



THE END OF EUROPEAN INTEGRATION?

MIGRATION

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In 2016, humanitarian crises of shocking and devastating proportions frequently hit the news headlines. In Syria, around 13 million people, or a little over half of the pre-war population had been displaced. Iraq was facing the threat of IS terrorism and the separation of the Kurdish and Shia Muslim minorities. Libya had descended into anarchy with multiple tribal governments laying claims to the succession of Colonel Muammar Gathafi's regime. In Yemen, the religious antagonism between Sunni Saudi Arabia and Shia Iran was acted out to vicious effects with 15 million people facing a humanitarian disaster. The Kenyan government shut down the world's largest refugee camp in Dadaab which at one point had accommodated 600,000 people and refugees were sent back to their countries of origin, mainly to Somalia. In Nigeria, Boko Haram continued to commit terrorist acts whilst persisting to kidnapping children in the most savage manner. The young state of South Sudan saw widespread human rights violations. U.S. American engagement in Afghanistan entered its 16th year. The Ebola virus in West Africa claimed many innocent lives, as did the super typhoon in the Philippines and the Zika virus in Brazil. According to the International Office for Migration (IOM), around 180 million people in Africa alone lived in crisis-affected areas. And Europe was the destination of choice for many. Seeking a better future might in some cases be driven by material concerns. More often though, it is often a desperate act of survival.

Types of Migration

The free movement of people is enshrined in the Treaty of Rome as one of the fundamental principles of EU integration. Holding a passport of any EU member state entitles citizens to live, work, study or retire anywhere within the bloc without the need for a visa or the approval of their new host state. Since 1985, free movement is complemented by passport-free travel within the Schengen zone¹ which makes crossing borders as easy as travelling from one U.S. state to another. As seen in Table 13.1. the percentage of EU citizens living in another EU member state is relatively small at 3.3% (or 16.9 million people). Citizens of certain member states, however, have taken an astonishing advantage of the free movement of people. In 2017, a staggering 19.7% of Romanian citizens were living in other EU member states, followed by Lithuania (15%), Croatia (14%), Portugal (13.9%), Latvia (12.9%) and Bulgaria (12.5%).²

In the run-up to the Brexit referendum of 2016, prime minister David Cameron secured an astonishing set of concessions from his fellow heads of governments in order to curb EU migration. As such, the UK did not grant any social benefits (such as income support) to EU migrants for the first seven years, thus effectively treating them as second-class citizens. The Cameron government also refused to pay child benefit for family dependents who remained in their EU country of origin. Longer re-entry bans for rough sleepers, beggars and fraudsters were introduced as well. However, Cameron's proposal to reject EU citizens should they not be in possession of a firm job offer was dismissed by the other member states, as was the idea to deport EU citizens within six months, should they fail to secure gainful employment.³

In contrast to citizens moving to other member states, there is also legal migration from outside the EU. Over the last ten years, the annual flow of non-EU nationals moving to the continent has been relatively steady and in January 2017 accounted for two million people, bringing the total figure of non-EU foreigners to 21.6 million; a mere 4.2% of the overall population (see Table 13.1.) As mentioned above, only 16.9 million EU citizens are living in a member state, other than their country of birth. Hence, out of a total population of 512 million, only 38.5 million people (or 7.5%) can be classified as foreigners.⁴ It was once more the UK as the member state most keen to bring immigration figures down. Government circles were increasingly alarmed by

persistently high net migration figures,⁵ which fuelled an anti-foreign rhetoric in the media and resulted in the rise of the United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP) which became the most popular party in Great Britain in the elections to the European Parliament in 2014. While the UK government could do very little about the EU's free movement of people, Cameron and his home office minister Theresa May embarked on an ambitious policy to curb non-EU migration, underlined by the perpetually repeated electoral mantra of bringing migration down from the hundreds of thousands to the tens of thousands. Tougher visa rules were implemented, which meant for instance, that non-EU students were forced to leave the country within days of graduating from their UK programmes. Bogus colleges that were merely designed to give students an entry visa but without offering any academic courses were shut down in droves. Tighter naturalisation laws, for instance of relatives from UK citizens, were also imposed. The measures however did not work, and in 2018, a staggering 248,000 people from outside the EU immigrated to the UK; the highest figures for 14 years.⁶

