The Uncertain Role of the EU Countries in the Syrian Refugee Crisis[1]

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ABSTRACT *This article analyses the EU's response to the Syrian refugee crisis, both inside the EU and in the Syria's neighboring countries. It first focuses on the background of the common asylum policy of the EU and major challenges posed by the refugee crisis to the common EU refugee policy. The article then focuses on an analysis of the impact of the refugee crisis on the EU, the failures of the EU to adopt a common approach towards the refugees from Syria, and the EU initiatives. As the Syrian refugees/asylum applicants constitute a large part of the asylum applicants/refugees in the EU and because the core documents do not differentiate among the refugees based on their nationality, we will simplify the EU position towards the refugees by assuming that it holds true for the Syrian refugees specifically. Should there be a special condition applied to Syrian refugees only, this will be explicitly mentioned.*

Common Asylum and Migration Policy of the EU

The common asylum and migration policy of the EU can be in general traced back to the 1950s when the EC (European Community) member states adopted the Geneva Convention of 1951 on the Status of Refugees, which defined the basic rules and principles of refugee protection. The efforts to embrace a common approach to asylum and migration policy were first reflected in the Schengen agreement signed by five of the ten member states of the EC in 1985, which provided for the removal of internal borders among Schengen member states. Creation of the borderless Schengen area was facilitated by the fact that the EC as such was at the time, when the agreement was adopted, much smaller and therefore much more flexible and easier to manage than the current EU-28. The EU accepted the Dublin convention of 1990 as a part of the Schengen system which provided for the basis of the common asylum policy. The EU common asylum policy was further modified in the Dublin II Regulation of 2003 and the EURODAC Regulation, which established an all-EU database of fingerprints of asylum seekers and refugees entering the EU.[2]

The Dublin Regulations are particularly important in the contemporary Syrian refugee crisis, as they stipulate that the asylum seekers should apply for asylum in the first country of entry to the EU, and if they are detained in another EU country they should be returned to the first country of entry. This country should take care of the asylum seekers including processing of asylum applications.[3] This provision of the Dublin regulations thus puts enormous pressure on the EU border states, such as Italy, Greece or Bulgaria, as they are the ones that should be in accordance with this regulation dealing with the majority of asylum seekers and refugees. These states therefore tend to protect their external borders with the non-EU member states to secure a reduction in the number of asylum seekers and refugees entering their territories. Various EU member states frequently adopt restrictive policies aimed at banning illegal immigration and make it more difficult for asylum seekers and refugees to settle in these countries,[4] some of them also plainly reject a high number of the asylum applications. According to the Eurostat statistics, some countries such as Estonia, Lithuania and Portugal declined all of the asylum applications in 2015, while "Latvia, Hungary and Poland recorded first instance rejection rates above 80%."[5]

The EU established the European Asylum Support Office (EASO) in 2010, in view of these national efforts to fight the rising number of asylum seekers and refugees in the EU and to promote implementation of the common European asylum system.[6] The EASO created a new Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF), which partially took over the functions of the European Refugee Fund (ERF), which was a tool designed to enable sharing of the costs of refugee burden within the EU and which was allocated 630 million Euros in 2008–13.[7] The AMIF is designed to distribute a total of 3.137 billion Euros in 2014-20 to support the management of asylum and refugee flows within the EU and to promote the common asylum and immigration policy of the EU.[8] Its specific objectives include support of the Common European Asylum System by application of uniform EU legislation in the field of asylum and refugee policy, support of legal migration and integration in the EU countries, as well as effective return strategies, fighting illegal migration, and funding activities of the European Migration Network. A specific condition of the AMIF is the solidarity within the EU countries to fairly participate in bearing the burden of the common asylum policy of the EU, "making sure that EU States which are most affected by migration and asylum flows can count on solidarity from other EU States."[9]

Other efforts to strengthen the common asylum policy of the EU included revisions and changes in the common asylum policy to improve the so called "Dublin system." In 2013 the European Commission reviewed the common asylum policy via EC regulation No. 604/2013, called the "Dublin III Regulation", which again called for registration of asylum and refugee seekers in

the first country of entry within the EU area, with the main objective of preventing submission of multiple asylum applications by asylum and refugee applicants.[10]

