

War at Europe's gates

The tragedy of refugees off the coast of Lampedusa last October demonstrated the gulf between north and south. Nonetheless, Europe is dependent on the influx.



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Money corrupts, so they say. Has Europe become too wealthy to understand the hardship of people outside its borders?

There are poor and crisis-torn states and societies in Europe too, but European states and societies are all relatively well off compared to the dire situation from which many migrants flee. Many Europeans have forgotten that this continent itself produced some 80 million migrants in the 20th century. If we called asylum seekers in Germany "refugees and migrants", for instance, perhaps we would show them more empathy by recalling the suffering that the Germans first created, then had to endure themselves.

Do the tragedies off Lampedusa that happened last year mark the beginning of a huge migration wave from Africa and eastern Europe?

Lampedusa is synonymous with just two of many refugee tragedies in the Mediterranean, but they are not unique to that part of the world. Disasters often occur along illegal routes into Australia as well. Migrants who manage to get through are isolated on distant islands as illegal migrants by the Australian authorities to deter others from following in their footsteps. I don't expect a huge migration wave, but there will be persistent migration pressure from Africa and



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eastern Europe. And I expect a further escalation of the war against migrants at Europe's borders, where some 20,000 people have already lost their lives – as many as in your average war. And now the European border control agency FRONTEX is to be empowered to divert barely sea-worthy migrant vessels on the high seas in international waters or to force them to go back to where they came from. That's a violation of human rights and a crime against humanity.

Has Europe exhausted its intake capacity?

Quite the contrary. Europe is a demographically aging and shrinking continent that is reliant on constant immigration. But in the case of legal immigration, European countries must have the right to choose their immigrants. Of the 45 million refugees worldwide, almost 90 percent remain in their country of origin, most, in fact, as internally displaced refugees within the borders of their own country. Five percent at most head for Europe.

The countries on the periphery of Fortress Europe complain of a lack of support from Brussels. What form should a future European migration policy take?

The Dublin System, which determines that the EU member state responsible for the asylum procedure is the state through which the asylum seeker first enters the EU, is effectively dead. The end result of Fortress Europe has been to make migrants illegal and to engender a job creation scheme for human trafficking networks that act like shady travel agencies. Germany has put a brake on attempts to change the Dublin System. This is absurd because the comfortable situation enjoyed by Germany in the middle of Europe with its comparatively low number of asylum seekers is a thing of the past, as shown by the number of applicants this year, which may exceed the 100,000 mark. The only hope of change is if Europe can move away from sharing the burden to sharing refugees. For this we need a key for contingents or quotas and a European migration agency to take over implementation in agreement with the member states.



Demography

Cold-hearted continent

Migration researcher Rita Süßmuth rejects the selection of immigrants solely based on skills. She demands a ...

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Recently, there has been talk of fast tracking at least well-educated asylum seekers to mitigate the pressure of migration. Could you explain this idea?

It would operate on a points system. Migrants would have to apply from abroad. Decisions would be made on the basis of transparent criteria such as qualifications, work experience and language skills. It could stop many from choosing the illegal and dangerous route to Europe. Refusing to take illegal immigrants would be more legitimate if there were defined legal migration paths. Fuzzy distinctions between economic migrants and asylum seekers would only be acceptable in exceptional cases. Otherwise the asylum procedure would become a migration gateway and ever more qualified people would set out in boats. As well as opening legal migration paths, it would then be even more important to examine the reasons why an individual is seeking asylum.

How can the reasons for fleeing a country be tackled effectively?

Migration pressure can only be relieved in the countries of origin themselves. But in many African states there is an unholy alliance between non-African business interests and corrupt African leaders.

How would this play out in practice?

Donated European clothing arrives on African textile markets, putting pressure on the African textile industry – an industry that was once the source of the industrial revolution in Europe.

Cheap European agricultural imports are destroying African farming. And enormous fish factories operating off the West African coast have put an end to West African coastal fishing – fish in below, tins of fish out at the top. With the exception of South Africa, natural resources – from oil to precious minerals – are usually exploited by non-African corporations. And a lot of good land in Africa is owned by non-African companies, which have set up so-called special economic zones or free production zones with chartered rights to engage in business activities.

Would more development aid be a way to integrate those countries in the global economy?

Let's take Africa as an example again. All too often it is African elite leaders who sign all these contracts and arm their private armies with development aid money, when it's not diverted directly to Swiss bank accounts or invested in expensive European real estate. Conventional development aid is a dinosaur anyway. It is estimated that, globally, three times more money is transferred by family members working abroad than is provided by development aid.

The USA is seen as the ultimate destination for migrants. What can Europe learn from North America?

Historically, the two are hardly comparable, because the United States came about as a result of immigration. But we can still learn some lessons, for instance with regard to greater initiative on the part of immigrants. In many European welfare states the mechanism of self-selection for immigration has been switched off. The USA also has social protection mechanisms for immigrants, but the old principle is still evident: If you can't stand on your own two feet financially, you should go back where you came from or move on.

South-south instead of north-south: is there any sign that the developing countries will stabilize themselves?

Some are already doing so, such as South Korea and Vietnam. In both cases there's strong economic growth, in South Korea even an astonishing increase in GDP. 50 years ago the country was still a poor agrarian state. Today it is one of the foremost economies in the world. But similar conditions for development are not present everywhere.

Population movement has existed since time immemorial but not national borders. How do we deal with migration when the trigger is global – climate change, for example?

The only answer would be global resettlement programs. But it would make more sense to limit the factors driving climate change instead of reflecting on its migratory consequences.

Michael Grimm