The statistics show that the European Union by and large is still quite homogenous. Granted, some countries mainly in the western part of the EU are more diverse than others. The United Kingdom, for instance, has a large non-white population of about 13%; a legacy of their colonial empire. According to the 2011 census, Germany is now home to 2.7 million Turks, and the picture in larger, western European cities is one of multi-culturalism and ethnic diversity. In contrast Poland and many other EU member states in central and eastern Europe, are highly homogenous whether from an ethnic, cultural or religious perspective. It is obvious that the EU is an attractive destination in an increasingly mobile and globalised world economy. But statistics offer very little support to those critics who might see the cultural integrity of some European countries jeopardised. The fact remains that the EU in its entirety does not have that many migrants - whether from within or from outside the EU - and if so, migration hotspots tend to be in western European cities, with the national character of many states completely unaffected.

Table 13.1. Share of non-nationals in EU member states, percentage, January 2017

EU member state	total	Citizens of other EU member states	Citizens of non-member countries
EU average	7.5	3.3	4.2
Luxembourg	47.6	40.7	6.9
Cyprus	13.4	12.9	3.5
Austria	15.2	7.5	7.7
Estonia	15.0	1.3	13.7
Latvia	14.3	0.3	14.0
Belgium	11.8	7.8	4.0
Ireland	11.8	8.9	2.9
Malta	11.8	6.6	5.2
Germany	11.1	4.8	6.3
Spain	9.5	4.2	5.3
UK	9.2	5.5	3.7
Denmark	8.3	3.5	4.8
Italy	8.3	2.5	5.8
Sweden	8.2	3.1	5.1
Greece	7.5	1.9	5.6
France	7.0	2.4	4.6
Slovenia	5.5	0.9	4.6
Netherlands	5.3	2.9	2.4
Czech Republic	4.9	2.0	2.9
Finland	4.4	1.8	2.6
Portugal	3.8	1.1	2.7
Hungary	1.5	0.8	0.7
Slovakia	1.3	1.0	0.3
Bulgaria	1.1	0.2	0.9
Croatia	1.1	0.4	0.7
Lithuania	0.7	0.2	0.5
Romania	0.6	0.3	0.3
Poland	0.6	0.1	0.5

Source: Eurostat.

Far from being a strain on a country, migrants provide a vital boost to the economy as consumers, but also as tax payers who contribute to the funding of welfare provisions. For years, European states have been suffering from a demographic deficit, with historically low birth rates and consequently an ageing population; a process which jeopardies long term economic prosperity. As seen in Table 13.2., by 2080, the total EU population is projected to increase only marginally from 510 to 518 million.⁷ While the UK will see its population swell from 65 to 82 million people, the number of Polish citizens will shrink dramatically from 38 to 29 million. Clearly, without migration, the

economic and social parameters of certain EU countries will be affected in a highly significant fashion.

Table 13.2. Demographic Projections, selected EU member states, 2016 to 2080 (percentages)

Top Five countries		Bottom Five countries	
UK	17.0	Poland	-8.9
France	12.0	Italy	-7.0
Spain	4.5	Romania	-5.2
Sweden	4.5	Germany	-4.4
Belgium	2.9	Greece	-3.5
EU average	8.6		