Despite these efforts to make the common asylum policy more effective, international organizations such as the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UN-

The crisis in Syria nevertheless represents a serious crisis for the European common asylum policy as the burden of the Syrian refugees has not been distributed equally within the EU

HCR) or European Council on Refugees and Exiles (ECRE) consider the current system a failure with respect to providing fair and effective protection of refugees and asylum seekers. This is because not all asylum seekers or refugees are able to access and correctly implement the asylum procedure, and are therefore at risk of being returned to their country of origin, in which they could be subject to persecution or to the country of the first entry, which also might not be in an adequate position to take care of them.[11]

The common asylum policy has also failed to work appropriately due to the ineffective asylum system in Greece and due to the lack of willingness of the EU member states to cooperate on issues related to the refugee crisis and coordinate their refugee and asylum policies. Despite the efforts of the EU to promote a common asylum policy within the EU and to equally distribute the asylum and refugee burden among the EU member states, different member states of the EU remain attractive to different degrees for the refugees due to the varieties in their economic development, cultural, religious and ethnic structure, and national legal systems. Therefore, even before the outbreak of the Syrian refugee crisis, there were intense discussions about how the EU should deal with applicants for asylum and refugees. The most regularly debated question is the fair sharing of the refugee burden by all member countries.

The most frequently proposed solution is the so called "tradable refugee quotas" (TRQ). The TRQ system would enable the common asylum policy to work efficiently by including a market principle in refugee allocation. As mentioned above, there are several economic models that discuss how to implement effective TRQ systems; however, their basic idea is the same. In theory, such a system would enable all countries of the EU to participate fairly in the refugee crisis by either directly bearing the costs of the refugee crisis (i.e. contributing financially to a special fund which would cover the financial costs connected with the refugee crisis), or by granting asylum to refugees (which would include reception, accommodation, administrative procedures and integration of refugees). Advanced versions of the TRQ system (proposed for example by Fernandez-Huerta Moraga and Rapoportz) are also based on a mechanism

A picture shows a sign in the dismantled southern part of the so-called "Jungle" migrant camp in Calais, northern France, on March 16, 2016.

AFP PHOTO / DENIS CHARLET

which enables the matching of refugees to their desired destinations, and enables countries to choose the desired type of refugees (based on, for instance, vocational skills, education, legal status, etc.). Should the EU be able to successfully implement this system of TRQs, such a system could allow for a plausible calculation of the country-specific costs of accommodating asylum seekers and refugees, and thus generate a cost-effective solution of the refugee crisis by minimizing the total costs for a given number of refugees or by maximization of the number of refugees for a given budget constraint. Such a system would also take into account refugees' preferences concerning destinations and simultaneously take into account countries' preferences.[12] However, as we shall demonstrate later in our analysis, the EU has so far not been able to manage the TRQ to secure a fair share of the refugee burden by all EU member states.

The European Union and Refugees from Syria in EU Countries

Before examining the position of the EU and its member states regarding the Syrian refugee crisis let us briefly look at the overall policy of the EU towards the crisis in Syria. Syria has traditionally been an important partner of the EC/EU, since the EC signed a Cooperation Agreement with Syria in 1977, and Syria has intensively cooperated with the EC/EU within the Euro-Mediterranean partnership since 1995. In the current Syrian crisis, the EU is considered by many to be a strong supporter of the opposition forces in Syria.[13] As mentioned in the *Elements for an EU Regional Strategy for Syria and Iraq as well as the Da'esh Threat*, EU "continue(s) to support the moderate opposition, including the National Coalition of Syrian Revolutionary and Opposition

Forces (SOC), but not excluding any other constructive domestic civil society or political forces."[14] Moreover, Syria remains a top priority of the EU under Federica Mogherini, High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy/Vice-President of European Commission, and the EU continues to support a diplomatic settlement of the crisis in Syria in cooperation with the United States and the United Nations, notably using economic tools such as the imposition of an embargo on selected representatives of the Syrian regime or an oil embargo.

