bordering issue because the national parties do not want the border protection to be an issue during election time.

## 5.2 EU support

As absent as the local governmental scale level is at the border (they are not physically present), as visible is the supranational level in the form of the European Union. The protection of the Bulgarian border does not only the protection of Bulgaria but also very much concerns the protection of the European Union. After all this border is the outer border of the EU. The Bulgarian government is supported by the European Union with the protection of this border. There is financial support; a huge amount of the money spent on building the fence and the high-tech surveillance system came from the European Union. At the end of 2013, when the refugee issue started to become a real crisis for Bulgaria the European Commission gave a lot of (financial) support, in order for Bulgaria to invest in the centers, renovate them and hire new people to clear the backlogs at the same time. The aim was to provide better care and better living standards for the people who were arriving during that time. In addition to this, there is the support that comes in the form of Frontex. This European agency responsible for European border management actively supports the Bulgarian border police. Border officers from different countries stay for a period of four months or four weeks in Bulgaria and officers from the Bulgarian border police also stay for periods of time in other European countries. During the fieldwork the same group of Frontex officers was encountered twice, the first time when they were in Bulgaria for two weeks and two weeks later the day before they left. That particular group consisted of debriefers, translators as well as patrollers. During the first encounter the Frontex people were very enthusiastic. They liked going on these Frontex missions because it meant that one month a year they get to work in another country. It seemed that for them this is also a sort of work-holiday. The patrollers have shifts of 12 hours during which they accompany a Bulgarian colleague and patrol their part of the border. The first and the second time they stated that they hadn't seen any migrants during their time at the border. Also, both of them stated separately that they had the feeling that the Bulgarian border police kept them from where the 'real action' happened. However, they were positive about all other cooperation with their Bulgarian colleagues. The debriefer was also positive the first time. He had some critical points about the Bulgarian border police's efficiency, but in general he told a positive story. He interviews migrant about the route they took coming to Bulgaria and about the smugglers they used etc. He has translators from Frontex at

his disposal and sometimes migrants speak English. However, the second time he told a different story. He had, by that time, experienced the way the Bulgarian border police treats people. When he had to interview people they didn't get food or water, even after he repeatedly asked for this. He saw some of the detained migrants were beaten. He reported this to his supervisors, but didn't know if something happened with this information.

The Frontex personnel working on the ground were generally positive about working with their Bulgarian counter-parts. However, they were less positive about working with the Turkish border police. They stated that the Turkish work only with Frontex because they have to. When it comes to working with the Bulgarians directly, the Frontex men described them as reluctant and lazy.

During the fieldwork several actors were asked about working with Frontex. The Bulgarian governmental actors were all very positive about working with Frontex. One of the young interviewers in the detention center in Sofia (Buzmantsi) explained for example that they work closely with Frontex and that they are quite helpful. Also, one director of a border station stated that they are very happy with the help of Frontex. They do part of the screening and debriefing and they have better equipment.

However, one UNHCR colleague had a different perspective. He stressed that for the Frontex people the deployments in Bulgaria are a sort of a holiday and all they do is drink and act inappropriately towards each other. They are only in Bulgaria for a short period. This was, according to him, also the reason they were kept away from the more eventful parts of the border. The Bulgarian border police feel that they can do that much better themselves. The fact that all the officials share such positive attitudes is because of the translators; they cannot afford them themselves and are therefore very happy with the ones that are coming with the Frontex mission. A journalist put the involvement of Frontex in a less positive light when talking about push-backs:

"I have reported as a journalist on several cases of violence at the Bulgarian border and the Frontex missions there. I believe such things cannot happen systematically without the knowledge of the other people who are placed there, I'm afraid" (Journalist Maria, 21 July 2015).

This journalist is also very critical about the general help the European Union is giving to Bulgaria, or to any country dealing with the consequences of being an outer border country of the EU. She voices an opinion that was also heard from other organizations:

"the strategy is just to pour money in some countries without any sustainable long term approach to making the system function. It is not working, it is not sustainable" (Journalist Maria, 21 July 2015).

The fact that the European Union is much involved with the border in Bulgaria while the local municipalities are not physically present at all demonstrates the way rescaling processes are entangled with bordering processes at the border in Bulgaria. Downward scaling does not seem to be the case (except when national parties are confronted with local elections) but upward scaling is important. By paying for border surveillance and being physically present through Frontex the supranational level plays an important role in the bordering process.

A second organization active in Bulgaria on behalf of the European Union is EASO, the European Asylum Support Office. EASO does not have a physical presence in Bulgaria. They do, however, support the Bulgarian government and especially the State Agency for Refugees in the implementation of the European asylum rules. During the fieldwork they visited Bulgaria and organized all kinds of workshops for the different actors of the refugees system. They focused on the identification of vulnerable groups. Unfortunately the researched was not able to come into contact with EASO directly.

### **5.3 Organizations at the border: Lobbying and monitoring**

Moving away from the governmental actors on different scale levels, it becomes clear that also non-governmental actors are involved in the bordering process. There are many organizations involved in monitoring and lobbying work at the Bulgarian border. The most prominently involved is the UNHCR. Other lobbying organizations are for example Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International. These organizations were not included in the fieldwork, but produce reports about the human rights situation in Bulgaria on a regular basis. In these reports they also focus on the rights of migrants and asylum-seekers. For example the public statement report Amnesty International published in December 2015, concerning the abuse of refugees and migrants by the police (Amnesty International, 2015) or the latest report of Human Rights Watch on summary returns, beatings, and robbery of asylum-seekers (Human Rights Watch, 2016). These organizations try to influence policy-making on different levels, not only at the national Bulgarian level but also at the European level. Their aim is to improve the rights and the access to rights for migrants and asylum-seekers. These organizations have a monitoring function as well, especially the UNHCR because of their permanent presence in Bulgaria and in the border areas. Every week UNHCR personnel visits every detention-, reception- and the allocation center in Bulgaria, as well as several border stations and checkpoints. In addition to their own monitoring they employ different organizations who monitor for them. The Bulgarian Helsinki Committee (BHC), for example, visits several border checkpoints at the Serbian and Romanian border every week and makes monthly visits to the border station in Burgas. These visits are short and require a lot of time spent on traveling; a BHC colleague explains that the UNHCR finds physical presence important even though some of these visits could be also settled by phone, saving a lot of time and money.

The UNHCR has good relations with the Bulgarian government. They have access to all centers, even the detention centers. They also work with the border guards. "It helps that the UNHCR does not have a political agenda and that we provide a lot of help" (UNHCR Protection Unit, 22 June 2015). An example of the help the UNHCR provides are booklets and information guides for asylum-seekers in different languages. The border guards can distribute these to the asylum-seekers when they are caught. There was also a time when the interpreters were hired by the UNHCR. Since 2010 the UNHCR has a tripartite: a formal agreement between the UNHCR, SAR and the Bulgarian Helsinki Committee, which ensure that they can visit border crossings and detention centers in order to determine if asylum-seekers have access to the country's territory, and to fair and efficient asylum procedures (UNHCR, 2010). However, during the fieldwork there were also some observations showed that things were not always running as smoothly as everyone was saying. For example, when visiting one of the centers in Sofia the director would not let the UNHCR colleagues go into the living and sleeping areas because there was no social worker of SAR available. Another time we tried to

visit one of the border stations near the border with Turkey and the border police informed us that the director had left 'just now'. According to the UNHCR colleague this happened every time he tried to visit that station.

The UNHCR employs other organizations for the work in the centers. The Bulgarian Helsinki Committee has lawyers in all centers to help asylum-seekers with their procedure. The Bulgarian Red Cross has social workers in all centers to help with social issues. The UNHCR started to organize bi-weekly coordination meetings with several partners, governmental and non-governmental, to organize the daily work in the centers. All the actors which were interviewed during the fieldwork were very positive about these meetings. It gave them the chance to discuss and resolve issues directly and it developed a mutual understanding between the organizations.

"... for the main players, both in institutional and non-governmental level to be able on a very regular basis, to sit together, to discuss together, to exchange information and requests on very concrete issues and cases even. This has been an experience, I think, that has been useful for the identification of the people who work in this sphere and the bettering of their interrelationship" (Center for Legal Aid, 25 August 2015).

The Bulgarian Red Cross is also involved in providing (health)care directly at the border. As mentioned before they provide medical training to the border guards and are in this way part of the bordering process. When asylum-seekers are detained in the border stations the border police does not have the resources to provide any further care after the first 24 hours. The Bulgarian Red Cross tries to help fill this gap.

"So we try to react [on the call of the border police] according to available resources to bring food to the detainees. Very often, because these people were caught at the border, if they are sick and it is not an emergency they have to pay for the stay in the hospital, because they are no one: they do not have health insurance and it is not an emergency. And there are quite a number of cases where the Red Cross has been approached [by the border police] to pay for the hospital stay" (Bulgarian Red Cross, 1 July 2015).

On the legal front there are some smaller organizations who try to lobby for better rights by, for example, going to court and using strategic litigation. There are three non-governmental legal organizations concerned with refugees in Bulgaria. The Bulgarian Helsinki Committee has close relations with the UNHCR and the Bulgarian government. They provide legal counsel in the camps on a regular basis and receive funding from the UNHCR. There is the Center for Legal Aid, which is a smaller NGO that has regular consultation hours for asylum-seekers, also for those residing in the country for a longer period of time. They are also involved in lobbying for better access to the asylum procedure. The third legal NGO is FarBG (Foundation for Access to Rights Bulgaria) who work on improving rights for asylum-seekers, lobby for better access to the asylum procedure and try to inform as many people as possible to improve the general knowledge about the system. This last organization is more on the activist side and their relations with the other organizations and the Bulgarian government are not of a friendly nature. These organizations will be discussed more into detail in the next chapter because their lobbying work is more focused on asylum-seekers who have already entered the country instead of those directly at the border.

## 5.4 Refugees

The actors described above are all bordering from within the country. They build walls, they lobby against these walls, they carry out punishment or care for the people who cross the border. However, the migrants and asylum-seekers are the ones who undertake the actual crossing of the border and in that sense also contribute to the bordering process. They try to cross the border from Turkey into Bulgaria. For the migrants and the asylum-seekers this border is their gateway to Europe, for them it is one of the obstacles on their way to a safer and better life. They are on their way to Western Europe, usually Germany. Many of them do not have the intention to stay in Bulgaria, they just want to pass through. When they are caught they have to go to prison, or apply for asylum, which is why they stay. However, many do not want to apply for asylum in Bulgaria so they try to escape before their fingerprints are taken, as described by one of the UNHCR colleagues above. Depending on which group they belong to, some of them move away when they are settled in the centers. They do not wait until the end of their procedure because they know that their claim will be rejected. This is mostly the case for people from Pakistan, Afghanistan, Iraq or any African country. They have only a very slim chance to receive a refugee status in Bulgaria, as a high-ranked SAR employee explained:

“Some of them do not wait until the end of the procedure. Most of them are coming from Iraq and Afghanistan, because we do not think that most of the people that are coming from those two countries need international protection. Our view, our attitude about these people is that when people are coming from Syria they are coming with their families, with their grandmothers, their grandfathers, with their brothers and sisters and all the children. And we know that nobody is going through such a trip because he wants to change something in his live. No, people are coming because they need protection, because they are endangered in their countries. But the people that are coming from Iraq or Pakistan, all of them are young men. And we do not think that all of them need protection. Of course there are some cases and our law is that we have to work over every case separately. Everybody has the right for a fair procedure, but normally most of these people do not receive any protection” (SAR, 28 July, 2015).