Source: Eurostat

But it is non-legal migration into the EU – whether economic migrants seeking a more prosperous future on European shores or political refugees fleeing their war-ravaged homes - that hit the headlines in recent years. The migrant routes from Africa into Spain or Italy have long been established. But the civil war in Syria, which began in 2011, and the subsequent exodus of large parts of the population exacerbated a crisis that had already reached worrying dimensions. According to the International Office for Migration, in 2014, a total of 280,000 refugees arrived in the EU. A year later, the figure had increased dramatically to 2.1 million, with at least 3,700 people being lost at sea. By 2018, and with entry into the EU now much more difficult, there were still over 100,000 people that had crossed the Mediterranean, with over 2,000 feared to have perished. ⁸

Migration from Africa

Managing the migration routes from Africa into Italy and Spain, was initially handled by individual member states without co-ordination at EU level. Italy for instance ran a full-scale rescue mission referred to as *mare nostrum*. The government claimed that between October 2013 and October 2014 alone, 140,000 people had been rescued at a cost of 9 million € per month to the Italian tax payer. In November 2014, *mare nostrum* was replaced by *Triton*. Now orchestrated by the EU border agency *Frontex* it did not possess its own boats or planes and thus relied heavily on the financial support, staff and equipment of volunteering member states. The budget for *Triton* was also considerably below that of *mare nostrum* at a mere 3 million € per month. Even more astonishing given the large number of people trying to reach Europe, rescue missions were now no longer conducted in international waters but were restricted to a 30-mile zone off the coasts of Italy and Spain.

Table 13.3. Migrant arrivals into Europe, 2014 – 2018

	Italy	Greece	Spain	Total
2014	111,197	209,457	2,166	319,000*
2015	153,052	847,048	3,845	1,004,356
2016	179,525	173,244	5,445	358,403
2017	119,310	29,595	21,663	171,635
2018	181,436	173,561	8,162	363,504

Source: Office for International Migration

* estimate

By the spring of 2015, migration had reached crisis levels. At a summit in May of that year, member states agreed to raise more money (although the summit's conclusions failed to provide specific sums) with more ships and planes deployed with the aim to destroy trafficker boats and networks and to improve border controls and surveillance. The measures were largely inward looking, designed to face the growing anti-migration sentiments that had emerged in countries like France, Germany or the UK. They tackled

symptoms but did not address the root causes of the refugee waves. Moreover, the plan did not work. The numbers of ships and planes co-ordinated by *Frontex* were insufficient, while the tackling of trafficker networks proved to be an almost impossible task, as criminal networks often relied on boats that had been fishermen vessels one day and were refugee cargo the next. Trafficking people into the EU was also highly lucrative with people smugglers being able to earn up to 40,000 U.S. Dollars per trip. Outsourcing the control of migrant waves – as practised by Australia and Indonesia – was also not a viable option, as those states with whom the EU could have collaborated (such as Libya and Tunisia) were highly unstable. To this day, a reduced, but nonetheless steady trickle of people from Africa continue to embark on the dangerous voyage across the western Mediterranean.

Migration to South Eastern Europe

In contrast to migration from Africa, the refugee crisis in south-eastern Europe was handled by the EU in a much more proactive fashion. By 2015, the sheer numbers that had started to arrive on European shores (see Table 13.3.) simply necessitated a rapid reaction. Most of the refugees taking this route from Turkey into Greece or Bulgaria came from Syria, with additional people pouring in from Afghanistan, Iran, Iraq or Pakistan. But it was the vicious civil war in Syria which had started in 2011, that caused a migration stampede; the scale of which Europe had not experienced since the end of World War II. By 2018, out of a total population of 13.5 million people, around 5.6 million Syrians had fled the country and a further 6.2 million had been displaced within Syrian territory.⁹ There was barely a person left that had not been affected by the civil war in one horrific way or another. Many people made it across the border into Jordan, and by February 2018, this small country housed over 650,000 Syrian refugees; close to 9% of its total population. Many more however were looking to escape to Europe and fled to Turkey before trying to cross the sea into Greece. Table 13.4. lists the shocking number of fatalities and in 2015 alone, 805 people had died making this perilous journey.

