

THE MIGRATION CRISIS





WHAT'S AT STAKE

THE EVOLVING REFUGEE/MIGRATION CRISIS MAY BECOME AN EXISTENTIAL THREAT FOR AN EU ALREADY WEAKENED BY THE FINANCIAL CRISIS, AND FACING THE PROSPECT OF A BREXIT. THE EU IS DIVIDED BETWEEN A GERMANY-LED GROUP SUPPORTING A EUROPEAN SOLUTION TO THE REFUGEE PROBLEM AND THE VISEGRAD GROUP AND LIKE-MINDED COUNTRIES, AND FAR-RIGHT POLITICAL PARTIES ACROSS EUROPE ARE GAINING TRACTION BY ARGUING IN FAVOR OF A EUROPE-FORTRESS MENTALITY. THE VISEGRAD GROUP IS UNOFFICIALLY LED BY HUNGARY'S PRIME MINISTER VIKTOR ORBAN, A KNOWN PUTIN ADMIRER.

THERE IS SPECULATION THAT A NUMBER OF COUNTRIES/ACTORS MAY BE USING THE SYRIA/IRAQ REFUGEE CRISIS TO PUT PRESSURE ON EUROPE AND DEMAND CONCESSIONS ON VARIOUS ISSUES SUCH AS UKRAINE, THE KURDISH QUESTION OR THE DAY AFTER IN SYRIA.

A WEAKENED EUROPE IS NOT IN THE INTEREST OF THE US, NEITHER IS A DESTABILIZED GREECE, AN OUTCOME THE US HAVE BEEN TRYING TO PREVENT IN THE CONTEXT OF THE FINANCIAL CRISIS AND THE DEBATE ABOUT A GREXIT.



HOW THIS IS DEVELOPING

Greece should fulfill its commitments regarding hotspots and full registration of all incoming refugees/migrants (with the provision of European economic support, as well as manpower and equipment). At the same time, it should be crystal clear to all that maritime borders cannot be fully protected without the cooperation of the 'other country' or without the use of force. "Push back" policies applied on small rubber boats filled well beyond capacity will only result to an increase of the number of people drowning in the Aegean. Such policies would be both inhuman and illegal under international law. Nor can Greece become a prison for several hundred thousand irregular migrants, as recently suggested by a senior government official of one of the founding members of the EU.

Refugees and migrants do not want to stay in Greece because the country has little to offer in terms of employment and social benefits. Many of them may temporarily stay in detention centers, but eventually they will grow impatient and desperate and border fences will not prevent desperate people from trying (and eventually succeeding) to cross. Furthermore, the fence between Greece and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM) only covers a tiny portion of the border. Human traffickers are in high demand among the refugees, and these traffickers have great incentive as the price refugees are willing to pay keeps increasing. The authorities of Balkan countries will be faced with increasing numbers of refugees - alone or in small groups- crossing their countries. Alternatives to the "Balkan Route" may still open: through Albania or Bulgaria for example.

Eventually, sufficient permanent facilities will be built for around 30-50,000 people in Greece. This is most likely the minimum number of people that will stay in the country, either in the context of a pan-European relocation agreement, or by necessity. This analysis is based on the working hypothesis that there will be an agreement, sooner or later, on the negotiations between the EU and Turkey (and among EU member states themselves). If this doesn't happen, then the situation will quickly become almost unmanageable for Greece. But we are not there yet.



AN EFFECTIVE WESTERN **REFUGEE POLICY**

AS THERE IS NO MAGIC BULLET TO DEAL WITH THE REFUGEE CRISIS, AN EFFECTIVE MANAGEMENT POLICY SHOULD HAVE THE FOLLOWING EIGHT COMPONENTS:

1. A diplomatic initiative that minimizes, if not ends, the fighting in Syria as soon as possible;
2. Greater financial support to neighboring countries (Jordan, Lebanon, Turkey) so they can manage their refugee populations better;
3. Incentives to Turkey to limit the refugee flows and accept return of refugees/migrants;
4. More efficient protection of the EU's external borders;
5. Implementation of re-allocation decisions among all EU member states;
6. Provision of humanitarian assistance to Greece;
7. More pressure on countries of origin to accept the repatriation of larger numbers of economic migrants;
8. Effective integration policies in European countries.

WHAT CAN THE U.S. DO?

1. Apply some pressure on the Visegrad countries, some of which the US has historically had influence over (Poland, for example) to stop blocking efforts for a European solution on the crisis.
2. Press Turkey for tangible and public cooperation. The EU/Turkey deal under consideration by the EU is providing incentives for Ankara to cooperate. Turkey should clamp down on traffickers and suspend its visa-free regime for Moroccans and some other nationalities. But the key element would be the establishment of hotspots on Turkish soil, for direct resettlement of refugees in various EU countries. That would alleviate the pressure on Greece and also save many lives in the Aegean.
3. Encourage the creation of a European Coastguard, with extensive jurisdiction, and better coordination between security and information agencies (also promoted by the establishment of the European Counter Terrorism Centre), but also with neighboring countries, especially in the South, should make an important contribution. NATO could make a modest contribution, provided Turkey allows the Alliance to patrol the whole Aegean. Also, Greece would need assistance (training, equipment) to deal with jihadists trying to cross through or operate in Greece and to properly register asylum seekers and migrants.