

# Migration and asylum crisis in contemporary Europe

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## Introduction

Europe is currently experiencing a migration and refugee crisis which constitutes a challenge for policy makers and a subject of intense political controversies. However, both member states and collective groups attempt to manage the crisis along the line of security-oriented and anti-immigration set of policy instruments which seem to bring more controversies and little results. Whether one should think about the thousands of deaths in the Mediterranean, the constitution of formal and informal camps, the tensions on the borders of Europe, the violation of rights and legal provisions at the national, European and international level, the booming of trafficking and criminal activities around migrations and migrants. The acute politicization of migration and refugee issues in the European context can lead to question the relation between the reality of new flows and policy decision.

Europe has been facing with an unprecedented flow of refugees, because it is surrounded by countries in conflict, which have produced flows of forced migration at large, even if they did not all enter in the profile of the Geneva Convention of 1951 on statutory refugees, mainly defined according to individual persecution or founded fear of persecution. Usually, Europe counted around 200 000 asylum seekers per year before the 625 000 in 2014 and the 1,2 million of 2015. But we must remember that this crisis is not so new, because after the fall of the Berlin wall in 1989, Europe received 500 000 asylum seekers per year from 1989 to 1993, mostly in Germany which welcomed  $\frac{3}{4}$  of all the asylum seekers in Europe from the communist regimes and then most refugees from the crisis of former Yugoslavia.

The present flows of refugees are mainly coming from Syria (5 millions left their country since 2013 and 7 millions are internal refugees in Syria), Irak (3 millions), the horn of Africa through Libya, from Afghanistan and from Kosovo. Turkey has welcome the most important part of them, with 4 millions on its territory. This situation led to conflicting ways between States and EU institutions to respond to the influx of migrants.

Some European member states are surrounded by countries suffering from internal and external conflicts. Those fleeing conflicts are asylum seekers (from Syria, Iraq, Eritrea) but also mix flows, labour migrants not unfounded to ask for asylum due to the situation of chaos in their countries of origin (Afghanistan, Sudan). After a period of procrastination from European leaders, a turning point appeared on September 2015, when Chancellor Angela Merkel announced that Germany would welcome 800 000 asylum seekers in 2015. Then, the President of the European Commission Jean-Claude Juncker proposed in September 2015 that 160 000 asylum seekers recently arrived should be received by other European countries for resettlement. These important steps, also supported by Pope François in 2015, have been insufficient for addressing in the refugee crisis. The European political crisis has been exacerbated, challenging European values of solidarity and human rights as

well as sovereign positions of some Eastern European countries fearing that their ideal of homogeneous identity and culture could be shifted by new comers.

Europe has been confronted with one of its major migration challenges with the refugee crisis of 2015 because it difficultly thinks about itself as an immigration continent and because the public opinion has been worked during years by the rise of extreme rightist movements and parties hostile to migration and refugees:

Which are the actual patterns of migration flows? Who is coming and from where and in what numbers, how has this changed over time, what are the motives, what are the key points of access and transit to and within Europe and what are the migrants ending up?

Which are the social mechanisms which have underpinned this process: organisations, traffickers. The border regime of crossing according to the departure country and destination and to mechanisms of closed or open borders may lead to trafficking which is becoming a pull factor, along with push factors linked with political crisis and unemployment;

The different and conflicting ways in which States and EU institutions are responding to the influx of migrants are defining a line of fracture between East and West of Europe facing with the refugee crisis, a lack of trust from Northern European States towards Southern ones confronted daily with refugee crisis, the inability of Europe to find an agreement between the 28 in the treatment of the refugees;

The implication of this for states and particularly for Europe and its institutions has led to a crisis of Schengen, a crisis of Dublin 2 and of Frontex, all legal frames made of "path dependency" towards the institutions already created without viewing other horizons of management of the migration flows.