Table 13.4. Migrants Deaths at Sea, 2014 – 2018

	Western Mediterranean Route (Spain)	Central Mediterranean Route (Italy, Malta)	Eastern Mediterranean Route (Greece, Cyprus)	Total
2014	23	2,326	83	3,279
2015	74	2,892	805	3,771
2016	69	4,410	434	4,913
2017	223	2,832	61	3,116
2018	128	4,581	434	5,143

Source: Office for International Migration

Others entered the EU via land borders in either Greece or Bulgaria. By the summer of 2015, thousands upon thousands of people made their way through the Balkans towards the more prosperous parts of Europe further north. Once leaving Greece or Bulgaria, the trek then snaked its way through Macedonia and into Serbia (both non-EU countries) before reaching the EU border in Hungary. By June, the flow of migrants had become so large, that the Hungarian government tried to seal its border with Serbia by erecting a metal fence. Refugees then looked for an alternative by entering Hungary's neighbour Croatia, before moving onwards through Slovenia, Austria and ultimately Germany. By September, those borders too, were all closed.

The rush to reach northern European countries was exacerbated by German chancellor Angela Merkel, who on August 25, 2015 announced to an astonished public, that the country was willing to accommodate one million refugees. By early September, Germany was taking in migrants by the train load who had been stranded in Hungary. News of this extraordinary generosity started to spread to other migrants, and now even more people made their way up north. By mid-September, Germany had to strengthen controls on its border with Austria. Managing the tide of people proved to be a great organisational and administrative challenge for German municipalities. Shelter, clothing, food, and schooling needed to be provided which stretched authorities to the limit of their capacities. Resentment also started to grow resulting in the worrying rise of the homophobic party *Alternative für Deutschland* (Alternative for Germany). Still, the German people deserve much praise for their response to Merkel's call for action. The summer of 2015 provided memorable scenes of overcrowded train stations in

southern German cities, to which people had flocked to with drinks, food and welcoming signs. Many were reminded of their own family's history. At the end of World War II, some 20 per cent of Germans had to abandon their homes and had become refugees themselves. This collective memory provided for an astonishing buffer of emotional readiness to follow Merkel's rallying cry of '*Wir schaffen das*' (We can do this). But the Merkel government did not properly consult other EU countries affected by the refugee wave. Welcoming Syrians into Germany is one matter. But how can refugees get to their final destination? Most people made the journey by carrying all their belongings with them. To reach Germany, walking was very often the only viable option, and that meant crossing other EU countries. Hungary, Croatia, Slovenia and Austria were not best pleased by Merkel's unilateral approach.

EU Responses

Since 1997, the legal mechanism of the EU for dealing with refugees has been the Dublin agreement. Updated in 2003 and 2013, it stipulates that refugees entering an EU state must be administered by that country - which involves fingerprinting and registration, providing food and shelter, or schooling for children - before any potential asylum application could be processed. Refugees making their way to another member state would then have to be sent back to the country where they first entered EU territory. In this way, multiple applications could be prevented. On August 25, 2015, Merkel however, decided to suspend Dublin for all Syrian refugees. This meant that migrants from that country would not be sent back to the original state of EU entry (in most cases Bulgaria and Greece). Describing her decision as a sense of national duty, Merkel thereby granted protection to hundreds of thousands of refugees. Even two years after the peak of the migration wave, Germany continued to be the member state that by far processed the most asylum applications in the EU with 524,000 (see Table 13.5.) This was in sharp contrast to the similar-populated United Kingdom which merely processed a twentieth of that number.