One of the colleagues of the UNHCR also stated that they figure that many from these groups also pass through Bulgaria without the authorities noticing them. It is said that in certain streets of Sofia, many people from these groups stay in one of the numerous hostels there, until they are taken into the rest of Europe by the next smuggler.

For almost none of the refugees Bulgaria is the final destination, no matter which nationality they belong to. All the refugees that were interviewed during the fieldwork expressed a wish to go to Germany (or any other North or West European country). One of the long-term volunteers explained that Syria was maybe a better country to live in than Bulgaria: the Syrians are used to much higher standards of living. In the next chapters some other reasons for the asylum-seekers' desire to leave Bulgaria as soon as possible will be discussed.

## 5.5 Economic opportunity: corruption and smuggling

As described in the theoretical chapter of this thesis, a border is not only a place that determines who is in and who is out. It is also a place of (economic) opportunity. The Bulgarian border is no

different. Regarding the border with Turkey, it might be expected to be a fluid place where cross border trade and living is normal. However when speaking to the Bulgarians living in this area, it became clear that this is not so much the case. For example a local business man, in his thirties, explained that there used to be more cooperation between the Bulgarian and the Turkish. He described how in the nineties, there were a lot of Bulgarian-speaking people in the Turkish town Edirne and the Bulgarians went to the market there to sell their products. This is not the case anymore. He himself does not speak Turkish and states that the Bulgarians living in this area do not like the Turks. He has some Bulgarian-Turkish friends and they are 'okay' but the 'real Turks' are not. However, the European Union has set up a cross-border program in this region, in which farmers from both sides of the border exchange ideas and experiences with farming. The reason that there is not so much cross-border relations on the local level can be traced back to the history of this border and the historical relation between the Turks and the Bulgarians, as described in the case-chapter. The negative feelings towards the Ottomans about what the Bulgarians still refer to as the '500 years of slavery' are still strongly felt today.

The fact that there is not that strong regular cross-border trade relations does not mean that there is no economic benefit from this border or the refugee issue. The economic benefit from the refugee issue in this border area becomes clear when driving through the many very small villages along the border. The presence of the border guards and Frontex is big, with patrol cars driving and standing on guard everywhere. The Frontex employees stay in hotels in local towns and go out to eat every night. Being present at one of these diners one evening, it became clear that the local restaurant owner was very happy with this large group of men eating at his place every night. One of the Frontex men explained that during their 12-hour patrol shift they eat in the local villages. The restaurant owners in these small villages confirmed this story. One woman owning such a restaurant explained that she never sees any refugees because they are taken directly from the border to the camps. However, she does see the guards and their translators all the time, when they come to eat at her restaurant. These guards are not only Bulgarian, but are also from other EU countries. The local population seems to gain something from the refugee issue.

In addition to what has been described above, there are also economic benefits the authorities do not like to talk about: corruption and smuggling. Many Bulgarian citizens are convinced that many of the border guards take bribes and that border guards live in the nicest houses. This rumor was actually supported by one of the UNHCR colleagues. It is most likely that corruption at the border takes place, but its scale remained unclear during the research. During one of the visits to the checkpoint of Lesovo, a border guard was just being arrested for bribery. Corruption is in Bulgaria still widespread and the border is no exception (Guardian, 2014) (Euobserver, 2016). One journalist stated:

"And those amounts of people who enter the country and leave without even being noticed are many and are very big. And I really doubt that this can happen without the knowledge of some people at least at the border. Because I have spoken to migrants who say, if you have the money like 8000 or 10000 euro you go straight to Germany, like transit through Bulgaria without any problem" (Journalist Maria, 21 July 2015).

In addition to the border police and guards taking bribes, there are also many people who benefit from the refugee issue because they are involved in the smuggling business. According to one UNHCR colleague the smugglers at the border are mostly Afghans and Pakistanis, but from the border onward into Bulgaria on the way to Western Europe, they are usually Bulgarians or refugees. During one of the border visits, the director of the border station in Elhovo shared that they are observing the worrisome trend that these beneficiaries of international protection, often statusholders, actively participate in the smuggling process. This makes them actors in the bordering process in two ways: as crossers and as smugglers. The director of the detention center Luybimets shared a story to underline the fact that the smugglers are getting very organized. They had a group of Afghans that wanted to go back to their country, but they gave their passports to their smugglers. They contacted these smugglers, but they demanded 500 euro per person to give back the passports. The migrants refused so the smugglers got angry and sent them a package containing passports from three different migrant groups. According to the director it was a sort of protest; 'if you do not give us money, we take everyone down'. The different groups were caught at different parts of the border, showing that the smugglers have diverse and organized smuggling routes.

During the drive to the checkpoint between Serbia and Bulgaria, the car was stopped by police men, when the police saw who were in it they waved that the car could go on. They were checking taxis to see if they were transporting migrants. Bulgarians that take part in the smuggling process are often taxi drivers. They pick up migrants who crossed the border with Turkey. They drive them to Sofia or to a spot close to the exit border with Serbia or Romania. Since they do not cross any national borders, they do not commit a criminal offence. This makes it difficult for the Bulgarian authorities to counter this trend. These taxi drivers economically benefit from the refugee issue too.

The director of the border station at the Serbian border near Dimitrovgrad stated that the smugglers are increasingly Bulgarian nationals and that they are the ones causing trouble, even getting very aggressive. The colleague of the BHC explained that this is the poorest area of the European Union. For villagers who do not have jobs or who can barely make a living from the profits of their lands, smuggling is a welcome source of income. Additionally, in this border area the location of the border shifted a few times in the past. This has divided villages in two parts; crossing the border in those places is easier than in other areas.

When talking about smuggling organizations on a less personal scale than locals and taxi drivers trying to make a living, many people stressed that it is just a matter of diversification. Bulgaria has always been a country with many smuggling routes. From cigarettes to petrol; people are just a new product.

"Even from the communist era of Bulgaria like till the 90s, there were channels for trafficking of cigarettes, drugs, etc. Bulgaria has a very good location, geopolitical location for that. Very often there are big trucks with cigarettes that have paid no tax for cigarettes and alcohol. They [the cigarettes] are being trafficked here, so the channels are already there, so if there is a new profitable source of income such as humans who want to be trafficked, it is a paved way. [...] So these are well established and well functioning channels that have been there for like decades. So now this is just another product" (Journalist Maria, 21 July 2015).

**Fig. 7: Checkpoint of Lesovo with endless line of trucks**



(Source: Author)

both sides have lines. He explains that when asylum-seekers are caught in one of the trucks entering Bulgaria, the border guards close the entire checkpoint, sometimes even for hours. His theory, which has also been confirmed by an UNHCR colleague, is that the Bulgarian authorities want to discourage truck drivers to take asylum-seekers in their trucks. However, the truck driver states that they often climb into the trucks when the drivers are resting. They cut the soft top of the truck, climb inside and disguise the cut by taping it shut from the inside. The truck driver was interviewed at 10 am and had been waiting at the border since 2 am. One of the first things he stated was that 'it is a shame for the European Union!'. He had been driving back and forth between Turkey and Bulgaria for six to seven years now and it wasn't like this before the refugee crisis. At 10 am it is already pretty hot in the Bulgarian sun, with temperatures reaching above the 40 degrees Celsius in this area one can imagine that standing in line for 10 hours is not very comfortable. There is no place to get water close by and no trees to give some shade. In addition to the economic loss of waiting for hours, sometimes with cargo that needs to be cooled, it is also a negative experience for the truck drivers personally.

Economically speaking this border is profitable for many different actors, but can also cause economic damage. These actors are, in their own way, all part of the bordering process, in the sense that they bend the border and the rules of the border established by the government to their own convenience.

## **5.6 Local citizens**

Local communities in the vicinity of the border are sometimes also affected by the bordering process and the refugee issue. Above mentioned examples are the restaurant owners where Frontex men/border guards come to eat and drink, the poor areas where citizens complement their income with smuggling and the truck drivers waiting in line for hours in the burning sun. During the fieldwork informal conversations were held with local villagers. For example in Lesovo, where a number of old

In addition to the economic benefits for some actors, there is also economic loss. An example becomes clear when approaching the border checkpoints and seeing the endless lines of trucks waiting to pass. This not only concerns those wanting to enter Bulgaria but also those leaving the country (Figure 7). Talking with one of the truck drivers, it becomes clear why



men sat at the village square. They explained that indeed refugees sometimes are turning up in the village square. They give them water and some food and call the border police; who come to collect them. According to these old men these are the refugees without money to pay the next smuggler to get them out of Bulgaria again. They also explained that in the past year they found refugees digging tunnels under the border, or using the river to cross into Bulgaria. They also stated that there used to be many more border guards in this area, sleeping in tents in the winter when the number of refugees crossing the border was extremely high. Now that they built the fences there are less refugees and guards. In another border village a hotel owner tells the story of finding refugees hiding under a water reservoir near the road. The refugees said that they were okay but he called the border police anyway and they came to collect them. He says he thinks that they were waiting for the next smuggler to pick them up. In a way he, but also other village people, are acting as guards as well, even though they are not border guards. By calling the police and handing the refugees over they become part of the bordering process. Even when they just provide them with food and water the people from the villages somehow actively take part in this bordering process and the refugee system.

In other border villages, further from the checkpoints, the inhabitants state that they do not see any asylum-seekers; confirming the words of the deputy director of the border station in Elhovo that most refugees cross the border near the checkpoints. When crossing the border in a somewhat desolate area, a border guard shows up. He explains that he is 48 years old and has been working as a border guard for a long time but that he feels too old for the job now. He wants to retire. He states that the asylum-seekers come at night with groups of 20-30 people and he has to chase and take them. They do not have papers and all of them say they are from Syria. The border guard is not very optimistic. He explains that his work really changed in the last years, there are much more refugees now.