## **I. Actual patterns of migrations flows**

The refugee crisis is a result of a world which is moving. During the last forty years, international migration has been multiplied by 4, from 77 millions in 1975 to 244 millions now, as well as internal migrants (740 millions). China itself has 240 millions of internal migrants and half of them are illegal. The south of the planet is now welcoming more international migrants (124 millions) than the north (120 millions), which is new. This globalisation of migrations, defined by the involvement of quite all countries in a process of departure, arrival and transit, is paradoxically accompanied by a regionalisation process: in all regions in the world, there are more migrants coming from the same region than coming from other parts of the world: this trend is due to the emerging presence of new comers alike women, unaccompanied minors, environmentally displaced migrants, internally displaced people who rarely go far and mostly refugees. These refugees are now amounting to 65 millions in situation of forced migration, with or without the status, including internal ones in their own countries called IDPs, internally displaced persons. The displaced for environmental reasons are representing 42 millions, out of them 17 millions of international climate refugees but without any status. This regionalisation of migration can be seen in all regions in the world (Euro-Mediterranean,

Northern America, Southern America, Russia, Turkey, Gulf countries, Sub-Saharan Africa, South-East Asia, Australia). In the past, the Europeans were many among the migrants in some of these regions.

The reasons of this global entrance into mobility is structural, linked with inequalities of development, demographic structures, gaps between rich and poor, information about better opportunities when crossing the borders due to new technologies of information and communication, offers of mobility due to trafficking, political crises creating refugees. Europe is in the middle of these shifting trends, surrounded by countries in conflict in the south rim of the Mediterranean. It is the first destination in the world regarding flows, followed by the United States, the Gulf and Russia. But, regarding stocks of settled population, the US are the first with 46 millions of foreign born, and Europe the second with 42 millions settled migrants.

Basic statistics hide the diversity of migrants and reasons for migrating. The discourse of last year focusing on “good” asylum seekers and “bad” migrants is misleading, because refugees and asylum seekers are both migrants. This discourse presents the risk of treating differently Sub-Saharan from Near and Middle East new comers, hinting at an ethnic classification between Africans who would lie and Arabs who give truth. Migrations in recent years have included a mix of people searching for a work and fleeing countries in crisis that no longer offer them a future. These flows are still growing, even if workers have to-day decreased, compared with family reunifications, students and high qualified elites from South to North and with asylum seekers and other forced migrations. Restrictive immigration policies have featured these trends, including illegal new comers. The current waves of de facto refugee come from Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan, Kosovo, the Horn of Africa (Eritrea, Somalia) and Libya (itself a long standing transit point from Sub-Saharan migrations towards the European Union).

The photograph of a three years old Syrian boy dead on the Turkish beach in Bodrum who perished when the boat carrying him and his family to Greece shrank in September 2015 spread across the world, showing that most of these refugees look like us and threw a doubt on the security approach responsible of this death, along with the 30 000 deaths in the Mediterranean since the end of the nineties, the 3 000 deaths in 2015 and the same number in 2016.

The main cause of the recent departures is war, political insecurity, instability and violence, involving young men escaping from unsafety at home and absence of hope, and families seeking asylum . All of these people do not meet the definition of persecuted individuals laid out in the 1951 United Nations Refugee Convention on asylum, and many are unable to acquire refugee status because they do not have all been individually persecuted: in 2015, France has accepted 31% of applicants as statutory refugees and Germany 45%. Most of them are belonging to middle classes, are qualified, well educated and ready to work: migration is for hem an option in life, supported in their efforts by smugglers offering passage to those who cannot get a visa. Some of them have worked in their countries of transit, like Sub-Saharan in Libya and lost their work due to the present chaos. Others are the victims of the war ravaging their home countries like Syrians and others failed to find any reinsertion opportunities in countries recovering from war such as in Afghanistan. All of them see Europe as a shelter of peace, security, respect for human rights and a place offering a future for their children.

## **II – Social mechanisms which have underpinned this process**

The refugee crisis has highlighted the importance of new migrations which have recently appeared: women, unaccompanied children, even if the majority is made of young men. Some of them are belonging to former south-south movements of migrations in countries where the rights are weak, with a difficult access to asylum protection (among the 50 countries not signatory of Geneva Convention on refugees of 1951, we find southern poor countries).