Table 13.5 Asylum Applications to selected EU member states, 2017 (in thousands)

Germany	524	UK	28
France	111	Greece	25
Italy	78	Belgium	24
Sweden	61	Netherlands	16
Austria	56	Spain	13

Source: Eurostat (rounded figures)

It was not until the end of September, when the union tried to establish a more multi-lateral and co-ordinated approach by passing a raft of measures. A structural strengthening of EU borders was agreed upon. Financial assistance was offered to Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey with the clear aim to keep Syrians closer to home and thus to avoid the long and dangerous march across Europe. This approach also had the undisputed benefit of making a return to Syria much easier, once the country returned to a degree of stability. The United Nations also received a financial boost of one billion € to improve conditions in their refugee camps. Most importantly, the summit proposed to distribute 120,000 refugees across the EU that were currently stranded in Greece and in Italy. The proposal was met with fierce resistance from Hungary, Romania, the Czech Republic and Slovakia – often referred to as the *Visegrad* group -, who cited their lower economic development in comparison with richer western European countries, and a subsequent massive strain on public finances. But Merkel was unrelenting and even threatened that during future budget negotiations, Germany would veto additional agricultural and cohesion funds for those countries. In the end, the objecting states were outvoted by the remaining EU members, which left a highly bitter aftertaste, based on the notion that smaller member states saw their concerns overridden and ignored by Germany as the mighty arbiter of EU policy. It was widely regarded as an obtrusive act of meddling in national affairs.

But the implementation of the refugee distribution was a farce. By 2016 and with numbers now having increased to 160,000 only a paltry 6,000 people had been reallocated. Other matters, most notably Brexit, had assumed a higher priority and the Slovakian presidency of the EU in the second half of 2016 understandably made no attempt to revisit this issue. Irrespective of the suitability and coherence of this policy, it nonetheless represented binding EU law which was widely ignored. The Visegrad

countries remained stubborn and by the end of 2017, with only 27,000 people finding new homes, the programme was quietly shut down.

The EU – Turkey Joint Action Plan

Since attempts to resettle migrants across the whole of the EU were largely failing, much hope was pinned on the EU-Turkey Joint Action Plan which came into effect in March 2016. In return for six billion €, the promise of enhanced enlargement talks and more visa-free travel for its citizens, Turkey agreed to take in refugees who had reached Greece by sea. The government also promised to improve human rights and conditions for refugees in Turkey and to use its security forces to intercept migrants and prevent boats from leaving its shores. On the EU side, for every person returned to Turkey, the bloc would accept a Syrian refugee for resettlement. However, the envisaged resettlement across the EU failed to materialise. Furthermore, in the aftermath of the failed coup of July 2016, Erdogan's actions became increasingly autocratic which nullified any expectations of an improved human rights record. Still, almost instantly after the deal came into force, the number of refugees across the south-eastern Mediterranean route began to fall sharply. While in 2015, over 800,000 people had arrived in Greece, the figure dropped to some 170,000 (see Table 13.3.) as Turkey began to sharpen up its security measures.

But this did not mean, that refugees stopped coming to Europe. Instead, an ever-increasing number of refugees looked for an alternative, longer and thus more dangerous sea crossing in order to circumvent the Turkish fortress. As seen in Table 13.4. deaths occurring at sea on the central Mediterranean route to Italy and Malta jumped from 2,832 in 2015 to 4,410 a year later. The problem was not solved, it merely shifted to other shores. There were also no significant developments on behalf of Turkey to improve its human rights record while enlargement negotiations continued to be stalled, with the visa regulations for Turkish travellers into the EU also unchanged. The deal lowered the number of refugees entering Greece and Bulgaria, but it did fall short in delivering on the other aspects to the agreement. It therefore can best be described as the attempt to contain a precarious situation.

Outcomes

Throughout the migration crisis, affected member states were intent on moving the human tide along to the next member state as quickly and comprehensively as possible. Any notion of European solidarity, of finding a continental solution were absent. Angela Merkel's government was the notable exception by welcoming Syrian refugees with an astonishing degree of generosity. But Merkel was also the catalyst for growing tensions at EU level. Her open-door policy was announced without much consultation with those member states that were most affected by the refugee stampede. Her aggressive behaviour in making the Visegrad countries come to heel over an agreement to spread out the burden of accommodating refugees went down very badly in the capitals of Hungary, Romania, Slovakia and the Czech Republic. There was no evidence of European solidarity, nor was there much consensus building.