In one of the bigger towns in the border area, the town of Svilengrad, a local girl of about 18 years old, shares some stories about how the refugee issue is perceived in her town and explains how this local border town is affected. She hasn't found any asylum-seekers herself, but they (she and her family) do find footprints in the fields around their house sometimes. The asylum-seekers that cross through this region have mostly taken the Mediterranean route through Greece. She says that often they are beaten up and sent back to Greece, where they get beaten up by villagers living on the Greek side. The asylum-seekers that are walking around in the village usually come from the reception center in a town nearby: Pastrogor. When they miss the last bus back they sleep at the bus station. The Svilengrad local finds that scary and rather takes a longer biking route home in the evening. In the town of Patrogor the people are more used to the refugees because they visit their shops, but in her town people are more scared; everybody knows each other and people are afraid for whatever is alien to them. There was an incident concerning the swimming pool. Some people, including some of her friends, protested that they didn't want to go to the swimming pool if refugees were also allowed in. When asked about Bulgarian smugglers she abruptly changes the subject, she says she knows some people involved in smuggling but does not want to talk about that. She does, however, share a story about her own experience with the border. She explains that close to the border you need to have your papers with you. One day when she was out with her friends in the fields she forgot her papers and the police came to ask for them. Her friend was the son of a highly

ranked border police officer and after 5 minutes the 'problem' was solved. It is a good illustration of the way the system works in Bulgaria. In 2013 when the refugee numbers started to rise, the villagers collected toys and clothes and brought them to the reception center nearby. However, she states, the refugees threw them away as to say: 'we do not want your help, we just want status'. This really upset the people from the villages.

The deputy director of the border station of Elhovo shared a personal story about how people in the border area are affected by the refugee issue. He explained that when his daughter had to be taken to the hospital because of a broken arm his wife had to drive her, because the ambulances in the area were occupied at that moment. The ambulances were taking migrants who got injured in their attempts to cross the border to the hospital. With this story, he wanted to show the impact of the refugees in the border region. However, a UNHCR colleague later explained that this is more a general issue of lacking medical coverage in these depopulated areas. This does not take away the feeling of the deputy director that the medical problems are due to the refugees, however.

Harmanli is the town with the largest reception center in Bulgaria. The people interviewed on the streets in this town didn't express any extreme opinions; they were neither very negative nor very positive. They explained that the local population and the refugees live together peacefully. One woman explained that every day she sees a group of about 15 men going to work in the town. A couple states that there are mostly Syrians now in Harmanli, they are very polite, some of them speak Russian or English and some are doctors and lawyers. They do not make any trouble, they do not go to bars. Another woman explains that in the beginning there were protests from a group of around 30 people against the refugees, but now these do not take place anymore. The locals have accepted the situation when they experienced no negative issues.

The above stories and examples do not seem to affect the daily life of the people living in the border area. Rather it remains incidents which have an impact on the discourse surrounding the border and the refugees. A journalist specialized formulates some interesting ideas about why the people in the border area are accepting the situation as it is; connecting the current issue to the history of Bulgaria and the border area with Turkey.

"as far as I know, I haven't done interviews with the Bulgarians, I have spoken with Turks, people help. These are generally elder and poor people, they are more empathetic than the others. So as far as I know they give them food, water and try to help them with whatever they can. [...] those are more simple people who understand better. Bulgaria has a long term history of migration. I mean some of the people who live in this area have migrated from Greece and Turkey and vice-versa, between the world wars and the Balkan wars. [...] So the elderly people remember this period, and they completely understand because they remember how their mothers brought them this way. Especially in this area people are very emphatic. And then on the Turkish side also because there was this process of forceful assimilation of the Muslim minority in Bulgaria in the 80s. Many people ran away the same way in the opposite direction. [...] As any border it has its history, but I believe that the people who live there understand the problem better and they see that the people are starving and tired and carrying their children etc. so they try to help them"(Journalist Maria, 21 July 2015).

## 5.7 Returning to the theory

This chapter presented the data on the process of bordering at the Bulgarian borders that was gathered during the fieldwork. The bordering process involves many different actors, ranging from the Bulgarian government to local citizens and from the supranational organization Frontex to the UNHCR. Some of these actors reinforce the border, some of them are against this and others try to make use of it. This leads to a lively border where people and organizations are guarding (including local citizens), lobbying, crossing and making or losing money.

The Bulgarian border illustrates how theories on bordering processes discussed in the theoretical chapter work in a real life example. It is a 'hard' external European border; it keeps the unwanted (the refugees) out. It is also an asymmetrical border: crossing the border is only difficult for certain people. This border determines who is welcome and who is not. Having power at the border is therefore a way to determine the lines of inclusion and exclusion that are drawn from this border into the rest of society. This border is also a place of economic opportunity, a place where money is made and money is lost. The experience of the truck drivers standing in line for hours shows the continuing tension between the economic interest of open borders on the one hand and the securitization of borders on the other (Newman, 2006) (Rumford, 2006).

At this hard, asymmetrical, Bulgarian border there are many state and non-state actors at work to determine the meaning and the narrative of this border. They illustrate how the processes of governance and rescaling affect the border. The state is not the only one anymore determining the workings of the border. Through rescaling, its power shifted upwards to the European level. The presence of Frontex is a result of this rescaling. However, the counter-trend on this denationalization of Jessop (2004), where states try to control this shift of power, is visible in Bulgaria as well. The feeling of the Frontex officers, that they are kept away from the important parts of the border, is an indication of counter-trend. The downward rescaling, on the governmental level, is much less visible in the Bulgarian case. Municipalities and other local authorities do not seem to be involved in the workings of the physical border at all.

The changing boundaries between state and civil society, the process of rescaling, become apparent at the Bulgarian border in all the different organizations involved. There is the Bulgarian Red Cross and the UNHCR supporting the Bulgarian government in dealing with the refugee issue, but in return they have clear humanitarian goals. There are the Bulgarian citizens providing the refugees with food and water while at the same time taking the role of the border police by calling the authorities. The outcome of the interaction between all these different parties eventually determines the outcome of the bordering process (Kjaer, 2011). The governmental power shifted sideways; non-governmental actors have their own say in the bordering process.

The next chapter will focus on the process of bordering within the Bulgarian society.



## 6. Bordering throughout the Bulgarian society

Seeing borders as socially constructed means that they are maintained, constructed and reconstructed through discourses and practices that emphasize the 'other' and the 'self' (Van Houtum, 2005). These borders not only enfold a certain territory, they also run through society, dividing it according to all kinds of characteristics like age, ethnicity, education and much more (Newman, 2003). The groups or actors who determine the borders have tremendous power; they are the elites. However borders are always subject to change, they are (re-)negotiated on a daily basis by many different actors.

The previous chapter addressed the way bordering processes are happening at the Bulgarian borders and how different actors play different roles in this process. This chapter will address the process of bordering that happens within the Bulgarian borders; inside the Bulgarian society. How are borders drawn? Who is involved in the process deciding who is Us and who is Them? And who decides which actors can be part of this process?

### 6.1 Government and politics

The government and especially politicians are a big factor in the bordering process. They have a lot of influence in deciding where the borders run in the Bulgarian society. Since the beginning of the refugee influx in 2013 Bulgaria went through about five governments. At the time of the fieldwork there was a coalition government led by a central right party but with partners from a traditionalist right party to a traditional left party and even an ultra-right wing nationalist party. The somewhat strange mix of this government represents the polarization in the Bulgarian society. When politicians from the opposition get into the mix, an even more diverse group with many different opinions occurs. During the refugee crisis in 2013/2014 the government and politicians played a huge role in the determination of the language that was used to communicate about the refugee issue to the Bulgarian citizens. By determining the words that were used, the tone of voice and how the issue was framed, the Bulgarian politicians ultimately set the discourse. By using words like 'illegal refugees' they influenced the public opinion. Especially in the beginning of the crisis when the issue was quite new and the large audience and also the media didn't know what to do and what to think, politicians who wanted too could easily manipulate. The media just repeated the politicians and therefore let the politicians determine the narrative.

"It is primarily not the media that creates the public opinion, but it is largely the political statements, coming from the high levels of government who influence this public opinion" (UNHCR Integration Unit, 25 June 2015)

"Quite often the negative rhetoric came from the politicians and the media just reported about it. For example I noticed that in one month the term illegal immigrant was used the most and I was wondering why, what happened? It turned out that it was the former minister of internal affair, who gave like a few interviews for a few days and he was the one constantly repeating this term. And this is why it was translated throughout the whole media. And he was not even a politician from a far right party [...] It was a person in governance" (Journalist Maria, 21 July 2015).

One can imagine that when the politicians and government of a country create such a negative discourse concerning the refugee issue, this boost the divide in society only further. It creates a discourse of Us and Them. It brings fear to the citizens who then turn away from the refugees because they are scared. Even though there are many different voices within the government and even more when you count the opposition, controversial decisions like the building of the fence are taken without much resistance. Even parties like the socialist party or the liberal party, who should be against the fence according to their theoretical political standpoint, are keeping quite. Worse yet, the building of the wall started during their coalition government in 2014. However, there are luckily also parties who are taking more positive standpoints towards the refugee issue. Unfortunately these two parties, The Greens and DEOS (a new, liberal party), only have small voices and they aren't even in parliament, making their influence in the bordering process very small. That the refugee issue remains a sensitive subject in parliament became clear when a woman from the MultiCulti Collective told a story about one of their projects:

"one of our latest projects, it involves 5 exhibitions in Bulgaria in the major cities. And one of them was supposed to be in the national parliament and we had the approval of the chair of the parliament and everything. But when the time came to set the date they started to say things like: well there are some, you know, some clashes in the parliament; some parties do not want this exhibition here; we can talk later; yeah we are totally doing it but we can tell the date later in September; and so on. So that is when we decided we really do not want to be involved in this scandal, because it will become a scandal, and that will not help at all. It will be used for political purposes and the election for the local is coming, so everyone is trying to get the most of the situation and to make their voters vote for them. And that is why we decided to go to an usual gallery and not at the parliament" (MultiCulti Collective, 25 August 2015).

Apart from the politicians and government, on the national level almost everything related to asylum-seekers and refugees in Bulgaria is the responsibility of the State Agency of Refugees (or SAR). During the fieldwork a few people working for SAR in the centers were interviewed on an informal basis. Most of them liked their jobs, they wanted to help but they do not have a lot of resources. Some of them were bordering in their own way. For example a social worker who explained that as soon as a family receives refugee status they are no longer entitled to care from SAR. But she said that when they have babies she gives them babyfood and milk anyway, even though she is not allowed to. This way she is in that moment breaking the border between the asylum-seekers entitled to care and the refugees who are left to fend for their own.

During the interview with the head of the directorate 'Social Affairs and Adaptation' at SAR, she explained that partly she felt that the agency is responsible for how the Bulgarian people react to refugees.

"if people have more information, things will be different and it is our job, we have to do this, we have to explain what is happening" (Head of directorate Social Affairs and Adaption SAR, 28 July 2015).