The border regime of crossing from departure countries to destination ones, explains the rise of trafficking which is becoming a pull factor, along with push factors linked with political crisis and unemployment. Smugglers often use small fishing boats but they also charter cargo ships, holding as many as seven hundred people to cross the Mediterranean from east to west and they themselves often abandon the crossing on the route.

Information is another factor of mobility : television, internet, cell phones are spreading an image of prosperity and peace in Europe and many new comers have transnational links with former migrant families : Syrians with Turkish families in Germany or Sweden, Afghans with Pakistanis in the United Kingdom, Sub-Saharanans with compatriots in France or UK. Those youth who embark on irregular migration because they are coming from countries where visas are necessary whatever can be the destination abroad, following the trans-Saharan, Mediterranean, Turkish, Greek or Balkan roads, are select groups : they must be in good health, resolute, able of enduring all kinds of difficulties, as well as having accumulated savings of as much as thirty thousand euros for their passage. They must all expect and be able to live abroad for a period long enough to regularize their status.

The so called “pull factor” is a false approach because most new comers choose their destination according to the transnational links already existing with one or another European country. This explains why the “one stop, one shop” Dublin II policy in Europe has failed : they do not want to be obliged to stay in the first European country where they have entered, usually in Greece or in Italy if they do not have a network or opportunities of stay and work.

### **III – The EU migration policies**

Europe has never thought of itself as a continent of immigrants and many Europeans continue to deny the reality of being an immigrant continent. Since the 1990's, when a security approach has given the tune to EU migration and asylum policy, the European Union has continuously increased efforts to discourage new arrivals, placing at the top of its agenda during these last two years the fight against immigration, and making immigration a security issue. The EU has also undertaken to hold smugglers more accountable, putting new frontier checkpoints and integrated surveillance systems along the Mediterranean coast alike the Frontex system of border guards and patrols along the Mediterranean.

The Dublin agreement of 1990 (Dublin I) was an attempt to harmonize asylum in EU countries. The Dublin II agreement, adopted in 2003, established the principle of “one stop one shop”, which requires an asylum seeker to have his or her application processed in the first European country where he or she has set foot. In 2000, European dactyloscopy, or Eurodac introduced digital finger prints in order to identify false asylum claims. In 2004, EU created the Frontex agency which militarises the EU borders and puts common police forces to protect them (with special regionalised missions alike Sofia on the departure Southern Mediterranean coasts to fight against traffickers and Triton in the middle of Mediterranean sea to control and save new comers). An arsenal of bilateral

and multilateral agreements of repatriation between European and non European countries has put into end the ability of asylum seekers and illegal migrants to renew rejected applications, fighting against “asylum shopping” consisting in applying for asylum in several EU countries in the same time.

The control of European external borders has become the primary objective, and the diversity of profiles of asylum seekers (collective ones, victims of their societies of origin but not necessarily of their States) poses the difficulty of processing asylum cases and recognition. Europe’s response to the recent surge of refugees has been a coward turn, with national controls of some national borders (France and Italy in 2011 and 2015, Bulgaria and Greece, Germany and Austria, Hungary) and growing hostility in Eastern European countries to share the burden with other EU members. Europe has so endangered the values upon which it has been created such as solidarity and human rights protection. The EU has responded to the refugee influx by reinforcing border controls.