The EU was already aware of the growing importance of the refugee crisis in 2014, being specifically discussed at the Conference on the Syrian Refugee Situation –Supporting Stability in the Region– in Berlin in October 2014. The Berlin Communiqué adopted at this conference put emphasis on promoting stability and peace in Syria by simultaneously addressing the economic, security and humanitarian needs of the Syrian population and refugees from Syria in host countries, including preparation of conditions for the safe return of refugees. The question of refugees was in addition addressed in

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the new comprehensive strategy of the EU called *Elements for an EU Regional Strategy for Syria and Iraq as Well as the Da'esh threat*, adopted in February 2015.[15] This stressed a more active involvement of the EU in the Syrian crisis based on solidarity, political support and promising a contribution of at least 400 million Euros, to be invested by the European Commission in the form of humanitarian aid to cover the needs of the population in Iraq and Syria and refugees in neighboring countries.[16] The EU promised another 1.1 billion Euros in favor of the Syrian refugees (including 500 million Euros in humanitarian aid, early recovery and longer-term stabilization assistance) at the Third International Pledging Conference for Syria held in Kuwait in March 2015.[17] The EU provided military assistance to the Syrian moderate opposition; however, it opposed a direct military intervention in Syria and supported a diplomatic resolution of the crisis. Due to considerable differences of opinion among the EU member states about the crisis in Syria, the only area in which the EU has so far been the most active in is providing of humanitarian assistance to the Syrian population and Syrian refugees in particular in the neighboring countries, but more long-term efforts than this are needed.[18]

Since 2014 the EU member states witnessed a growing number of refugees and asylum seekers from Syria. Between April 2011 and December 2015 there were 897 645 applications by Syrian refuges in the whole Europe out of which 579 184 were in the EU member states, Norway and Switzerland, based on the

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data of the UNHCR.[19] Compared to 506.8 million citizens of the EU28 (on January 1, 2014, as Eurostat estimates)[20] it is a very small number. The crisis in Syria nevertheless represents a serious crisis for the European common asylum policy as the burden of the Syrian refugees has not been distributed equally within the EU –besides the Southern countries of the EU (such as Greece, Bulgaria or Italy) the refugee crisis hit the developed countries of the European Union in particular as they are attractive for refugees (such as Sweden and Germany).

The refugee crisis thus demonstrated that the Dublin system can no longer smooth the challenges met by the EU countries. If applied as intended, most of the burden connected with refugee and asylum registration would be carried out by the countries of the first entry within the EU (namely Greece, Italy, Hungary or Bulgaria) which are already hit heavily by the refugee crisis and are already facing serious economic and social problems as a result of the increasing number of refugees. Therefore these countries are serious advocates of a revision of the Dublin system, upon simultaneous protection of their external borders with the non-EU countries (Greek-Turkish border, Hungary-Serbian border, etc.). However, should the Dublin regulation be applied concisely in the EU, Germany, Sweden and other "target" countries should return the refugees to the countries of the first entry, thus making their situation even worse. Therefore Germany decided in August 2015 to stop implementation of the Dublin regulations and ceased sending Syrian refugees and asylum seekers to the countries of first entry, offering asylum to Syrian refugees directly in Germany or allowing Syrian refugees to submit their asylum application in the country of their choice, not of the first entry.[21] The Czech Republic adopted a similar step in September 2015.[22]

Hungary, Poland and Slovakia together with the Czech Republic on the other hand refused the revision of the Dublin Regulation relating to introduction of mandatory quotas as an expression of the burden sharing within the EU. Their negative stance towards the quotas has persisted even until recently.[23] Other countries also do not respect the agreed system by trying to limit the number of refugees reaching their soil through temporary blocking of their borders, such as was the example of Austria.[24]

As pointed out above, the EU has been trying to solve the question of relocation of refugees since the beginning of the refugee crisis. Several different relocation mechanisms have been proposed as a reaction to the introduction of the common asylum policy in the Schengen area. From analysis of the position

of the individual EU member states towards the refugee crisis it is nevertheless evident that the EU has so far failed to implement a common asylum policy towards the Syrian refugees. There are two distinct groups within the EU with a substantially different approach towards the refugees. We can basically simplify this situation by stating that the "old" EU member states tend to be far more open towards the refugees and receive a larger number of refugees compared to the former Communist countries which are now members of the EU. Apart from the division between "old" and "new" members, one of the biggest visible clashes of interest among the EU member states is specifically between Germany and the countries of Visegrad cooperation (Czech Republic, Hungary, Slovakia and Poland, further referred to as V4). As opposed to Germany's welcoming stance, we are witnessing that after a long period of complicated relations, the V4 countries are finally finding a common voice, although only to criticize the plans for re-distribution of refugees to different member states by a system of pre-allocated quotas.