The causes of the human tide were not addressed, merely its consequences. Assad – with the help of Russia – resumed his authoritarian and unchallenged position as Syria's leader. The UN – despite the EU's one billion € cash injection - continued to be underfunded and its efforts, for instance in the refugee camps in Jordan and in Lebanon were greatly compromised. Given the gravity of the civil war in Syria, the EU had a humanitarian obligation to help refugees. But how about refugees from other countries, such as Afghanistan or Iraq who might also have a legitimate claim to seek a safe haven? Those people were not given shelter, simply because the Syrian numbers were so overwhelming.

Attempts by the EU to get a grip on the crisis never focused on how to bring refugees in and thus safeguard them from the potentially perilous trek up north. EU actions, as evidenced by the EU-Turkey deal instead focused on how to keep people out. The crisis brutally demonstrated the consequences of lacking an effective EU immigration policy. Instead, we had an incoherent, uncoordinated mish mash of national approaches, with affected member states fiercely guarding their sovereignty. An EU-wide approach, whether implemented through intergovernmental collaboration or co-ordinated by supranational EU institutions simply did not exist.

Ever since the migration waves reached crisis levels in 2014, the EU was behind the curve, desperately, yet futilely catching up with developments. At best, the bloc was just about able to handle waves of African migrants, although the death tolls on the

central and western Mediterranean routes certainly tell a different story. But Brussels and national capitals were hopelessly ill-prepared once Syria started to implode in the aftermath of the Arab Spring of 2011. It is as if Europe had stuck its head in the sand, hoping for an increasingly insurmountable problem to just disappear.

EU actions have also been divisive. Germany has used threatening language over future EU funds to bring about an agreement to re-distribute refugees in a more widespread fashion which in any case was never implemented in sufficient numbers. The government of the Czech Republic had argued that compulsory refugee quotas were illegal and demanded a legal clarification through the European Court of Justice (ECJ). Such a clarification was provided by the court in September 2017 by confirming that the refugee relocation scheme was indeed valid and legally binding. The verdict came amidst legal procedures that the European Commission had initiated against the Czech Republic, but also against Poland and Hungary over their refusal to accommodate migrants in sufficient numbers.¹⁰ In June 2018, Italy's incoming populist government had turned away two rescue boats. The first one, carrying 630 stranded migrants was rerouted to Spain, with Interior Minister Matteo Salvini claiming victory in his ongoing feud with other EU countries over a fairer distribution of refugees. The second boat with 224 passengers was also turned away, this time to Malta. The ships were operated by aid organisations that had rescued migrants in open waters and were aiming for the nearest coast which happened to be the Italian one. Salvini went on to describe them as 'taxi services that finish the job of the smuggler organisations'. In response, Mission Lifeline, which operated the second vessel argued that many of its passengers were fleeing, torture, rape and slavery.¹¹ Salvini escalated tensions by threatening to withhold his country's contributions to the EU budget if it does not receive more support on the migrant issue.

The sovereign debt crisis in Greece demonstrated that a supranational management of the EU – even for a supranational policy such as the Euro – was no longer deemed to represent a viable solution. Intergovernmentalism was the order of the day and within this process, it was Germany that was taking the helm in a hitherto unseen fashion. Up until 2010, the country was quite content to support and finance European integration, without taking too much of a pro-active role in designing the key policies or institutions. Of course, being the economically most powerful player in the union always meant that its voice carried a stronger resonance, but it would have been

far-fetched to describe Germany as the architect of the EU. Other countries, most notably France but also the UK were far worthier of such an accolade. But 2015, with the re-structuring of the Greek economy in the spring and the refugee tide in the summer, ushered in a period of German hegemony. Welcoming Syrian refugees gave Chancellor Merkel the moral high ground; coercing fellow EU governments into an agreement on refugee distribution, however, did not.