One area receiving special attention has been the definition of safe and third safe countries, which determines whether asylum seekers are at risk or not. The unequal exposure of various EU countries has been the main obstacle to a joint response: only three countries have supported the burden, Germany (with one million arrivals in 2015, Greece and Italy with weekly arrivals, specially in the small Mediterranean islands alike Lesbos or Lampedusa and bigger others alike Malta or Cyprus which have to welcome tourists while receiving refugees within restrained spaces. Greece has been confronted with the major arrival of Syrians and other Middle easterners affected by war. The Thracian route has proven to be less dangerous than the maritime one, but it has led to the closure of borders between Hungary and Serbia, as well as between Bulgaria and Turkey. The EU response has been marked by an absence of solidarity between States as well as towards migrants and refugees. When Italy launched the Mare Nostrum operation in 2013 to save the new comers by the sea, it occurred in the indifference of other EU countries towards the many shipwrecks around Lampedusa. When in May 2015, the EU Commissioner Jean-Claude Juncker proposed to share 40 000 asylum seekers to be resettled in EU countries, member states responded with a categorical no, arguing that enforced quotas would hurt the exercise of their national sovereignty. After the Merkel speech of September 2015, the trend took an opposite direction and Jean-Claude Juncker proposed to resettle 160 000 asylum seekers in two years between 28 countries. A new East-West split appeared between countries accepting or not the obligation of permanent sharing of Syrians asylum seekers between EU countries. The countries of the so called Visegrad group (Poland, Hungary, Czech Republic, Slovakia) refused to share the burden of the newcomers. The borders of the Balkan route were covered with barbed wires as a symbol of missed solidarity. The EU attempted to find another reinforcement of its external borders with “hot spots” (local reception and holding centres for new arrivals) in Greece and Italy, the two main arrival countries. It signed an agreement with Turkey to externalize its borders, which took effect on April 2016 : in exchange for accepting Syrian refugees (and also other middle easterners) Turkey introduced three requirements : the reopening of the negotiation about its application to EU membership, the suppression of visas for Turkish migrants to Europe (Turkey has to-day a negative migration flow to Europe with more Turkish coming back to Turkey than Turkish going to Europe) and the payment of 6 billion euros over two years to help the hosting of refugees. This agreement set some controversy because Turkey is not considered as a safe country and because the agreement recalls previous agreements between EU and Libya, where the head of State, Mr. Khadafi was looking for more recognition from the Europeans through his acceptance to maintain the new comers on his territory. The current agreement with Turkey also foresees a one for one exchange: for every Syrian sent back from EU to Turkey (because he or she

does not fit with the definition of a refugee), another Syrian is accepted as asylum seekers by the EU (up to 72 000 applicants), defining a strange bargaining of humans.

#### **IV The Schengen and Dublin crisis**

Some myths and paradoxes are featuring European migration policy, driving anti immigration discourses and anti immigration effects. Many of them are belonging to answers to short term political and electoral concerns in member States : one could list military dissuasion as a means to stop migration, considering migration as a security issue to be managed by repression, the mixing of irregular migration with terrorism and criminality, regularisations as a pull factor leading to new flows, return and development as an alternative to migration, an idea renewed in the Valletta Euro-African summit of October 2015. During a long time (until 1974, date of the suspension of migration of labour force in most European immigration countries), immigration was viewed as a provisional solution to labour force shortages in a period of high economic growth.

A striking feature of migration politics in the increasingly integrated EU is that European nations and public opinions as well as government have failed to translate the change of their status from emigration lands towards immigration countries from the 1960s onwards. Historically a continent of intense emigration, sending millions of its natives all over the world through labour emigration, colonisation, trade, missions, wars, cooperation, Europe clearly became a land of immigration in the 1960s but both migration and immigrants' politics seem to lag behind statistical and demographic facts.

In Europe various trends of migration policies and politics in the region, have led to harmonization of migration policies on the external dimension of European borders control through the Schengen 1985 visa system and bilateral and multilateral agreements with countries of origin, leading to weakening entrance conditions and strengthening military forms of control and closure. The focus on closure in a world on the move can appear paradoxical. In the meanwhile, the countries of emigration have been transformed into immigration and transit countries by Europe as border guards for externalisation of the border.

Some new events as the murders in Paris committed by Islamic terrorists in November 2015, following a debate on the burden sharing of refugees from Syria, Iraq and the horn of Africa led to a lot of contradictory opinions and debates on the opening or closing national borders in France and Europe and to ethic positions about the attitude towards Islam as a form of otherness in European countries.

Another crucial debate has been focused on Mediterranean. Now, the globalization of migrations focuses on Mediterranean as a concentration of quite all migration situations in the world: refugees, illegals, unaccompanied minors, processes of containment and of mobility, integration dynamics and security approaches, transnationalism and diasporas, religious identities and pluralism of situations between the states bordering the sea.