The V4 countries recently convened a prime-ministerial meeting which, apart from celebrating the 25 years of existence of this platform, was focused on migration and the EU's reaction to it. In the joint declaration, the prime ministers claimed their support for EU decisions, yet called for stronger and stricter control of the EU's outer border and also asked for plan B to be ready in case of failure of the agreement with Turkey to keep the migrants there.[25] Many journalists interpreted this as the V4 prime ministers' support for building a wall at the Macedonian border.[26] This, combined with the complaints against quotas for resettlement[27] and rising nationalistic tendencies, has led to disagreements with Berlin.

As German political scientist, contemporary historian and peace researcher Egbert Kurt Jahn explained, no-one, not even the Germans themselves, understands why even today while the German attitude to the refugees is so open, that of other countries such as the Czech Republic, Poland, Slovakia, Hungary or even France in the West is not. He tried to explained it by the fact that generations of Germans have their own refugee experience (Sudeten Germans, Russian Germans, Eastern Germans during the Cold War, combined with Turkish immigrants and many other incoming nationalities) and therefore are more tolerant; yet he failed to explain why the Czechs and others, for years sending their people as refugees abroad, cannot accept this point of view. As one of the possible reasons he cited the unemployment rate and the readiness of industry to educate and accept unskilled workers.[28] One of the reasons might therefore be that while Germany sees the refugees as an opportunity[29] and source for further development, the cultural difference is stressed more in the other countries –especially in regard to Islam. Another related reason might be that while Germany has had long experience with migrants since inviting the Turkish workers to help to rebuild the country, the countries in the

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East didn't have any such experience due to their isolation within the Soviet bloc.[30] Whatever the reasons, the fact is that, lately, Germany with its positive stance towards refugees finds itself in growing isolation.

The common asylum policy of the EU in the face of the Syrian refugee crisis is thus facing several significant problems. These include, among others: the lack of a uniform position of EU states concerning the refugee crisis and fair burden sharing, reflected in particular in the disputes between the "old" and "new" member states as described above; and problems of illegal migration and people smuggling. These represent a fundamental security gap and frequently lead to emphasis on the external border control of the EU and also to serious questioning of the effectiveness of the Schengen and Dublin system, in particular with respect to free movement of unregistered refugees within the Schengen area with no internal border control.[31] Some politicians, such as Hungarian Prime Minister, even argued that if the EU fails to respond properly to the refugee crisis "Schengen is over."[32] Apart from what can be seen as these "real problems" connected to migration, the issue is also systematically securitized, as argued by different scholars, such as Jeff Huysmans.[33] This was also visible from the media coverage of the recent terrorist attacks in Paris and Brussels, which were portrayed in connection with the migration.[34] That it is the security which shapes the migration discourse then has further implications –such as the reluctance of some states to accept the refugees.

In the face of the current crisis of the common asylum policy and the Syrian refugee crisis the European Commission adopted the "Ten Point Action Plan on Migration" addressing the refugee crisis in April 2015. The most significant points of this action plan include (among others): increased financial support for Joint Operations in the Mediterranean (Poseidon and Triton); a systematic fight against smugglers in the Mediterranean, including regular meetings of EUROPOL, FRONTEX, EASO and EUROJUST in the fight against smugglers; and new options of emergency relocation mechanisms and a new return program for rapid return of irregular migrants.[35] However, implementation of these proposals is complex and complicated and has faced many difficulties within the EU, and therefore it has so far not been very effective in adopting a common response to the Syrian refugee crisis, which is perceived by many as a real test of the European common asylum policy.[36] Therefore, the individual

EU member states have so far adopted different approaches and attitudes towards the refugee crisis and stressed various aspects of assistance for the refugees. Many of the member states agree that some volume of humanitarian and development aid in the region is necessary, even those, or maybe even more those, who are reluctant to accept refugees to the EU.[37] The otherwise skeptical V4 countries also hoped that Germany would forge an agreement with Turkey regarding the blocking of immigrants from continuing in to Europe.[38]