## 6.2 Media

The media play an important role in the bordering processes going on in the Bulgarian society. The way they portray the refugee issue reaches a large part of the society. When the refugee crisis in Bulgaria started at the end of 2013, the media wasn't really sure what to do with the issue. During the fieldwork different actors mentioned that the influence of the media on the way society perceived the situation was substantial. As one respondent put it: "the only image was through the media and that image was not positive at all" (MultiCulti Collective, 25 August 2015). This is one of the reasons that the UNHCR for example started to educate journalists about the way refugees should be portrayed. At the same time they launched their own campaigns to reach the general public, which will be discussed further on. When asking about the start of the crisis a journalist, who was also part of the association of European journalist, explained that refugees were up to that time a marginal issue in the Bulgarian media. Only the once specialized in this area completely understood the issue. She did some research about how many times the issue reached the media; before 2013 there were about 600 publications in three years, after the start of the crisis there were 6000 in one month. The journalists who didn't understand the issue mixed up the terminology; confusing refugee with illegal migrant and asylum-seeker with immigrant. The problem at that time was portrayed as "threat of terrorism, threat of disease to the public health and the social system and then conditions in the camps" (Journalist Maria, 21 July 2015). To counter these trends the UNHCR organized, since the beginning of the crisis, four big forums about the way the media could portray the refugee issue in a different way. They try to get opinion makers, agenda setters like editors and journalists to come to these events and to discuss the issues at hand.

"for me it is just really important not to have UNHCR but to have others come out and start talking about refugees. Because of course we are the credible authorities on refugees matters, but we have a mandate and that mandate is refugee protection. So we would like someone else who is closer to shaping the opinion of the media or engaging with the media as an analyst to tell them about their perspective. [...] Our purpose is not to show the media that we are monitoring them, and to scold them and say, why are you still using this headline. It is to create a debate where the media amongst themselves will reach the conclusion they have to adapt a certain standard" (UNHCR Communication Unit, 24 June 2015).

That this helped and that the media are approaching the issue differently now that it is calmer is also noticed by Bulgarian citizens: "The media changed the way they describe the problem, they somehow learned to use better language and this also causes positive attitudes from society" (Volunteer Refugee Project, 21 August 2015).

Even though the campaigns targeting media seemed to help, many actors share the opinion that the media themselves are only partly responsible for the way the issue is presented in society. Concerning the discourse surrounding the refugee issue in Bulgaria politics (governments as well as opposition) and the media are strengthening each other's discourse. Especially in the beginning when the subject was quite new for Bulgaria, politicians dominated the debate with negative statements, because the media didn't know what to do with the subject. The discourse surrounding the subject of refugees in Bulgaria plays an important role in how borders surrounding this group in Bulgaria are drawn. Through these border narratives the lines of inclusion and exclusion are

reproduced. Politicians and the media both play an important role in this bordering process. They are the ones spreading the dominant discourse, which was a very negative one. The next section will describe the discourse surrounding refugees in the Bulgarian society, but one should remember that politics and media were responsible for the spreading of much of this discourse and border language.

### 6.3 Society

During the fieldwork many Bulgarians were interviewed in formal ways but mostly in informal encounters. The general impression that resulted from all these conversations was the fact that the society is very polarized concerning the issue of the refugees. When the refugee crisis started at the end of 2013 the Bulgarian society was confronted with a large influx of people that were different than they. Bulgaria has always been a very homogenous society (chapter 3) and the Bulgarian people got scared of all these new people. As discussed above the general information citizens got was mostly very negative; either from politicians or through the media. "there was growing anti-refugee propaganda coming out. A lot of the right wing was using xenophobic language, hate speech was very common, the media was not sure what it had to do so it was just reporting, it was giving a platform to the right wing. So basically this created a very volatile atmosphere it created an environment where xenophobia was expanding to a point hitting full parts segments of the population" (UNHCR Communication Unit, 24 June 2015). Eventually something happened that made the situation spin out of control. There was a knife attack on a girl in Sofia that was managing the night shift at a cigarette booth. The attacker was an Algerian man, living in Sofia for more than three years. He was a failed asylum-seeker and therefore an irregular undocumented migrant. However the incident was used as an example of what the incoming refugees could do and right wing parties organized gigantic rallies and introduced civic patrols. There were many attacks on Syrian men and boys, but also a Bulgarian man, an ethnic Turk, was mistaken for a refugee and beaten into a coma.

In 2014 the situation normalized. Fewer refugees were entering the country and the situation in the centers improved a lot. When talking with different people about this time they mention two examples from 2014 that illustrate the feelings in the Bulgarian society very well. The first incident occurred in a village called Rozovo (in Kazanlak) when three Syrian families, who received refugee status, wanted to settle in this village. They legally rented a house, but the protests by the citizens of the village were so severe and in some case violent, that the refugees were driven out of the village. The whole thing was televised and very public and created a debate between pro-refugee groups and people against refugees. The second incident in 2014 occurred in September when the school year starts in Bulgaria. A group of nine refugee children were about to start school in a village named Kalishte. There were so many protests from the parents of the Bulgarian children, the teachers and even the local authorities, that the refugee children were not allowed to go to school there. Again this was very public. "It was televised to the point that people were seeing on national television, a interview with a young Bulgarian child who was from that school and who was saying that they were sick and illiterate and they didn't deserve to live. So that was the reason they were not allowing them. And obviously when a child says it you understand that this is the influence from the parents" (UNHCR Communication Unit, 24 June 2015). This story came up during a few interviews, but only in the interview with a women from the State Agency for Refugee the end of the story was revealed. "these children were send to another school thanks to a school in another village. And people were so happy with these children and they were sending their children to school because you know there



are not a lot of children in these villages, they are deserted. And they are going by bus, the bus is collecting them in different places. And when children are going to school they receive hot meals and so on at school. But the parents were sending some kind of breakfast and so on not only for their children but also for the refugees. And it was so nice to see children among the others, and how they were accepted. And they began to speak Bulgarian very fast, because they were among them" (Head of directorate Social Affairs and Adaption SAR, 28 July 2015).

One respondent explained the origins of the hostile attitudes by using her personal experience. "I grew up in the socialist time: I was 20 years when it changed. So people always had a specially attitude towards so to say Germans, people from Europe and a completely different attitude to people from the Middle East or other countries. It was like first class people and second class people, I cannot explain why, but I felt it always" (Bulgarian Red Cross, 1 July 2015).

The two incidents are both examples of negative reactions of the Bulgarian society, but during the fieldwork it became clear that there was also another side to this story. During the same period the UNHCR colleague above described as a volatile atmosphere, there were also many citizens who really wanted to help.

An example is the story of a journalist who wanted to collect clothes among her friends to give to the refugees during the beginning of the refugee crisis. She made a Facebook-event which generate much unexpected, positive attention.

"It was at the beginning of September 2014, like hundreds of people showed up in the pouring rain bringing all kinds of stuff and money, they were just giving us money like that. And I was super shocked. The idea was not to make it public and I didn't expect such enthusiasm. And people we didn't know, everybody was coming and saying: 'I brought clothes, I brought food, but if you need something else'. Some people offered translation, others offered other things and it was amazing for me" (Journalist Maria, 21 July 2015).

From that time they became engaged with the issue more seriously. At the same time two other Sofia guys started an initiative called 'friends of the refugees'. The two initiatives joined forces and organized different things. They collected clothes, food, sanitary ect. They worked also with companies to gather all kinds of materials needed in the camps. In the beginning they were not allowed access to the camps, but according to the journalist the government realized at some point that they couldn't handle the situation alone. The Facebook-group 'Friends of the Refugees' still exists and has more than 4000 members. They still organize things occasionally but this is more when individual refugees need for example medical help or a job. The Center for Legal Aid explained that the Friends of the Refugee group is "Quite an unique formation in the civil society of Bulgaria" (Center for Legal Aid, 25 August 2015).

These different negative and positive responses of Bulgarian citizens show the way the Bulgarian society dealt with the refugee issue quite clearly. First there was this massive wave of negativity that came from lack of information and the feeling of being threatened. At the same time there was also a counter movement of people who wanted to help and welcome the refugees in Bulgaria. When the situation normalized the polarization decreased. Still there are the people who are absolutely against

anything concerning refugees and there are the people who engage themselves with the refugee issue. But the group in the middle grew overtime. These are the people that do not know a lot about refugees, do not really have an opinion on the issue and are busy with other things to engage themselves. Bulgaria is a country that has many different problems and for many of its citizens the refugee issue is not the biggest of their concerns. It is even not the group in society that is most on the outside. In Bulgaria you can start a conversation about refugees or any other subject, but you eventually will end up discussing the Roma-issue.

“ So things are very difficult for Bulgarians living here by a large segment of society, three percent I think is the last statistic is living below the poverty line [...] So the care for others who are arriving from outside, particularly while the country is still struggling with minority issues, is not on people’s minds” (UNHCR Communication Unit, 24 June 2015).

#### **6.4 Counter-bordering by the UNHCR**

The international organizations engaged in refugee- and migration issues like the IOM and the UNHCR, are not only active at the border of Bulgaria but also very much in the society. They actively take part in the border process. They try to change the narratives about refugees in the society, influencing the lines of in- and exclusion. Another way of taking part in the bordering process is by lobbying at the national level, when they want to change policy outcomes. An example is the UNHCR. The UNHCR is very much involved in the refugees issue in Bulgaria. As explained in the last chapter they are active in the camps, but as mentioned above they also interact with the media to make the news reporting about the refugee issue more fair. They have organized different forums and meetings for journalist and other media involved people. At the same time they have their own media campaigns in which they try to portray the refugees in a more positive light. For example in the weeks surrounding world refugee day they had an exhibition in a local art gallery, but they also had, at the same time, an exhibition outside in one of the central parks in front of the national theater. The UNHCR had an media campaign called ‘see refugees through new eyes’ with TV commercials and big posters all over Sofia. By using these different outlets they are trying to speak/advocate on the behalf of the refugees. “Luckily the UNHCR is been able to participate in all these debates very actively, with a strong voice for refugees in these times” (UNHCR Communication Unit, 24 June 2015).

In addition to this focus on society and on the camps they are involved with the government quite a lot. By assisting the State Agency for Refugees they are in some way able to influence what happens. They also take actively part in meetings and try to influence the decision making by lobbying and staying in dialogue with the responsible governmental actors. However they remain an apolitical party and cannot be involved with policy making too much. For example the issue of integration. The integration associate from the UNHCR was involved in the making of the integration program since the last one ended in 2013. However even she couldn’t change the fact that there was still no program at the time of the fieldwork (the lack of an integration program will be discussed in the next chapter).

By sensitizing the public the UNHCR hopes to alter the border narrative in a positive way. One way they try to do is are photo essays. During the fieldwork the UNHCR was working on the story of a 28 year old refugee women. Her four year old daughter died in the reception center Harmanli.

“so finding ways to first of all write that story in a way that it is engaging and then present it in sensitive ways so that it serves the purpose for us but it also serves a purpose for the mother as well and then finding an adequate platform which will publicize it so that it makes an impact” (UNHCR Communication Unit, 24 June 2015).

## 6.5 Local initiatives: NGO's and civil society

Even though many people in Bulgaria do not pay attention to the refugee issue, or are against anything concerning refugees, there is also a big group of people who are active in this field. There are many civil society initiatives and some of them are much involved in the bordering issue. Even if they themselves might not see it that way. First there are the long time established NGO's, like the Bulgarian Red Cross (BRC), Caritas Bulgaria and the Bulgarian Helsinki Committee (BHC). These are organizations that have been active in the Bulgarian society for a long time. Their work with refugees is only part of what they do. The work the BHC and the BRC do concerning refugees is partly funded by the UNHCR. They are their partners and follow the line set out by the UNHCR. Caritas used to be funded by UNHCR, now they are funded by the European fund for asylum, migration and integration. Social workers from organizations like the Red Cross can sometimes accomplish more than social workers from SAR.

