

Gerald Knaus, Chairman of the European Stability Initiative (ESI) emphasised the fact that not many proposals have been put forward regarding what can be done with respect to the unfolding refugee crisis in the Mediterranean. He stated that this proposal comes at a time, when there is a potential of fundamental change in Europe's values in the face of escalating anti-migrant and anti-Muslim rhetoric from far right parties across Europe.

The presentation initially attempted to debunk five myths about the unfolding refugee crisis. These myths are the following: 1) The unfolding refugee crisis is a global movement from the South to the North; 2) Angela Merkel caused the crisis; 3) Turkey controls the refugee crisis (the tap theory); 4) Greece can stop the crisis; and 5) The only solution is European. With respect to the first myth, it was stated that the unfolding refugee crisis is a predominantly Syrian crisis. Indeed, at the end of 2014, there were already 3.9 million Syrian refugees living outside their home country, while 7.6 million Syrians were displaced in Syria. Hence, the situation was not sustainable already in 2013-2014. Regarding the second myth, it was argued that migration flows were already rising steadily in the first half of 2015, that is at least two months prior to Angela Merkel's intervention. Regarding the third myth, it was maintained that Turkey is the country with the most refugees in the world and that "paradise", that is the EU, is just one step away. Furthermore, it was suggested regarding the fourth myth that Greece can actually do nothing to control the flows, since the distance between the Aegean islands and the Turkish coast is only 2-10 km, while the risk of crossing the border is significantly low (about 99.95% make it to the Aegean islands). Finally, with respect to the fifth myth, it was argued that the solution doesn't have to be European as the crisis concerns only a handful of countries in the EU (i.e. Germany, Sweden, Austria), while major countries have opted out of global asylum policies (e.g. Canada, Australia, Japan). It was further argued that within this context new alliances are formed, which see the refugee crisis as an opportunity to promote a new EU identity in opposition to the liberal identity.

Thus, an alternative proposal to deal with the crisis has been put forward, which suggests that an agreement between Germany and Turkey could have an immediate and dramatic impact on the Syrian refugee crisis, as it would restore control over Europe's south-eastern border without sacrificing compassion for the refugees. At the core of ESI's proposal is the idea that the German government should take the lead and commit to resettling 500,000 Syrian refugees directly from Turkey to Germany. Germany already expects high numbers of refugees to arrive in Germany. But rather than waiting for them to undertake the perilous journey across the Aegean and the Western Balkans, Germany should accept claims from Turkey through a fair and orderly process and provide safe transport to successful applicants. The offer should be limited to Syrian refugees already registered with the Turkish authorities, to avoid creating incentives for new migration flows into Turkey. Other EU member states could join in as well. In return, from a specified date, Turkey should agree to accept back (readmit) all new migrants reaching Greece via the Aegean or the Turkish-Greek land border in Thracia. This would quickly reduce the flow of boats crossing the Aegean. The ESI proposal is based on the assumption that Turkey is a safe third country for asylum-seekers from Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan and other countries, so that Greece could return them to Turkey without jeopardising their rights and safety.