We can witness the practical impact of the disputes - the Balkan states used to allow people in and send them north, whereas the states further on the route, such as Austria, have started to be reluctant to accept those arriving[39] and countries like the Czech Republic have been shunning the refugees altogether. Although the Czech Republic in summer 2015 had less than 1000 refugee applications,[40] a surprisingly high number of citizens have anti-immigration sentiments. According to the inquiry conducted by *Centrum pro výzkum veřejného mínění, Sociologický ústav AV ČR, v.v.i.* in June 2015, more than 70 percent of the Czech citizens older than 15 years (tested on a sample of around 1000 respondents) were against accepting the refugees and immigrants from Syria and North Africa.[41] Recently even the Balkan route was blocked by Macedonia closing its border with Greece, the same happening on the Austrian border with Germany. Ignoring for the moment the increasingly complicated southern situation, the constantly rising numbers of migrants create tensions even in states tolerant to migration – like Sweden, which was famous

The enormous disproportionality of the number of refugees in comparison to the local population has eventually led Lebanon to efforts to curb further arrivals of refugees as well as to failures of their registration

for granting permission to stay to virtually all Syrians reaching its territory for three years,[42] yet which is now scrutinizing its immigrant population and starting to send some rejected asylum seekers back to where they came from.[43] The number of asylum applicants also exacerbates the patience of the states which have already had some immigration issues, such as France.[44] This leads to a rising call for External Processing Asylum Centers,[45] and it is in addition slowly securitizing the question of migration, as we can see by the recent involvement of NATO in a patrolling mission in the Aegean.[46]

So far the refugees are not returned to their home country and solutions are sought in order to find a compromise between uncontrolled migration and forced return (such as the new EU-Turkey deal). Yet the recent approach is to keep the refugees out. Amidst all the uneasiness stands lonely Germany, which has tried to welcome all those coming; but this has revealed the hidden divisions in its own domestic society.[47] Furthermore it has complicated its relation to other countries – such as with the Visegrad group as explained later.

Dividing lines in the populations of members states are also worth mentioning. There is huge support for refugees from groups of volunteers, irrespective of the official stance of the government. There are likewise many NGOs providing free legal counseling and other services; this informal sector of aid provides space for extensive further research. On the governmental level, though, everyone seems to agree that it is necessary to provide help in the region and try, both with humanitarian and development aid and with diplomatic efforts, to contain the migrants in the region they are coming from.[48] For this purpose, the EU is getting involved in the region more than before, financing and facilitating numerous projects, as we explain in the following section of our article.

EU and Syrian Refugees in the Neighboring Countries of Syria

The number of Syrian refuges in the EU represents only a fraction of the total number of Syrian refugees. The EU therefore also significantly contributes to the assistance for refugees in Syria and neighboring countries. As Turkey's situation has been analyzed in detail elsewhere[49] and as the situation in Turkey continues to be covered by media and other researchers, our attention in this section will be given primarily to the other neighbors of Syria –Jordan and Lebanon, as they too host a great share of Syrian refugees.[50] According to the

data of the EU Humanitarian Aid and Civil Protection department (ECHO),[51] the EU has so far donated more than 5 billion Euros, making it one of the largest donors.[52] The EU, in cooperation with relief organizations provides material help, or focuses on broader initiatives such as "No lost generation," which targets the continuing education and protection of Syrian children.[53] Last, but definitely not least, it also tries to enhance the resilience of the host communities.

The refugees arriving in host countries often shake the fragile domestic balance, either religiously or because they put pressure on under-developed parts of the countries. Therefore, the main purpose of the development projects is not only short-term refugee aid, but to strengthen the resilience of host communities and provide developmental activities primarily beneficial to them.[54]

The EU is especially helping Syria's neighbors, the countries that are the most affected by the refugee influx and bear the highest expenses of the Syrian refugee crisis. The EU's main conditions for providing humanitarian assistance stress the protection of civilians, compliance with international humanitarian law and guarantee of safety of humanitarian personnel. In providing humanitarian assistance, the EU closely cooperates with international humanitarian organizations, UNHCR –The UN Refugee Agency and the Turkish government to ease the situation of the refugees in Turkey. The assistance focuses on provision of health services, humanitarian funding and assistance to child refugees in cooperation with the initiatives like People in Need (IPN), Concern International (PCI) and the Children of Peace. The EU also supported provision of health services to the refugees in Turkey through UNHCR in the amount of 13 million Euros via the Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance, and 8.8 million Euros to support the UNICEF projects providing schooling to Syrian children refugees.[55]

