

Realism about Immigration

In September 2015 the photo of a 3 year-old Syrian child lying dead on a Turkish beach next to his mother and 5 year-old brother who had all drowned, as had over 2,000 others, was a poignant picture. Everyone recognizes the need for humanitarian assistance to a reasonable degree for those trying to escape from the horrors of the brutality of the war in Syria and the barbarous Islamist terrorism.

While recognizing the moral problem involved, the countries of Europe are confronted with the pragmatic problem of responding in the context of 4.6 million Middle East refugees seeking asylum and 13.5 million people needing assistance inside Syria. The numbers will grow as the civil war in Syria continues and ISIS, the Islamic State, still exists.

There are three factors involved. The first is the unwelcome straightforward issue of the number of would be migrants, genuine refugees, from Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan, Somali, and Eritrea, who can realistically be accepted by European countries and, to a lesser extent, by the United States. A second is whether those migrants, mostly Muslim, can be satisfactorily integrated into western democratic societies. Already in 2015 more than 1 million people came to Europe by sea, and another 34,000 by land. A third problem is the fear that some of them may be Islamists or jihadists prepared to cause harm, rather than genuine refugees.

By coincidence, these factors were discussed on successive days, February 3 and February 4, 2016. On the first day, the President of Finland Sauli Niinisto said that migration into Europe by people, almost all Muslims, was a serious threat to Western values, culture and identity. It is now clear that a considerable number of those seeking asylum are not genuine refugees fleeing war. Tougher laws are needed to prevent migrants from entering Europe simply because they are in

search of a better life. The West should try to some extent to help those in distress or who are being persecuted but not those people who are not really in need.

On February 4, 2016 a conference in London attended by representatives of 60 countries was held to raise funds to assist in the humanitarian crisis and to provide jobs and schools for refugees. Held one day after peace talks in Geneva on Syria had failed and been suspended, the London Conference agreed to raise more than \$10 billion, the largest amount raised in one day in response to a humanitarian crisis. The sum of \$6 billion was raised for 2016, and almost \$5 billion for future years. Germany is to provide \$2.5 billion, the UK \$1.75 billion, the European Union 2.6 billion euros, and the U.S. \$925 million.

This aid, however, does not resolve the European underlying dilemma and disagreements about admitting migrants, and the numbers of them, a dilemma that also faces the United States. The heated debate among the Republican presidential candidates continues on the various related issues: amnesty for illegal immigrants, temporary visas, green cards, the banning of all Muslims from entering the country, and the need to secure the US border. Already, 30 governors have declared their states would not accept any of the 10,000 Syrians that President Barack Obama had suggested could enter the country, while some of the presidential candidates have suggested admitting only Christian Syrians.

The debate is even more heated among the European countries, facing the largest migration crisis since World War II. Many European citizens regard immigration as the major political concern and one that for two reasons calls for strict limitation on numbers that should be admitted. One is that it is simply not feasible for European societies now encountering economic difficulties, to manage to incorporate a large influx of foreigners that would be a burden on resources. The other is the reasonable expectation that the nature of their society

would be changed for the worse.

That concern has a number of practical dimensions. The countries of the European Union, more concerned with their own interests than with collective EU solidarity, have difficulty in agreeing on a solution on admitting migrants. In September 2015 European Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker declared that the 160,000 asylum seekers would be divided according to quotas based on country size, and economic output among the 28 countries of the EU. Germany, which has taken disproportionate numbers, was to take 17,000, and France 12,000, but the UK opted out of this quota proposal. The UK did not join the earlier plan in 2015 to relocate 40,000 migrants from Greece and Italy more evenly. Instead it built walls around the entrance of the Channel Tunnel to prevent migrants camped in Calais from entering it to get to Britain.

One fear has been that refugee camps in European countries may become breeding grounds for jihadists. That has come true according to new reports about young people in the Traiskirchen migrant camp in Austria that holds 1500 individuals. Those young people have apparently become radicalized because of the difficulty and their unwillingness to become integrated into Austrian society.

Austria, with a population of 9 million, received 90,000 asylum claims, but many of the claims were by economic, not political, migrants. The Austrian government deported 12,500, and argued that the European Union should stop giving aid to those Middle East countries that refuse to take back nationals whose asylum claims were rejected.

All the European countries recognize that the influx of migrants has caused difficulties in their social, economic, and political system. They face increasing burdens on social welfare programs. Those countries where unemployment is nearly 11 per cent have cut benefits.

Politically, many of the countries have witnessed the rise of far right and nationalist political parties who call for limits on immigration, especially by those of Muslim culture and religion, who they argue are difficult to integrate into the existing system or even worse may be hostile to it as has been shown by the Islamist violence in Malmo, Sweden.

Among these parties are the French National Front, Dutch Party of Freedom, Ukip in the UK, the Italian Lega Nord, the Swedish Democrats, Pegida and Alternative for Germany in Germany, the Austrian Freedom Party, the Danish People's Party, the Progressive party in Norway, the Finns in Finland, the Golden Dawn in Greece, the Flemish Interest in Belgium, the PVV in The Netherlands, Jobik and Fidesz in Hungary. They change the landscape in European politics.

Some of these parties are virulent in their opposition to immigration and their fear of the challenge to Western values. Nevertheless, two factors are relevant. It is not racist to suggest that for practical reasons reasonable limits be put on those attempting to immigrate. Considering the millions desiring to leave not only from the Middle East but also from Africa, Europe faces the possibility of an enormous increase in scale and an uncontrollable pressure. That pressure becomes even more potent since the native population of Europe is aging and declining.

More important is the perceived threat of Muslim migrants to western values and the possibility of social, cultural, and religious conflicts, and especially Islamist terrorism, they may bring. The question is not one of discrimination, but of real differences: educational levels, cultural behavior, religious and political views.

The Finnish President on February 3, 2016 asked the question, "We have to ask ourselves whether we aim to protect European values and people ...or inflexibly stick to the letter of our international obligation with no regard for the

consequences.” If Western democracies are to survive the answer is obvious.