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## Balkan Migrations

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As part of the ongoing Open Lecture Series in the framework of the Masters in Interdisciplinary Research and Eastern European Studies (MIREES), students attended Anna Krasteva's lecture on **Balkan Migration** on May 12<sup>th</sup>, 2011. This is a complex subject with many sub-categories, affecting all countries in the Balkan region and is impossible to discuss fully in two hours. Despite the challenges, Professor Krasteva gave a comprehensive overview of three main themes with the Balkan migration discourse: the economic crisis, migration trends since 1989, and Remittances.

She started the discussion by looking at the impact of the **economic crisis** on migration patterns in Europe. While the expected results were lower levels of migration and remittances, the reality was slightly different. Migration flows did decrease, but only slightly, and the same goes for returnees. As far as remittances are concerned, they were certainly reduced, but more importantly, the dependence of certain states on the remittances was exposed. The problem, however, of looking at migration through the crisis, is that it tends to force a short-term analysis. This leaves out many of the important facets of migration, emphasizing only the economic factor.

The next focus of Professor Krasteva's discussion was to emphasize the **long-term perspective** of migration, by looking at it in two key phases, from 1989 to 1994, and from 1995 to 2007. In the first period migration was triggered by the collapse of both the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia. The conflicts in Yugoslavia meant that until 1995, migration was generally forced. This forced migration was both ethnic and political – minorities moved to areas where their was a majority of their ethnicity or moved abroad, and others fled political persecution.

In Bulgaria and Rumania, the opposite was true: the collapse of the communist regimes and the absence of conflict shifted the primary definition of migrants from political to economic. Now, rather than fleeing political persecution, most were seeking opportunities in the west. But that is not the whole picture, as there was also a degree of migration within ethnic groups, such as Germans and Jews. In addition, there was the constant, and still ongoing, migration of the Roma communities through-out the region. In the case of the Roma communities, there was added burden that they don't have the traditional characteristics of peoples belonging to a nation, or a nation-state; they are not in the majority anywhere, they have not state to return to, and high levels of discrimination have made integration largely unsuccessful.

In the second phase we discussed, from 1995 to 2007 the wider Balkan region generally saw a return of the forced and political migrants, yet the net flow of migrants was negative. Of the returnees there were two principle categories: hard returnees, those who's ideology or involvement in conflict meant they opposed return; soft returnees, those returning for economic reasons. The final point we examined from these periods was that the Balkans became a destination for a very negative type of migration: trafficking of humans and organs. The large presence of the international community offers some insight into the human trafficking in the region.

Before engaging in lively debate with the students, professor Krasteva highlighted the fact that **remittances** remained fairly high during the crisis: an important testimony to the fact that human solidarity resisted the financial crisis better than Foreign Direct Investment.

David Brown,  
MA candidate at *MIREES Interdisciplinary Research and Studies on Eastern Europe*  
*University of Bologna (Forlì Campus)*