Although the EU was active in the region even before the crisis,[56] working under the action plans set in the framework of European Neighborhood Policy and using instruments –ENI (ENPI)[57] and ECHO for financing the already existing initiatives, the main turning point in the EU's approach to the crisis came with the end of the year 2014. This term was significant due to the creation of a special fund for dealing with the Syria crisis– the MADAD fund (EU Regional Trust Fund in Response to the Syrian Crisis). The MADAD fund should help eradicate the overlapping of different projects and streaming of different financial sources (from the already used instruments, member states' contributions and third party donors) to one big fund aiming at regional help and development. Since it came into existence in 2014 it has been used to finance most of the EU's non-humanitarian activities in the region.[58] The main aim of the fund is to help Syria's neighbors to cope with the influx of Syrian refugees. The main target countries are Lebanon, Jordan, Turkey, Iraq and Egypt,

but its scope includes all countries burdened by the Syrian refugee influx. In Syria, the fund gives the primary role to the already existing Syria Recovery Trust Fund operated by the United Nations and so the MADAD activities in Syria itself will be only complementary to it.[59]

As explained in the factsheet of the European Commission regarding the EU's response to the Syria crisis, the MADAD fund should serve the long term needs of refugees and host communities, bolstering resilience now, and possibly turning into a fund helping with "reconstruction, resettlement and political solution of the crisis".[60] As one of its key advantages the fund presents its low administrative costs (maximum 3 percent[61]). Another advantage is more effective targeting of finances. The fund does not prohibit the member states from bilateral activities outside the Fund, yet cooperating within the MADAD framework is strongly emphasized. So far the nineteen member states have pledged to provide finances and fifteen have already done so, as can be seen in the MADAD report.[62] One of the biggest donors is Austria, and understandably so, because it lies directly on the migration route from the Balkans to Germany, should the refugees opt to continue to Europe instead of staying in the region. Denmark is another of the other big donors and attention should be paid to the fact that even the V4 pledged their support.[63] Nevertheless, some states still rely more on bilateral agreements. The fund itself does not "make" any projects, but relevant projects falling under its scope and defined mission may apply for financing from this fund.

Why has the fund been created now? One of the reasons might be that the EU is struggling to cope with the sudden rise in numbers of migrants and therefore trying to control their flow. Apart from protecting the borders, it is also trying to help the states in the region to take care of the refugees so that they do not proceed to Europe. Another reason is to decrease the financial ineffectiveness of the existing aid systems and last, but definitely not least a reason might be to become part of the solution of the existing crisis as an important actor, as otherwise the EU still struggles to define its role as a single entity which belongs to the group of important global actors. In addition, the Fund should be ready to transform itself from a fund for crisis response to a fund oriented towards long-term development and post-conflict reconstruction.[64] The EU is therefore preparing the ground for its long-term involvement in the region. Apart from plain humanitarian aid, the reason for involvement might be higher influence of the EU in the region and bigger control of the situation, so that further spillovers of refugees from the region to the EU are prevented. A related reason is Public Relations, being viewed as a strong player may help the EU's global role as well as its internal image within the EU at a time when many see that the EU's unity is crumbling. The at-site PR aspect is part of every project[65] and eventually the EU will be able to reap the benefits of its activities inside the EU itself. Apart from the internal reasons, there also exists external

pressure on the EU, not in the least exerted by Turkey, to share the "burden" of the refugees.[66]

Yet forgetting for the moment the dubious reasons behind its creation, the truth is that the MADAD fund does a great deal of work in its field of activity. On December 1, 2015 a new package of programs was approved. 390 million Euros in total was divided into four big programs: 165 million Euros go to education, 145 million Euros to resilience and local development, 55 million Euros will be spent on health and finally 25 million Euros are allocated for the water, sanitation and hygiene program.[67] Even though the EU is trying for integration of its funds, it also tries to vary its approach to different countries in the region based on their needs and also on the state of mutual relations prior to the crisis. To illustrate this point, we will briefly mention the activities in Lebanon and Jordan as the situation in Turkey has been already analyzed in the previous issue of Insight Turkey.[68] Yet in the end we will shortly touch on the new deal brokered between the EU and Turkey regarding the refugees.