The unprecedented nature of the migration tide might have sown the seeds of a tentative EU refugee policy. Germany liked to see a replica of its own asylum system being spread out across the EU, whereby migrants were distributed more evenly whilst also considering prosperity levels, unemployment and population density of affected member states in order to reach a fairer formula. The Commission was backing Germany's agenda, but the potential damage to the union was clear for everyone to see. Forcing countries to take people that they don't want, while asking migrants to go to places they don't want to settle in could have disastrous consequences for inner peace and social stability.

The migration crisis turned into yet another identity crisis for the EU. The European project has always been built on solidarity. In days gone by, before the Big Bang enlargement of 2004, a member dealt with a problem that arrived at its border for the sake of the EU. Nowadays, once a problem arises, the first cries are for help in solving the problem. These are two utterly different conceptualisations of solidarity. Pursuing a common notion of a European destiny centres on the belief that the interests of the member states are intertwined and that peace and prosperity for all depends on giving up a degree of national sovereignty. It is highly questionable whether such an understanding is at all alive in many EU capitals. The refugee crisis revealed a tension between the interests of the EU (which was 'processing' and managing the crisis as swiftly as possible) and the interests of most of the member states (which was passing on the problem onto other member states as swiftly as possible). In the end we had a chaos of nationally driven, short-term remedies.

One reason for this new mind set might be found in recent developments surrounding the Eurozone crises. More and more people from countries that were affected by economic collapse moved from poorer to richer member states, sparking a gradual increase in anti-migration rhetoric that was exacerbated by the astronomical bailouts for Greece, Spain, Ireland, Portugal and Cyprus. These emerging nationalist

sentiments then fuelled much of the debate surrounding the migration tide. It seems that Europe – more than ever since the Big Bang expansion of 2004 – suffers from utterly different notions on how to integrate people. In western Europe, the last forty years saw an ever-increasing move towards multi-culturalism. In the new member states of central and eastern Europe, however, such a concept was always regarded as potentially disruptive to social cohesion. The concept of multi-culturalism as practised by the West was expressed by Angela Merkel's offer to house Syrian refugees and to demand a more even distribution of them across more member states. The response to her actions, however, and the resentment of being bullied by Germany were the expression of some of the new member states' belief that multi-culturalism is a failure.

Solutions

Borders can't be sealed. European leaders ought to have been aware of this considering the recent dismantling of the Iron Curtain. And the Turkish-Greek border, with its very large Turkish coastline and hundreds of Greek islands is particularly hard to seal. So is the Italian border with many islands close to African shores. The refugee tide might continue for years to come, if the Middle Eastern region continues to remain unstable. If the risk of fleeing is smaller than the risk of dying, then people will leave their homes behind. At the moment, Greece and Italy are housing most of the migrants, with refugee camps now permanently in place, since people cannot be moved on, unless a coherent EU distribution quota is implemented. This is not a solution, but merely a stop gap. What is needed is a common EU migration policy with common asylum rules applicable across all participating member states.

But Europe also ought to address the causes of the problem. Less refugees, means less refugee distribution, means less costs, means less antagonism between member states, means more inner peace and social stability. Investing more heavily in crisis-affected countries therefore seems paramount and international charities have for years called for more financial resources for food security, healthcare, and job creation or to tackle government corruption. The problem is not new, it has only been exacerbated recently, but the solutions have been plain to see for many years. Now

might be the time to significantly upgrade the UN spending target for development aid of a paltry 0.7% of GDP.