“They [BRC Social Workers] are quite busy because, even the Bulgarian social workers of the SAR: they rely a lot on our social workers. Which are kind of better positioned within the people in the centers. [...] Somehow the people respect kind of, not respect, trust more NGO persons” (Bulgarian Red Cross, 1 July 2015).

Other, more small scale organizations are for example the Council for Refugee Women, Center for Legal Aid, FarBG (Foundation for Access to Rights Bulgaria) and the MultiCulti Collective. The Council for Refugee Women is an organization that was established in 2003 by a Syrian refugee. Over the years this NGO developed as an important actor. They provide aid to refugees and asylum-seekers but they also form the bridge between local Lebanese, Syrian, Iraqi etc communities and the new arrivals. They are an important partner for the UNHCR as well as for SAR. They have short connections and this makes the organization powerful. Because they focus on the refugee women they are very well informed and are the first ones to see new trends. For example the founder explained that currently she noticed a lot of underage Syrian girls who were already married, sometimes even with kids. She shares her findings with the UNHCR and SAR. At the same time she is a spokeswoman for the refugees in the Bulgarian society. She is interviewed by different media regularly. She is presenting a different narratives and in this way negotiating the border discourse. Twice a week Bulgarians can drop of clothes, food and other materials at their storage. At the same day these products are distributed to refugees and asylum-seekers. Forming a bridge between the donors and the receivers and negotiating a different border narrative.

The Center for Legal Aid and FarBG are both NGO's focused on the legal matters concerning refugees and asylum-seekers and in some way complement the BHC. They give council to asylum-seekers and

present them in court. But they also identify gaps in legislation and campaign for legal reforms. They work together and with other NGO's. FarBG does a lot of strategic legislation for example. FarBG is also focused on the education of the people who work with asylum-seekers and refugees. They have information meetings and events for volunteers, students and lawyers. Both NGO's run on volunteers and funding from (European) funds and organizations. There is one big difference between these two NGO's and that has to do with the level of acceptance by other institutions and organizations. The Center for Legal Aid works with SAR and the BHC. They have good relations and refer clients between them. FarBG (Foundation for Access to Rights Bulgaria) however is more on the activist side. The women leading this NGO is not afraid to be critical towards the system and the Bulgarian government.

"They are afraid of me, because they know that we do not have to keep any friendly of diplomatic relations as other partners have to do. We do a lot of strategic litigation" (FarBG, 12 august 2015).

She published some articles for example in the Oxford Forced Migration Review Journal about wrongs in the Bulgarian system. First they were part of the University as a legal clinic, but the University cut them off. During the fieldwork period EASO was visiting Bulgaria and there were all kinds of meetings and workshops for everybody in the field. FarBG wasn't invited.

"So for example yesterday, we heard from other colleagues, other NGO's that it [the workshop by EASO] was being set up. We called Mrs Anna Andreeva [Head of directorate Social Affairs and Adaption SAR], because she was the contact person to get subscribed for the workshops, she told us no, all the places are full and EASO has given us a list of organizations that can attend. And off course I didn't believe that, and I thought to myself okay I have connections everywhere, I have students that work at EASO. So I send a Facebook message to my student, she spoke with the Bulgarian team, they said off course that this is not true, there is no such limitations. And we subscribed for the workshop and received email confirmation from EASO that we could attend" (FarBG, 12 august 2015).

By trying to change the (legal) system in Bulgaria FarBG and the Center for Legal Aid are both taking part in the bordering process. They try to reform the legal system in such a way that asylum-seekers and refugees have a fair change in the Bulgarian society. However the work of FarBG is complicated by the fact that they are not accepted by the established organizations. Not by the governments agency for refugees but also not by an established NGO like the BHC. They are kept away from the decision making table and are not invited to join any processes. However because they keep going and are not afraid for the system they still manage to be part of the bordering process for example by educating others or by persistently going to court as long as it takes to change something. "It is not easy, because people who tell the truth are usually left to the margin" (FarBG, 12 august 2015).

"For example access to the asylum procedure. This has been a problem since 2007, but nobody spoke about it. You know, the European Council on Refugees and Exiles, when they spoke with me, I think it was in 2011, and they asked me about such a problem, I told them there is such a problem, that persons are first detained as illegal migrants. That they are not regarded as asylum-seekers from the moment of making the asylum application, but from the moment of registering it and there is a lot of time between making and registering the asylum application. [...] So I spoke about this problem, but

when everybody asks the Bulgarian Helsinki Committee and when the BHC says that there is not a problem. So the problem does not exist. And there was this contradiction because I was telling about [...] this problem, but when the BHC was asked they said there is not such a problem. [...] But when in 2013/2014 the number of asylum-seekers became very big it was not possible for the Helsinki Committee to control everyone [every asylum case]. Then they started to speak about the problem of the access to the asylum procedure and started to use the cases that we have created in the court for registration. They took this caselaw, that took us several years to built it” (FarBG, 12 august 2015).

The Refugee Project is a project of Caritas and CVS Bulgaria and deserves to be mentioned here. The Refugee Project organizes classes in the different reception centers in Sofia for children as well as adults. They teach English, sports, provide cooking lessons and science lessons, but also organize excursions outside the centers (Figure 8). They have been going to the centers since 2010 and developed themselves to a well established organization. The classes are organized by Bulgarian volunteers. It is a project that uses the civil society of Sofia and connects them to the refugees. By going to the centers the volunteers bring entertainment and education to the refugees and when they leave they bring knowledge and experience concerning refugees to the rest of the Bulgarian society.

“It gives the refugees bigger visibility in the society, because the volunteers will share their experiences with their friends. I think this is the way we should work with the civil society, not to work with the nationalist or the people that are afraid. But we should work with the positive attitudes. So I think it should become bigger and spread” (volunteer The Refugee Project, 21 August 2015).

“Some of mine (friends) are a bit curious, what we do there [in the reception centers]. But most of them know that I'm doing that and that I am not afraid to go there, that I'm not worried about going there. And just by knowing that they accept: okay she is going there, it is fine to go there” (The Refugee Project, 21 August 2015).

The Refugee Project and their 250 volunteers (over the years) are part of the bordering process in society as well. By spreading their positive experiences through their friends and families they are bordering for more positive attitudes towards the refugee issue. They are on a small scale altering the border narrative.

**Fig. 8: Excursion with the Refugee Project**



(Source: Author)

Another local project, which is more focused on integration is the MultiCulti Collective. In general they promote different cultures living in Sofia by organizing cooking events and other food related projects. For example the MultiCultiMap with all foreign restaurants of Sofia. They are increasingly including refugees in their projects and are monitoring integration for the UNHCR. They are also part of the European SERIOUS. They are part of the bordering process because they are actively promoting positive views on refugees on a very grassroots level. For example they organized an event where Bulgarian children and refugee children were asked to draw each other. The idea was that the children really had to see each other and had to make some kind of connection. Other projects are the free guide tour through Sofia with an Arabic speaking guide, integrating refugees in the MultiCulti kitchen events and theater workshops for refugee women. One of the project that had just started during the fieldwork were cards with recipes from different countries.

“So last night a girl, I think she was 27 from a very small Bulgarian city, send us a picture of the food she made from a recipe from such a card. And she said that she is very fond of cooking and she feel very sorry for the Syrian refugees and that she is also a bit afraid and she feels insecure but then she sees these people on the television and she sees that they are mainly children and women and feels like why should these people go when it’s so difficult journey. They must experience some serious problems. And this is why she made the Syrian dish for her family. So she told them it was Syrian and that maybe Syrians are not that bad if they make such wonderful food. So this is basic level and it is a real story from yesterday. And I’m really happy that we can go to this personal level and to invite and make people try different things so they change their attitudes” (the MultiCulti Collective, 25 August 2015).

Next to all these small local organizations who are each in their own way trying to better the lives of the refugees and at the same time are trying to spread positive attitudes towards the refugees into the Bulgarian society, there are also some individuals trying to better the situation. For example in the center of Harmanli there is a local Bulgarian woman who is very active with volunteering in this center, but she is also very critical towards the Bulgarian system and towards the work of the UNHCR by blogging and Facebooking about this she in her own way tries to change the situation. In this same center there are also two English women who run a playschool. They are also trying to better the situation in their own way. Also in Harmanli, there was clear example of refugees trying to engage in bettering their life for themselves or actually for their children. They started their own school, so that their children could continue to learn even though they were living in the reception center. During the fieldwork a sort of parent-teacher meeting of this school was attended. The refugees were debating the curriculum and the schedule of the school and they were trying to recruit new teachers. One Bulgarian volunteer assisted them, but they run the school themselves.

During the fieldwork some interviewees mentioned that there are also churches who are visiting the detention centers. They were not reached during the fieldwork, but they are also examples of Bulgarian citizens trying to be involved with the issue and trying to make the lives of these asylum-seekers better.

## 6.6 Governance within the refugee system

When asking the different organizations about their cooperation and the cooperation with the government, especially the State Agency for Refugees, they all more or less gave the same answers. The cooperation with the State Agency for Refugees improved enormously in recent years. The organizations have gained access to the centers and they are positive about the cooperation with SAR in the centers. They mention the meetings organized by UNHCR as very valuable. However there are also some counter voices. For example about the fact that not every organization is welcome at the table; the above mentioned case of FarBg being refused entry to a meeting with EASO organized by SAR is an example of this. FarBG is an activist legal organization; they take many cases to court much to the exasperation of SAR. There are also some negative sounds concerning the effectiveness of these meetings. Not only the meetings organized by the UNHCR, who are mostly valued positive, but more concerning all the meetings organized by different state institutions. The head of the Caritas social center for example explained that the idea behind the meetings is always the same; there is a powerpoint with many examples about how it goes in Germany or Austria or the Netherlands, but nothing happens with this information:

“but nobody is trying to establish a good practice in Bulgaria, according to the Bulgarian conditions and to the Bulgarian situation. Just to see what is going on in the Netherlands or in Sweden I can check it on the internet so I do not need somebody to prepare a PowerPoint for me and take half a day of my precious time. Sorry to say but it is. [...] I have to say, it is not working. So there are always the same persons, always discussing the same problems since many years and spending a lot of money for nonsense. [...] They [state agencies] are just passive receivers of the information and that's it, nothing happens. And I can imagine it is also kind of demotivating for the colleagues of UNHCR, because they are clever enough to see that it is not working” (Caritas, 13 august 2015).