The big challenge in the case of Jordan is that because the majority of refugees do not live in camps, but they live in the host communities, their presence start to raise tensions due to higher rents and job competition

Lebanon's formal ties with the EU and its predecessors date back to 1965, and since 1995 Lebanon has operated within the Euro-Mediterranean partnership. On top of the long term reform and development efforts in the country, additional funding and projects were approved as a flexible response to the Syrian crisis.[69] The European commission has so far provided, in response to the Syria crisis, nearly 552[70] million Euros to Lebanon. Although this seems as a high amount, it is low in comparison to the total costs Lebanon is bearing given the extremely large number of refugees hosted there. According to World Bank estimates, hosting the refugees costs Lebanon 1.6 billion dollars a year, while Jordan is spending 2.7 billion dollars a year.[71]

Approximately half of the amount provided by the EU to Lebanon aimed to strengthen Lebanese structures and provide developmental help while the other half went to humanitarian assistance.[72] All four main groups of programs (education, resilience, health, water and sanitation) are applicable to Lebanon. The knowledge of EU activities in Lebanon is quite high; the locals felt even before the crisis started that the EU can contribute to peace and stability.[73] Yet the situation is very volatile, with the country of approximately 4 million citizens showing extreme hospitality and hosting more than 1 million refugees. The EU is committed to provide further support and continues in supporting the projects; however, the living conditions of the refugees are far from ideal

A general view of a refugee camp for Syrian Kurdish refugees on February 2, 2015, at Suruc, in Sanliurfa.

AFP PHOTO / BÜLENT KILIÇ

and deteriorating. The enormous disproportionality of the number of refugees in comparison to the local population has eventually led Lebanon to efforts to curb further arrivals of refugees as well as to failures of their registration.[74]

Jordan is another partner country within the European Neighborhood Policy, and it has been fulfilling the set criteria and pace of reforms well. Nevertheless, the country, after narrowly avoiding the impact of the Arab Spring, is facing new rising tensions caused by the refugee influx, which especially affects the less developed areas of the country. Therefore, a sensitive approach is needed, and here the EU system of developing the host community as a way of helping refugees is very adequate. So far the European Commission has channeled 583.7 million Euros to Jordan in response to the crisis, and more finances were donated by single member states. Additionally there has been another more than 500 million Euros under the scope of ENP donated to Jordan.[75] An interesting experiment is going on in the country, where the government accepted logic similar to Germany and it tries to allow the refugees to work, thus using them as a force for development.

Yet the truth is that at the beginning of 2016 there were over 636 000[76] refugees in Jordan, half of them women and children. The big challenge in the case of Jordan is that because the majority of refugees do not live in camps, but they live in the host communities, their presence start to raise tensions due to higher rents and job competition. Therefore even in Jordan the situation is not ideal and here the access of refugees to the country has been lately

A man and children walk in the so-called "Jungle" migrant camp in Gande-Synthe where 2,500 refugees from Kurdistan, Iraq and Syria live on February 11, 2016 in Grande-Synthe near the city of Dunkirk, northern France.

AFP PHOTO / PHILIPPE HUGUEN

limited.[77] Therefore we can see that the aid and projects themselves might not be enough if not connected to a broader solution of the crisis.

As mentioned before, apart from the wish to really help the local populations and the refugees, one of the main reasons for the EU involvement is to protect its own territory from the influx of refugees, or at least from uncontrolled huge numbers of them. Although it faces only a fraction of the migration wave in comparison with the local countries, the EU is at odds with how to react and how to deal with the situation. Slowing the stream of refugees is becoming crucial at a time when nationalism is growing in the EU nationalist parties gain momentum and some groups of people become radicalized. It is hard to point out specific countries, because this trend is spreading through more of them, but some visible examples can be found in France (and National Front Party),[78] Germany (the PEDIGA group),[79] the Czech Republic, (home of the authors, where for example an attack with Molotov cocktails on a refugee-oriented social center took place) or for example Hungary (Jobbik Movement).[80] Another example being the paradox of the World National-Conservative Movement, trying to link different national-conservative, often even extremist parties, from Europe,[81] and a common solution to the problem is nowhere to be seen. Helping regional countries to deal with the changed internal balance and rising tensions among its peoples must be considered together with preventing the refugees themselves from moving, as a crucial precondition for stabilizing the situation in Europe. Last but not least is the growing fear of terrorism; of both foreign terrorists arriving in the EU disguised as refugees