Migration in the Mediterranean is a very acute debate, due to the present refugee crisis, to the consequences of Arab revolutions (unforeseen in its extent and length for Syria), to the proximity with emigration and transit countries, but also to the involvement of Southern European countries in the arrival of new comers. The logics of migration movements in the region, the perverse effects of

dissuasion policies of border controls and the various forms of transnational networks are spread between countries of departure and arrival.

### **1) Conflicting ways between EU and States**

The first European answer, through the voice of Jean-Claude Juncker, President of the European Commission, has been to propose a burden sharing on May 2015 of 40 000 asylum seekers between the Countries of the EU according to their wealth and population. This announcement was followed by a strong refusal, being lived as an intrusion in internal State policies. During summer 2015, many Central European countries closed their national borders with the entrance of new comers across the Balkan road, and Hungary was the first to be opposed to welcoming new refugees, followed by the Check Republik, Slovakia, Poland, all countries threatened by the rise of extreme rightist parties. On September 2015, Mr. Juncker asked anew to European countries to welcome 160 000 asylum seekers. Then, the discourse of Angela Merkel of September 7<sup>th</sup> announcing Germany ready to welcome 800 000 asylum seekers in 2015 and the mediatized photograph of the three years old Syrian Aylan Kurdi died on Bodrum shore after the wreckage of the boat taken by his parents, led the Western European States to accept with some reluctance the figures proposed by Mr. Juncker (so 30 000 resettlements for France in two years, for example). During 2015, according to UNHCR, Greece welcomed the most important part of new comers, who then tried to enter in other EU countries. But Italy, who was at front stage before 2015 and who led the Mare Nostrum operation of 2013, saving 146 000 people in one year (November 2013 to November 2014) is anew particularly involved, since the EU/ Turkish agreements of March 2016 which stopped most of passages between Greece and Turkey by sea.

According to this agreement, Europe follows a long trend consisting in fleeing from the rules of its common policy thanks to bi or multilateral agreements with extra European neighbor countries. Libya was the most important contractor with several European countries to play the game of filter for Sub-Saharanans wanting to reach Europe and it was paid with amounts of money, infrastructures and recognition of Khadafi as a legitimate partner in the dirty job of containment and readmission. As Libya is now the land of traffickers to illegal passage, the co-contractor has been Turkey. This country has so been immediately considered as a safe country for asylum seekers and it asked a real bargain: 6 billion euros, the new negotiations of Turkish application to EU and the suppression of visas for Turkish to Europe. This country actually does not represent any migration risk for Europe although it has the most important population of non Europeans in the EU (4,5 millions), because now there are less Turkish going to Europe than Turkish coming back from Europe to Turkey. The legitimacy of President Erdogan, somewhat criticized for his authoritarian and religious governance has been restored in the EU and Europe also asked for a strange exchange during one year of 72 000 Syrians sent to Europe as asylum seekers in exchange of refused asylum seekers by the EU.

### **2)The factors of failure and the implications for States and EU institutions**

Among the main reasons of these bad responses, there is the European immigration and asylum policy itself. Since 1990, most instruments of dissuasion, repression and confinement have featured European immigration and asylum policy as a security approach. The Schengen system of reinforcement of external border control led to 30 000 died people in the Mediterranean between 2000 and 2015, 40 000 since 1990. Trafficking is the main answer to closed borders, with a lot of money to win, few possibilities of control of the main responsible and impunity. But every time there

has been lots of dead people in the sea, the Frontex mechanism of common police (born in 2004 as a common European police at external borders of EU) has been refunded and we can perceive some path dependency towards institutions created to control the illegal flows without asking about their efficiency. The Dublin agreements on asylum can also be questioned: the Dublin I (1990) agreement tried to define a common European asylum policy which reduced the chances to get a refugee status due to harmonization between all European countries. But the most responsibility can be granted to Dublin II of 2003, highly criticized but never cancelled, according to which an asylum seeker entered in a EU country has compulsorily to ask for asylum in this country (“one stop, one shop” system). It does not work because new comers have a precise choice of the country where they want to apply and Greece is rarely the chosen one.