One of the leading volunteers from the Refugee Project explained that the social workers and other personnel from SAR in the centers are mostly happy that they are present, but they cannot try to change to much, or ask many things if this give the people from SAR extra work. The head of the Council for Refugee Women explained that the cooperation between SAR and their organization is usually very good. They have their disagreements for example about the cutting of the 65 lev financial support for asylum-seekers or about the discrimination in the procedure with mainly Syrians receiving status, but overall the cooperation is good. Also the head of the social center of Caritas stated that working with SAR is going well, they have been partners for years so there is cooperation based on phone calls and emails. However nothing is made official, it is all based on informal contacts. The women leading The Refugee Project explains that SAR changed its attitude towards them and that the cooperation is now friendly and good. This opinion was shared with the women from the Center for Legal Aid.

“because they do not have any programs in the center and when they saw that we are going there without stopping for the last four years, we are the only ones going there without just all the time. [...] And so they started as recognizing us as something important, and in general the communications with the social workers in the centers is good” (The Refugee Project, 21 august 2015).

“it has been improved, I think the crisis has shown that the State Agency for Refugees, they cannot carry the burden alone. And they have been brought to that realization. So there is a change in the attitude, at least visibly in their willingness to work with other partners. Which include the NGO sector”(Center for Legal Aid, 25 august 2015).

About SAR in general some respondents were less positive. Just before the fieldwork the head of the agency changed. The new head was actually a former head and most people were not too happy he was back. A BHC colleague stated that he fired the few good professionals the agency had and replaced them with people close to him. As well as establishing silly rules that work counterproductive. For example that asylum-seekers cannot change reception centers which leads to people who speak French and are staying in Harmanli not being able to transfer to Sofia where there are people who can translate French to Bulgaria. In the spring of 2015 SAR cut the 65 leva support asylum-seekers received. They argue that because the asylum-seekers are receiving three (during the summer this was cut to two) meals a day, they do not need the 65 leva. All the non-governmental organizations were furious, because not only is the 65 leva according to the Bulgarian law, the asylum-seekers need it very much to buy medicine for example. The head of the social center from Caritas stated that the Bulgarian state in general does not want to work with NGO's.

“And somehow the institutions do not want to recognize the NGO's as equal partners and if they do not want to do something, to give the responsibility to provide social assistance to vulnerable groups to the NGO's. Because I would say that the NGO's have a lot of capacity to do that, if they are funded by the state. That is a working modus in a lot of European countries and the state will do just monitoring” (Caritas, 12 august 2015).

If SAR really does not want to work with the NGO's couldn't be verified during the fieldwork. And maybe that is not really the point. The fact that NGO's feel that they are not a welcome partner, or that they are afraid to ask too much (the Refugee Project for example) shows that there are still some issues to work out. However, according to the head of the social department of SAR, there is no problem; she is very positive about the cooperation with their partner organizations. Especially when talking about the bigger organizations (UNHCR, BRC, BHC and Caritas) she referred to them as 'family'. She was also very positive about all the civil society initiatives and the NGO's working with refugees. According to her the coordination meetings are very useful and help to address the problems together. SAR also receives many calls from individual Bulgarians offering jobs or housing, she tries to use this as well, for example they organized some sort of job-fair in one of the reception centers.

“They have their funds and we see it is very, very useful for us. And yes it was the beginning when they were supporting everything we were like a family. Because you know, now I'm trying not to call them for every difficult case, but there were years that I did call them” (Head of directorate Social Affairs and Adaption SAR, 28 July 2015).

When the different non-governmental organizations were asked about the cooperation between the organizations themselves, they were much less positive. Some organizations do work together and refer cases to each other but in general all of them think there should be more involvement. The head of a social center from Caritas explained that there is a lot of cooperation and interaction between the different organizations working with asylum-seekers and refugees. However this is



based on personal contact, phone calls and emails. There is nothing official and it is not organized. According to him this should be different, there should be a more official way of working together. He does however realize that it will cost money and time and human resources to coordinate the activities and to put this together and the NGO sector in Bulgaria does not have time or money. This lack of coordination was expressed also by other NGO's:

“but also there are quite hindrances of this unity in the NGO groups of working together of knowing each other. Knowing how to partner, how to have good and efficient partnerships, everyone doing independently their own thing and this is also a challenging issue. And this is why I think the friends for the refugees initiative, that happened on a very civil society based, non-uniform way, have helped and gave a very good example of how this actually is possible to happen. At least as a hub of information. I think there is also a need for a very unified database of the organizations that are working in this sphere and the concrete activities that they are having. And this to be transparent and to be publicly announced. So that there can be, that the orientation, better referral mechanism between the services, the different services that are provided. Because we for example provide only legal services, but when people come to us for legal advice, they come with much of other non-legal issues, that I need to know where to tell them to go next. So but this uniformity is still lacking” (Center for Legal Aid, 25 August 2015).

## 6.7 Returning to the theory

This chapter has presented the findings of the fieldwork on how the borders concerning refugees are drawn within the Bulgarian society. Just as at the border the bordering processes in society know many actors and the theories discussed in the theory chapter concerning governance and rescaling can be applied here as well.

By approaching borders as social constructions and as lines that determine the ‘self’ and the ‘other’ we can understand that borders run through a society (Van Houtum, 2005). These borders are established by the people with power, the elites, but at the same time they are always subject to change through negotiations (Radu, 2010). In Bulgaria borders concerning refugees were established mostly by the government and the politicians. Especially in the beginning of the crisis at the end of 2013. They determined the border narrative and set the discourse. The media played a huge role because they copied the border narrative and language used by the politicians; they let the politicians decide. This led to much fear and negative responses from the Bulgarian citizens. However, the border narrative portrayed in the media and used by the politicians, was actively countered for example by the UNHCR. They tried to educate journalists and had their own media campaign in which they presented a different border narrative, more positive towards asylum-seekers and refugees. At the same time many local organizations tried to counter the dominant border narrative as well. Organizations like the Refugee Project and the MultiCulti Collective contest the border narrative on a very grassroots level by involving citizens and spreading a positive sound into society.

Van Leeuwen's (2008) theory on encounters with diversity can very well be applied on the way the Bulgarian society reacted to the refugee issue. On the one hand there were a lot of negative reactions; the safety requirement was not met and the encounter with diversity was experienced as threatening to the psychological, vital and national integrity. As explained in the theory chapter these

different safety spheres are not formed naturally but are manipulated and influenced, the extend of which increases from the first personal psychological sphere to the broader last national sphere. The border narrative dominant in the media, largely coming from politics influenced these spheres very much. By presenting the refugees as the 'other' who threaten the nation state, politicians manipulated citizens in feeling unsafe. At the same time for parts of the Bulgarian society the safety requirement apparently did get met and they were not or less influenced by the political manipulations. They experienced the encounters with diversity as something positive which inspired some of them to organize help for the refugees. The result was the spontaneous donation of all kinds of goods and money, but also the establishment of longer lasting organizations like the Refugee Project.

The State Agency for Refugees was at first skeptical towards these civil society initiatives. However, during the time of the fieldwork the cooperation between the government and the non-governmental organizations was experienced positive by most actors. The boundaries between the state and the civil society changed (Kjaer, 2011).

The next chapter will discuss the issue of integration of refugees into the Bulgarian society.

## 7. Bordering though integration

As discussed in the last chapters Bulgaria received many more refugees in the last few years than they did before 2013. The asylum-seekers are processed in the country in different centers, they are taken care of by the State Agency for Refugees and by several other nongovernmental and nonprofit organizations. After their initial crossing of the territorial border they are confronted with many other borders concerning the process for applying for asylum, their stay in the reception centers and the borders of Us and Them in the Bulgarian society. These borders are constructed, changed, and negotiated by many different actors. After this period many of them receive refugee status and with this status they gain the right to stay and work in Bulgaria, to build a new life, to integrate. However, in order to start the integration process they need to learn the language, they have to find a house and a job. It is in that moment that they are confronted with a new border, the border of the integration policy.

“In my opinion the majority, of course there are many exceptions, but still the majority of the people I think do not want to stay, do not want to integrate. And the state in general, like the political power, do not want them to stay. This is why they are doing just help them to go away” (MultiCulti Collective, 25 August 2015).

After discussing bordering at the physical border and in the Bulgarian society in the last two chapters, this chapter will focus on one aspect of bordering in the society. This last data-chapter will focus on the integration policy of Bulgaria, or rather the lack of an integration policy and how it is used to create a border for refugees, after they already crossed the border into the Bulgarian territory.

### 7.1 Integration policy in Bulgaria

In Bulgaria there have been national integration policies since 2005. There were three programs, each for three years; the last one ended in 2013. During that time the State Agency for Refugees was responsible for the implementation of these policies. The influx of refugees in these years was low, around 100 people were granted international protection each year and the program focused only on Sofia. When the numbers started to rise slowly from 2010 and rapidly from 2013 onwards, it became clear that the way the integration programs were organized was no longer enough.

“After that it was decided that it would not be the State Agency for Refugees that would be the responsible body for the implementation of such integration programs. However the format should be wider, including other relevant institutions on the level of ministries as well and also state agencies, agencies and so on” (UNHCR, Integration Unit, 25 June 2015).

To elaborate such a new plan, where integration was no longer taking place on an individual basis like it had been done in the years before, a working group was formed. The UNHCR was one of the many organizations taking part in this working group that started in 2014. However it became clear that in order to make an integration plan there should be some kind of strategy. The re-tasking of this working group took some time and was then postponed because there was no clarity about how this should be working. In July 2014 the working group finally produced a national strategy on the area of integration. Several issues delaying the implementation of the strategy arose after July. The strategy

appointed the ministry of labor and social policy as the responsible body for integration, however the law for asylum and refugees was not changed and still stated that the State Agency for Refugees was the responsible body. This discrepancy between the primary and secondary legislation resulted in a lack of clarity concerning who was responsible. Then, in the fall of 2014, the government changed twice: first to an interim government and after the elections to the new government, who came into power in November 2014. With refugees and integration not being a popular topic in election times, the whole process was stalled till after the elections and with the change of government the ideas on integration changed as well. In the beginning of 2015 there hadn't been an integration policy for a year, the strategy that was adopted in 2014 was thrown away and a new working group was formed. The idea of this new working group was to adapt a set of strategies on migration in general, including asylum and integration, to one strategy. This time fewer organizations were invited to join the process, some governmental agencies, the Bulgarian Red Cross and the UNHCR. Again they first needed to formulate the strategy, before an action plan could be drafted.

The fieldwork of this research took place in the summer of 2015, the strategy on integration was ready at the end of June and during the rest of the summer months the action plan was revised so that it would cover the second half of 2015. However, because there was no clarity about the responsible body for a long time, none of the state agencies applied for European Funds, which resulted in the impossibility to use European funds until the end of 2015. All the funding therefore has to come from the state budget, but Bulgaria does not have a lot to spend. In the mean time the European Emergency Fund provided 4 million leva to Bulgaria to use for the housing of about 800 refugees for a period of 1 year. This however is, according to the UNHCR, not in any way related to integration.