In concrete terms, and in addition to promoting sustainable economic development, the EU could fund reception centres where people are fed, housed, clothed and schooled. Financing ought to be done not by national governments as is the present practise, but by the EU budget and thus by financial contributions from all member states. An agreed quota system could then allow for a co-ordinated re-settlement of migrants across Europe whilst considering different prosperity levels of EU members. More EU funds should also be made available to shut down trafficking networks while assistance to Jordan, Lebanon, Serbia and Macedonia who also house significant refugee numbers would seem a justified action. After all, refugees are human beings, and helping them is a moral and humanitarian imperative – a notion that after all is one of the founding legacies of the EU.

Endnotes

¹ Schengen refers to the very small town in Luxembourg where in 1985 the governments of France, West Germany, Belgium, the Netherlands and Luxembourg agreed to abolish border controls. Over the years, many EU but also non-EU countries joined this bi-lateral agreement before the Treaty of Amsterdam (1997) formally integrated Schengen into EU law. All EU member states except for Ireland, Croatia, Bulgaria, Cyprus and Romania are part of Schengen. Outside the EU, Iceland, Switzerland and Norway also do not impose border controls to the travelling public. Given its Eurosceptic credentials, it comes as little surprise that the UK was never part of this agreement, often citing the danger of terrorism, and the consequential need to screen anyone entering the country's territory. Despite its international character, Schengen represents pure intergovernmentalism. As such, any government can at any stage suspend Schengen and re-instate border controls. This occurred on a widespread scale during the Syrian refugee crisis in the summer of 2015. In the immediate aftermath of the Al-Qaeda attack on Madrid commuter trains in 2004, Spain dropped out of Schengen. Germany did the same when hosting the FIFA football championships in 2006.

² The member states with the smallest share of its citizens living in another EU country were Germany (1.0%) and the UK (1.1%). Source: Eurostat.

³ In November 2014, the European Court of Justice supported Britain's assessment of the potential abuse of the free movement of people. The city of Berlin had refused to pay welfare support to a female citizen from Romania who had moved to Germany, but without showing any intention of looking for employment. The ECJ sided with Berlin, stating that a member state must 'have the possibility of refusing to grant social benefits to economically inactive EU citizens who exercise their right to free movement of people solely in order to obtain another member state's social assistance'.

⁴ In 2016, the top five countries from where people acquired EU citizenship were Morocco (101,300), Albania (67,500), India (42,700), Pakistan (32,900) and Turkey (32,800). For more information on a range of migration statistics please refer to:

https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Migration_and_migrant_population_statistics

⁵ Net migration refers to the difference between the number of people entering the UK, and those leaving the country. This figure started to rise after 2004, when the UK government – unlike all other western EU member states except for Ireland and Sweden – allowed EU citizens from the new member states of central and eastern Europe to come to its shores. During the peak of the recession in 2012, net migration (including EU and non-EU migrants) dropped to 177,000, only to rebounded strongly in the year ending in June 2016 with 336,000. The annual figure for the year ending June 2018 was 273,000.

⁶ In contrast, Germany, with an ageing population and low birth rates, embarked on a pro-migrant policy by issuing U.S. style green cards for professionals in the high tech and IT sectors. The policy had little success however, mainly because of language barriers.

⁷ To access the full table, please refer to:

[https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=File:Demographic_balance,_1_January_2016-1_January_2080_\(thousands\)_PITEU17.png](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=File:Demographic_balance,_1_January_2016-1_January_2080_(thousands)_PITEU17.png)

⁸ See: www.unhcr.org/europe-emergency.html.

⁹ See: www.worldvision.org/refugees-news-stories/syrian-refugee-crisis-facts

¹⁰ The relocation scheme required member states to pledge available places for relocation every three months. Hungary had not taken any action at all since the scheme had started. Poland had not relocated anyone and not pledged since December 2015. The Czech Republic had not relocated anyone since August 2016. See: europa.eu/rapid/press-release_IP-17-5002_en.htm

¹¹ See: www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/migrant-crisis-italy-rescue-ships-matteo-salvini-libya-spain-latest-mission-lifeline-a8412591.html