The most important failure was the solidarity crisis between EU countries. During the past years, burden sharing was the line proposed by most important receiving countries of asylum seekers alike Germany and Austria after the fall of the Berlin wall. Then, the Dublin II regime passed the task to Southern European countries settled on the Mediterranean, mostly Italy and Greece who are lacking of infrastructures namely in the Mediterranean islands. A gap has also appeared during 2015 between Eastern and Western European countries as for the resettlements proposed by the EU: most countries belonging to the Visegrad group refused new comers and closed their national borders, arguing on the challenge brought to their homogenous identity and the context of terrorism. Solidarity is however one of the values of the EU, defined in several articles of the EU Treaty of Lisbon and part of the founding values of Europe, alike Democracy, Human Rights, Liberalism, Secularization of the State and Diversity. We have seen a lack of trust between EU States regarding refugees and situations where States have been the main obstacles to European solidarity, due to the strength of nationalist growing ideologies all over Europe. The coming back to national borders and symbols of sovereignty of the State have been often quoted by States during the refugee crisis.

The situation has been very different in the various EU member states regarding welcoming the new comers, showing a lack of political will at the top, except for Germany. The “armies” ready to welcome at regional level (alike in Sicily) or at local level (alike in small towns and villages in France) are associations of solidarity and human rights, local collectivities, which find the resources and the capacities. The resettlement of the inhabitants of the Calais jungle in October 2016 has shown a new gap between mayors ready to welcome them and mayors refusing to do so, along with strong rightist leaders alike in the region Auvergne-Rhone Alpes. The Hungarian Government launched an extensive and anti-immigration campaign, under the auspices of xenophobic right-wing populism but it failed to meet the 50% of voters to the referendum refusing refugees.

Other outcomes would be possible but they were not debated, such as implementing a 2001 European directive on temporary protection for new comers not fitting with the criteria of the Geneva Convention, a status created for Kosovars which could be applied to Syrian and other refugees in the present situation, though it seems to have been largely forgotten in the recent debate. One could also reopen some other legal channels of immigration in employment, which would weaken the explosion of so called mix flows of job seekers trying to get the refugee status. Discussions have also focused on the “hot spots” that European agencies have begun to organize in Italy and Greece. The Dublin II system also, should be re-evaluated, as it requires sending asylum seekers back to the European country where they first stepped foot. Declaring the war to migration

as it was debated at EU level one year ago and dissuading with repression of militarized borders is not a suitable solution for Europe. The weakness of Euro-Mediterranean dialogue and the coming back to old failed solutions such as return policies (as decided in the Valletta Euro-African summit of autumn 2015) are also part of the crisis, a crisis which is more on solidarity and dissuasion than on refugees, who strongly stroke few EU countries except for Germany, Italy and Greece. The exceptional nature of the current situation is a crisis of responsibility on the part of Europe.

## **Conclusion**

The issue of asylum and immigration has become high on the European agendas as well as in national European policies, but the recent increase of refugees since the Arab revolutions of 2011 and particularly with the Syrian crisis has attracted most debates, along with some confused situations such as Calais, in France. It has launched debates about how this crisis should be considered as a migrant or refugee crisis, or a crisis in the first place. It has highlighted the limitations of the European immigration and asylum policy and the Dublin agreements on a common asylum policy, and the strength of divergent interest of national governments. Most of these policies at State level are not necessarily done to build a good policy but to satisfy public opinion, contradicting the values of Europe made of solidarity, harmonisation, humanitarian protection, inclusion, challenged by the present crisis.

This crisis has been constructed, from humanitarian to border security approach by political parties, polls, and some national European countries : other countries such as Turkey, are receiving more new comers (4 millions), Lebanon (one million out of 4 millions inhabitants, Jordan with 600 000 refugees in a small country. The construction of the crisis consist in a redefinition of the conditions of reception leading to minimize the exclusion lived by asylum seekers trying to reach Europe and to maximize the needs of cohesion of each country to refuse new ones in a context of austerity and political turmoil.

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