"However this measure is by no means related to any other integration measure. Only for housing. We should be clear to ourselves that as apart from the housing there is no other support available, this money will be wasted, because the people will stay in these apartments for one, two, three months. They will leave and in their place there will be new people, but this has nothing to do with integration" (UNHCR, Integration Unit, 25 June 2015).

The situation surrounding the new integration policy as ascribed above is mainly based on an interview with the Integration Unit of the UNHCR. The head of the social department of SAR that was interviewed, more or less mentioned the same issues, but in a much shorter version.

"Well, we do not have an integration program since the end of 2013. We didn't have an integration program in 2014 because there was a big crisis, all the money went into the reception conditions and so on and we could do nothing in this area. In 2014 it was very difficult but we prepared a new strategy on integration and we prepared an integration plan but we couldn't apply because of the changes in the government. And now we are preparing a new short plan for three months of this year. Because, as you know, it was in the newspapers, we have special emergency measures for Bulgaria and we received money for accommodation for 800 persons that are granted international protection, and they are staying in our reception centers [...] But I'm not sure that there are people that want to go, they want to go to Europe. [...] So we decide what to do, how to inform the people about these possibilities and we try to move them from our centers to private apartments. And I hope that in October we have money from the European fund for asylum, integration and migration

and we try to, with this money, to organize Bulgarian classes. But we need some more money from the government for the daily allowances. And we are preparing for a national plan for 2016 because we have to know how much money we need and to prepare everything for the next year” (Head of directorate Social Affairs and Adaption SAR, 28 July 2015).

The money of the European Union Emergency Fund meant for housing was a pressing issue during the time of the fieldwork. SAR asked the Bulgarian Red Cross to organize the housing, but that wasn’t so easy. Next to the organizational difficulties, finding people who wanted to stay in the apartments turned out to be a difficult task.

“Today I was trying to see what the status of this new housing between the State Agency and the Bulgarian Red Cross, I think you know it. The ladies of the state agency said that they were trying desperately to find people who wanted to go out to the external address to their new separate apartment, they couldn’t find any. People just do not want to go, they want to stay at the agency and then leave as soon as possible. And off course the lack of the integration program in the last two years is not helping at all. People do not speak the language, they do not know anything, they do not know where to go or where to seek help” (MultiCulti Collective, 25 August 2015).

During the fieldwork many other organizations gave the lack of integration measures as the main problem for refugees in Bulgaria now and in the foreseeable future. What becomes clear is that there hasn’t been an integration policy for a few years now, and the policies before these years were so individually based that they received a lot of critique and are in no way suitable for the amount of refugees coming to the country in the recent years. At the same time there are policies and strategies developed, but also delayed and no state agency or ministry seems willing to take the responsibility. This lack of political responsibility is for many people and organization a huge frustration.

“SAR feels not responsible for the persons who are granted international protection and are living on external addresses. And they are right because somehow also the other institutions have to take responsibility and do something. So the ministry of Interior, the ministry of Social affairs and politics and some other institutions. Everybody should get into the same boot. But they do not want to and SAR is weak. Their budget is approved by the ministry of Interior, so they do not have their own budget, and it makes it more difficult” (Caritas, 13 August 2015)

“The lack of process makes other organizations dispirited: “And there is this strategy, to be honest I do not follow anymore that topic, because when I started my job, they were discussing strategy and for the last three years they were discussing strategy, the whole time. And now I do not follow it anymore. I mean I will hear when they start doing something with it” (The Refugee Project, 21 August 2015).

When putting the integration issue in the perspective of rescaling it becomes clear the national government carries most of the burden. They receive money from European funds but one could argue what the effectiveness of this solution is:

“the strategy [of the European Union] is just to pour money in some countries without any sustainable long term approach to like making the system function. It is not working, it is not sustainable” (Journalist Maria, 21 July 2015).

When focusing on subnational levels of government in Bulgaria, the integration issue is no different than the issue of bordering at the physical border or bordering throughout society: the municipal scale is completely absent. The Integration Unit of the UNHCR stresses its frustration when asked about the local level. They explain that the municipalities are absolutely reluctant. They are afraid that it will cost them a lot of money, but that they do not get additional funding to pay for the services they have to provide. When asking SAR about the involvement of the municipalities, the head of the social department states that this is indeed a big problem, especially now with the local elections coming up.

“And municipalities are not ready to work with us. You know in Harmanli we have a big camp and we have a lot of people, some of the people they stay there, they work there in restaurants or something or other places, but the deputy Major of Harmanli told me: yes I help you, but at this elections I won't be at the same position” (Head of directorate Social Affairs and Adaption SAR, 28 July 2015).

## **7.2 Other reasons for the lack of integration**

The lack of an integration policy is a huge obstacle to integration in the country and it is an important reason for people to leave the country, but off course there are also other reasons. One of them is described by the head of the Center for Legal Aid as the feeling of temporality and is actually a consequence of the lack of integration policy.

“There is only one national strategy that has been very like under pressure written, but there is no practical application still in this integration practice. So this is a big big demotivation for people to stay in Bulgaria. Even the people who stay for short term or longer term, feeling this temporality of their stay. It is very difficult to be in any way integrated.” (Center for Legal Aid, 25 August 2015).

If you continue to feel that your stay in a country is temporary, it is hard to stay motivated to integrate. Especially if the society you are trying to integrate in is not so welcoming. Negative sentiments are therefore another reason to leave. The Council of Refugee Women gave the following example as to demonstrate how hard it is for refugees to find their place in the Bulgarian society. The story is about an rich Iraqi women. The women was working as a volunteer for the organization and wanted to stay in Bulgaria, therefore they were trying to find her a house. “and my social workers talked to different agencies, they are looking, and she has money; she is a very rich women from Iraq. She is not working, she has a car. But they do not want to give her an apartment. We found just here a flat that she liked and first it was okay but when they asked about documents and saw she had a refugee card, they said no” (Council of Refugee Women, 11 august, 2015).

More personal reasons for refugees to leave Bulgaria have to do mostly with financial reasons or family reasons. When your family is in Germany, you want to join them. Also, as a long term volunteer already explained in chapter five, Syrians are used to higher standards of living than the

standard in Bulgaria, when you add the poor social security in Bulgaria, one can imagine that richer countries as Germany and Sweden form much more attractive settling places.

“And because our social security system is very poor for Bulgarians as well, if these people have to rely on the social security system, they cannot survive in Bulgaria. Its nothing, you have to work, both have to work, otherwise you cannot survive. You are marginalized like the Roma people. That is why they choose to leave, they see very quickly that here there is no system in place to help them, at least in the initial period. And even if they get work, the wages everything they get, will be maybe not enough if they have 3,5,6 children to take care off” (Bulgarian Red Cross, 26 June 2015).

The low wages in Bulgaria also form a problem when they have to repay the debts they have. Many of them loaned money from friends and family to pay the smugglers and they need to find better paying jobs to be able to repay those loans.

“And those that report to us information on this say that they are all in debts with more then 2000-3000 euro and for this they need to find a job that is better paid so that they can actually repay their debts. And this is actually why they head to western European countries, so that they are in a situation which would allow them to start from zero again and to be able to take care of themselves and their families” (UNHCR, Integration Unit, 25 June 2015).

These different reasons to leave Bulgaria make the integration process only harder because it is very hard to integrate someone, who does not want to be integrated.

“in order to have real integration you have to the interest for this from the both sides. [...] So actually it is very hard to integrate someone who is not willing” (MultiCulti Collective, 25 August 2015).

The most mentioned reason why having an integration policy is important for Bulgaria has to do with the Dublin returns.

“which is like two completely empty years in terms of integration. And normally people would like to move on but you know that with the Dublin agreements etc. the people will start, they have already started to come back and these are the people who are most motivated to integrate themselves because they tried everything. So they really need to do something here now and they have no opportunity offered by the state” (Journalist Maria, 21 July 2015).

“of this groups of people that due to, some of them inability to stay here, or some of them some of them Dublin returns that still are not happening in big numbers, but that might be continue to happen and to grow in the coming year and years. There will be a big and bigger group of people that stay here and that still Bulgaria is completely unprepared to integrate” (Center for Legal Aid, 25 August 2015).

### **7.3 Integration without the support of the state**

No integration policy from the state does not mean that there is no integration possible at all in Bulgaria. There are organizations targeting statusholders, but they run into problems themselves. For example Caritas, they run an information center for statusholders where they provide Bulgarian language lessons and help with practical things like writing a CV. However, they do not get their

funding from the state and receive funding on the basis of one year projects, so it was unclear if this information center would exist longer than one year. One of the major issues Caritas runs into when applying for funding is that there is no target group for refugees in the Bulgarian society.

“But the problem is so the target group, refugees and asylum-seekers do not exist as a separate group and so it is hard to find funding from the Sofia municipality. Because they have budgets for such kind of centers, centers for integration and social rehabilitation but for vulnerable persons, or persons with disabilities, and this is the explicit target group. So you can find funding only for that target group, and all other target groups, they are just other” (Caritas, 13 August 2015).

Another problem Caritas describes is about the willingness of the refugees themselves. Learning Bulgarian only works when you attend the classes, but as soon as they get a job, learning Bulgarian is not a priority anymore. Keeping the refugees in class is therefore a difficult task.

“So the main challenge is to find well motivated students who have also free time during the day. Because you know the refugees, or persons granted international protection they also receive immediately a work permit. So off course they are seeking for jobs. So that is one of our challenges” (Caritas, 13 August 2015).

The Red Cross also has information centers throughout the country, but these are focused on many different target group, not only asylum-seekers and statusholders. However they try to help when refugees come to these centers and when they have the resources.

“We do not have programs for targeting exactly those people who are granted asylum, because we do not have resources to provide something for this group, except what is possible pro bono. So we are not proactive to look for them, there goes a lot through the information centers and we try to spread these information that such a center exists” (Bulgarian Red Cross, 1 July 2015).

The IOM is also involved with the integration issue, however they do not have any programs, they work more with events. They use the local foreign communities for this. Their focus is much less on the personal integration of statusholders but more on the familiarization between migrant communities and the Bulgarian society. In the long run this might develop understanding making the integration process easier.

“So we have a large communities living here like for thirty years maybe. Like the Syrian, the Iraq, the Iranian communities. We have a Chinese, a Vietnamese, a very big Russian community, Ukrainian, Moldavian communities. In the framework of our integration activities, we created different events. Multi cultural events, like concerts, football tournaments, exchange of different kitchens. Also in order to present communities the Bulgarian society, as well as the Bulgarian society to get familiar with these communities here. Because Bulgaria was closed for many years. And so the issues of the integration for the large number migrants is something quite new for the county” (IOM, 21 July 2015).

The Council for Refugee Women is much more involved in the personal integration and also work with local communities. They have refugees work as volunteers for them, to develop their (language) skills and make it easier to find jobs. They use the communities of migrants who have been in



Bulgaria for a long time to help find housing and jobs. The council helps with food, schooling of children, mediation in family affairs and health insurance.