The current refugee crisis clearly demonstrates that the EU member states can no longer adopt a common position on the refugee crisis

and the country's own citizens becoming radicalized.[82]

Apart from the MADAD fund and other activities, which should help to increase living conditions in the region and so motivate the refugees to stay there, another important step to control the flow of the refugees was the recent EU-Turkey deal. The deal agreed on March 18, 2016, allows Greece to return those migrants who arrive after March 20 and do not apply for asylum or their claim is rejected to be sent back to Turkey. In return the EU will resettle a corresponding number of Syrians already registered in Turkey and provide financial help to take care of the refugees there, which number over 3 million.[83] Care of them from the beginning of the crisis had already cost Turkey, more than 6 billion dollars by the summer of 2015.[84] Moreover further Chapters of the accession process will be opened and should Turkey fulfill all necessary conditions, its citizens will be granted visa-free entry to the EU.[85] However the deal seems close to breaking point, as the EU is pushing Turkey to reform its law on terrorism and make other changes in order to get the visa-free status for its citizens, while on the other hand in Turkey, the main supporter of the deal –former Prime Minister Davutoğlu– has stepped down with the current rhetoric of president Erdoğan clearly showing that he considers it is the EU which is asking for help and therefore he is not keen on any concessions.[86] The deal also faces criticism regarding, among other arguments, the rights of the refugees and also the possible threat of the old migration routes being reopened, if people are really deterred from using the Turkey-Greece route. Furthermore it seems that not everybody, even inside the EU, is happy about the deal from the beginning.[87] Therefore we can again see that the division of the Member States together with uncertainty about the best course of action prevents the EU from dealing with the situation effectively, and to benefit of the refugees.

Conclusion

As demonstrated in our analysis, the European Union has not been able to effectively apply the common asylum policy towards the refugees, in particular those from Syria. Despite the fact that the principles of the common asylum policy should be applied in the Schengen area based on the Dublin regulations, the current refugee crisis clearly demonstrates that the EU member states can no longer adopt a common position on the refugee crisis. Even though the European Union has been at least for some time quite active in helping Syria's neighbors to bear the costs of the Syrian refugees, in particular through the MADAD fund in Lebanon, Turkey and Jordan, all the programs described

above focus on the effort to keep the refugees in the region. We could accept the argument that the EU learned from the previous mistakes of making interventions or allowing uncontrolled migration and is trying to solve the situation in the region where the people on the run can find at least some cultural proximity.[88] However the EU's attempt to make the refugees stay in the region, where they are hoped to integrate better, provided that it will pay for such a solution and help also domestic populations, might fail to work thus endangering those that it should help. Apart from the situation in Lebanon, also the deal with Turkey is also under enormous strain and close to breaking point and the situation in another MADAD recipient country –Jordan– is far from ideal. Yet, finding another better solution might be a challenge hard to face, because of the different voices in the EU not being able to agree on a common stance as explained in great detail before.

As we have demonstrated in our analysis the situation is changing and new possible solutions should be created. The common asylum policy in the face of the current Syrian refugee crisis remains a dream. The inability to reach consensus results in part from significant differences among the EU member states, in particular between the "old and "new" member states. This crisis therefore clearly calls for deeper discussions about the common asylum policy and revision of the so called Dublin system to provide a fair share of the refugee burden to all EU member countries and to promote a common position of the EU towards the refugees. The crisis also highlights the divisions in societies of the member states as well as the polarization of some of the electorate. It is therefore hard to ask the member states to find a common voice when they struggle to find unity within their own borders. Therefore, the fact is that although efficient in providing help to the countries in the MENA region, the EU is still at odds over how to deal with its domestic tensions. Yet this crisis is a unique chance to become the actor the EU always wanted to be, and so it is high time to reconsider the attitude towards the migrants and the crisis as such. ■

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