“many of our volunteers, when they are volunteering they learn Bulgarian. Learning the language it was easier for them: when they hear a word they do not know they can ask. And many of them they found real jobs. Some of them in the private sector, some of them in different organizations, NGO's” (Council for Refugee Women, 11 august 2015).

The MultiCulti Collective focuses a great deal on integration of statusholders and migrants. They organize all sorts of events for the familiarization of the different cultures, much like the IOM is doing. But they also have a network of people who want and can help individual refugees. Many organizations stated that the only way to survive in Bulgaria is to have local connections of people that want to help you. According to the UNHCR Integration Unit, this is only a handful of people.

“Just some people from the Syrian communities for example or some nice people Bulgarian who want to help offer jobs. So there are some people integrating but they are integrating because of their own efforts and the efforts of some others, locals” (Journalist Maria, 21 July 2015).

Next to all these problems and issues concerning the integration policy, programs and opportunities in Bulgaria, sometimes a little change can be seen. There seems to be an increasing interest in the issue and more political will to change things than in the beginning of the crisis. However it are only some starts and it remains to be seen what will really change.

“And at the same time something finally started to take place. At least these meetings, last week and Friday on the occasion of the world refugee day, there was a seminar on integration and beneficiaries of international protection. Under the vice president, which you can imagine is a very high level of commitment to the issue and this seminar was attended by high ranking officials from various state institutions for example the deputy minister of interior, the deputy minister of science and education, the chairperson for the state agency of refugees and others. So that was a very positive step, because what we lack currently is the political will. In order for something to start taking shape, first of all there should be a high level decision for this” (UNHCR Integration Unit, 25 June 2015).

## 7.4 Returning to the theory

This last data chapter has focussed on one specific aspect of the refugee issue: integration. During the fieldwork it became clear that integration plays an important role in the way bordering is carried out in Bulgaria. Integration turned out to be an important tool for the Bulgarian government in the drawing of borders surrounding refugees. By not providing assistance to refugees to help them integrate, or to help them build a life in Bulgaria there is a powerful border process going on. The lack of an integration policy but also by not making refugees a target group making it impossible for nongovernmental organizations to get funding, the refugees are kept away from a new life in Bulgaria. The Bulgarian government cannot keep the refugees out, because of international agreements, but by making it impossible to stay the border is drawn in a new place: the moment the refugee receives status and therefore does not have any rights to support anymore. This leaves the refugees feeling unwelcome and it gives them a feeling of temporality. The endless waiting and the lack of opportunities gives them no real place to start a new life. As seen in the border processes

described in chapter five and six the integration border is also contested and negotiated. Many organizations try to help the people with status, but they seem much less successful in doing so than they are in the other bordering processes.

The responsibility of the integration policies remains with the national government. Rescaling upwards to the European level is only visible in the financial area. Rescaling to the regional level does not seem to work at all. The Bulgarian municipalities are not interested in taking part in the integration of refugees into the Bulgarian society and thus remains the State Agency for Refugees the only one, on the governmental level, involved. However they are slowly starting to involve more non-governmental agencies and to share the responsibilities with them. That the Bulgarian Red Cross is now made responsible for a housing project is a clear example of how charitable agencies are made responsible for the care of refugees and therefore enter the territory of care that traditionally belonged to the nation state (Dwyer, 2005).

## 8. Conclusion

This research has focused on how borders are drawn in societies and how rescaling and governance influence the drawing of these borders. To understand these processes the research has focused on borders that are drawn in relation to the refugee issue in the Bulgarian society. The topic of refugees and borders is very topical in contemporary Europe. The central question in this research is the following: *In what way are processes of governance and rescaling in the refugee system influencing the process of bordering in the Bulgarian society?* To be able to answer this question the research made a distinction between three different borders in the Bulgarian society: the physical border, the borders within society and the border of integration. This chapter will first summarize the conclusions of these three aspects and will finish by formulating an overall conclusion as an answer to the research question.

At the physical border there is this very classical and literal form of bordering going on by the government. Bulgaria installed an advanced border control system. There is not only a fence that is expanding to cover more and more of the border between Turkey and Bulgaria, there are also many patrol cars, the border police grew and the border is controlled tighter and tighter. The Bulgarian authorities are in charge at this border. At the same time, however, many other parties are involved in the border process. Through upward rescaling the European Union is much involved; this border is also an outer EU border. Directly at the border this becomes visible through the presence of Frontex, less visible is the substantial financial support the Bulgarian government receives from the European Union. Even though the Bulgarian government seems happy with this rescaling upwards they also illustrate ways to counter the trend or at least control it. By determining which parts of the border can be controlled by Frontex they try to counter Jessop's (2005) trend of denationalization.

At the physical border there does not seem to be any rescaling to regional or local governmental levels. The local authorities are not interested to get involved at all: they are afraid it will cost them money and so they leave the bordering to the national government. This is a contrast with the Turkish side of the border where the authorities from the regional towns are responsible for the guarding of the border (together with the Turkish army). However, when local elections are approaching national parties begin to worry about having to answer uncomfortable questions during election time, at this moment the subnational level is indirectly influencing the national level in the bordering process. When going beyond the governmental agencies a lot of other actors are involved at the border. Through governance the boundaries between the state and (civil) society change (Kjaer, 2011). At the Bulgarian border this becomes visible when the Bulgarian Red Cross takes over responsibilities from the Bulgarian border police to provide care and food for detainees or when the UNHCR provides interpreters. At the same time these organizations like the UNHCR are lobbying, in Bulgaria but also on other scale levels, for a more open border where people get the change to apply for the international protection they need.

It are not only organizations who take part in the bordering process. The border and the refugee issue also present economic opportunities to smugglers (from Turkey, from Bulgaria), Bulgarian border guards (corruption) Bulgarian taxi drivers or inhabitants of the border areas. Bulgarian citizens

sometimes become border guards when they find refugees in their field or towns and call the border police; they actively become part of the border process. And let us not forget the asylum-seekers themselves. For them this border is an obstacle in their way to a safer and better life.

Borders run also through society, forming lines of in- and exclusion: dividing 'us' and 'them'. They are social constructions that are maintained by constantly reproducing them through practices and discourse: the border narratives (Van Houtum, 2005). In the Bulgarian society the government and politicians dominated the debate surrounding refugees. They were not promoting any positive sounds concerning refugees. The extreme right wing parties are strong and can voice their opinion, but also the more liberal and moderate parties do not oppose when fences etc are build. By voicing only negative ideas concerning the refugee issue they polarized the society. The politicians determined how the refugees were portrayed and which language and discourse was used. The media, especially in the beginning of the crisis in 2013, copied the border narrative from the politicians. The result was that large segments of the Bulgarian society had a very negative take on the refugee issue. However, the UNHCR tries to counter this narrative in numerous ways. They educated the media and tried to start a debate amongst the media themselves about how to portray the refugee issue. This has helped and the reporting is now much more balanced. The UNHCR also had their own media campaigns (for example the 'see refugees through new eyes' campaign). They are not the only organization promoting a positive take on the refugee issue in Bulgarian. Many civil society initiatives and local NGO's also try to change the border narratives from a very grassroots level.

That the Bulgarian society responded to the refugee issue in a very polarized way is not strange when understanding the negative rhetoric of Bulgarian politicians as a way to manipulate the national and vital integrity of the society. People got scared and began to fear the refugees; their safety requirement was not met, because of the political manipulation (Van Leeuwen, 2008). On the other hand there were also people who responded much more positive; for them the encounter with the refugees formed a positive experience that fulfilled a fascination and a longing to be part of something that "transcends the individual" and gives meaning to their lives (Van Leeuwen, 2008, pp. 156). They were less or not affected by the political manipulations. It inspired some of them to get organized and provide all kinds of assistance to the refugees.

The responsibility for the refugee issue in Bulgaria lies with the State Agency for Refugees (SAR). There is not much rescaling going on. The European Union provides funds but there is no further support from the European level (maybe a little from EASO). One of the respondents described it strikingly accurate: "the strategy [of the European Union] is just to pour money in some countries without any sustainable long term approach to like making the system function. It is not working, it is not sustainable" (Journalist Maria, 21 July 2015). The subnational governmental authorities are again not interested to play any role in the care for asylum-seekers and refugees; much to the frustration of the UNHCR and SAR. However, the many non-governmental organization do play a growing role. The State Agency for Refugees seems to be more open for partnership then it was in the beginning of the crisis. Especially the fact that the Bulgarian Red Cross is now made responsible for a housing project is a clear example of how charitable agencies are made responsible for the care of refugees

and therefore enter the territory of care that traditionally belonged to the nation state (Dwyer, 2005). There is still much room for improved though.

During the fieldwork it became clear that the Bulgarian government is drawing the border in a new place. There has not been a integration policy in Bulgaria since 2013. The process of creating a new policy is taking very long and has often been delayed because of political changes etc. This makes it impossible for refugees to build a new life in Bulgaria: forcing them to leave. It is not only the fact that staying is impossible it is also very much the feeling that it gives to the refugees. They are feeling that they are unwelcome, that their stay is temporary and will stay temporary. The endless waiting and the feeling that they are in 'limbo', makes them want to move on to other parts of Europe. However, the question remains of this will help. When refugees arrive in Germany, Sweden or The Netherlands does this feeling of temporality go away? Or will they just end up in new endless procedures, waiting on Dublin transfers or new procedures and family reunion? It seems that there is some sort of 'governance of time' arising in Europe.

Also in the case of borderwork through integration there are nongovernmental organizations in Bulgaria who are trying to counter this trend. The UNHCR, for example, is much involved with the establishment of a new integration policy but they are frustrated that it goes so slow. Organizations like the MultiCulti Collective, Caritas Bulgaria and the Council for Refugee Women try on a grassroots level to help individual refugees integrate in the Bulgarian society but it seems a very difficult task to change the integration border, to change the feeling of temporality refugees have.

The research has shown that there are many forms of bordering going on in Bulgaria at many different borders. It illustrated the many different ways borders get constructed and negotiated by many actors all with their own goals. Bordering is no longer only done by the government, processes of rescaling and governance have now involved many others. Concerning rescaling processes the research has shown that there is upward rescaling at the Bulgarian border, the involvement of Europe through mainly Frontex is very visible. However, at the same time the Bulgarian state controls this rescaling and determines who does what. Rescaling downwards on a governmental level is hardly the case in Bulgaria. The local and regional authorities do not seem to be involved at all (except indirectly during local election time) and do not want to be. One could argue that the process of rescaling as Brenner and Jessop describe is not really compatible (yet) with states that are not North- or West-European states. Their systems of government have not (yet) reached this stage, but to really make a statement about this would be to bold on the basis of this research. It is, however, an interesting observation that deserves more research in the future. The process of governance is much more compatible with the Bulgarian situation. It indeed seems to be the case that the boundaries between the state and the civil society changed and still are changing. This research has also shown the emerging of a 'governance of time': refugees are kept in a temporary state that goes on endlessly. This makes it impossible for them to build new lives and the power over their lives remains with the national governments in Europe.



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