



EU Countries in Face of the New Refugee Crisis: Controversy and Cooperation

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Abstract

Since 2010, the number of refugees applying for immigration to Europe has increased year by year, and reached the highest point in 2015. Europe is undergoing a new wave of immigration. Faced with the complicated situation, EU countries have caused contradictions and disputes on account of their respective interests. It is precisely because of the same difficulties that have created their alliances and collaborations. This article will start from the causes of the influx of refugees, then it will continue to compare and analyze the refugees’ situation in the major EU countries and their corresponding policies adopted. Next, it will implement an in-depth study on the EU’s “relocation plan” and “quota system” from the source to the end. Based on this analysis, we try to predict the development of the European refugee problem and explore the solutions.

Key words: Refugee; EU; Quota; Policy

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INTRODUCTION

Since 2010, many migrants, contained a large number of refugees, have arrived in Europe via the Mediterranean Sea and the Balkans from Africa, the Middle East and South Asia. Then, Syrian refugees passing through

Turkey joined this movement, and more exiles from war-torn regions threatened by terrorism participated in the displacement wave. This finally triggered a migratory peak in 2015. Although the number of refugees has started to decline since 2016, the European situation is still complicated and severe.

The arrival of millions of refugees and the frequent accidental tragedy have led European countries to be caught off guard and to be agitated. Indeed, the migratory wave reflects the many difficulties that Europe is currently facing the economic, political, social and diplomatic spheres. Moreover, the crisis of unexpected magnitude has caused the collapse of unity among the EU member states.

To get rid of it, France and Germany have adopted the reform of the right of exile, other countries have implemented temporary policies. The EU signed the agreement with Turkey, reconciled country members to get their support, financed Greece and Italy, and advocated the quota system. All these tests have shown hope to solve the problem. However, the final resolution of this crisis would depend on the joint efforts of all countries, as well as cooperation and communication between them.

1. AN INEVITABLE CRISIS AND DISCORDS AMONG NATIONS

From the geopolitical point of view, the outbreak of this crisis is inevitable for all Europe. Indeed, the origin and destination of refugees have obvious geographical characteristics. On the one hand, the migrants come mainly from Africa, Middle East and South Asia. In this context, a series of local wars have occurred frequently such as the Kosovo war, the war in Iraq, the war in Afghanistan, which has caused the turbulent situation in the conquered region. And then, the ongoing ethnic conflicts in because of religious differences have aggravated the chaos. Thus, the countries such as Syria, Kosovo and Afghanistan affected by the war, and the

nations such as Tunisia, Egypt, Yemen, Libya influenced by the “Arab Spring”, and especially Syria which has been doubled affected, become the origins of a huge number of refugees flocking to Europe.

According to the International Organization for Migration (IOM), more than one million people arrived in 2015, including more than 850,000 via the Greek coast, mostly from Syria (56%), Afghanistan (24%) and Iraq (10%). In 2016, total arrivals by sea dropped to 363,000, not counting 24,000 arrivals by land routes.¹

On the other hand, European countries are still the ideal and comparatively easy places for refugees, especially the developed states for example, France, Germany and Switzerland, who hold the banner of humanism. By applying generous acceptance policies, they attract exiles who follow each other without interruption. Moreover, in history, Kurds, Palestinians, Iraqis, Afghanistan, and immigrants from former colonial countries still represent the main part of resettlement and integration. As a result, there is no exception that Europe becomes a target area in this flow of people who seek refuge.

In this case, Italy and Greece, two major entrances in Europe is taking a lot of pressure to welcome, register and install the exiles who ask for help. However, as EU member countries failed to agree on the acceptance of refugees, they accused themselves of neglecting surveillance of illegal immigrants. Great Britain criticizes France for making a large number of illegal passengers sneak into it. France accuses Italy and Greece of allowing refugees to circulate in Europe, while the two injured countries are also spearheading the rich states of Europe, dissatisfied with the indifference of neighboring nations. Without a universally accepted resettlement plan, conflicts and negotiations alternate among EU countries, exacerbating and prolonging the crisis. Clearly, the refugee problem would not be close to being closed.

2. GREECE BURDENED WITH UNBEARABLE WEIGHT

From a geographical point of view, Greece, southern gate of Europe, serves as the first barrier to keep refugees out. In 2015, “According to the OIM, 1,011,712 people arrived in Europe by sea, including 853,650 on Greek coasts.”² In recent years, the political turmoil and the debt crisis, combined with the influx of refugees have cast a gloomy shadow over the former glorious country in history, which has no other way than to ask for aid to the

¹ L'Europe et les migrants, faits et chiffres, Par L'Obs, Publié le 19 mars 2017 à 11h16. Retrieved from <https://www.nouvelobs.com/monde/20170319.AFP9626/l-europe-et-les-migrants-faits-et-chiffres.html>

² Crise migratoire en Europe: des chiffres pour comprendre, 16 juin 2017. Retrieved from <https://www.leparisien.fr/flash-actualite-monde/crise-migratoire-en-europe-des-chiffres-pour-comprendre-16-06-2017-7057359.php>

EU. In March 2016, the European Commission proposed to the Council and the European Parliament to accept “an amending budget of 300 million euros can be allocated in Athens”.³ In addition, the EU signed a comprehensive plan with Turkey in the same year to stop the daily arrival of thousands of migrants by boat on the Greek islands of the Aegean Sea.

However, the situation of Greece remains in chaos. Although arrivals declined significantly after the signing of the agreement between the EU and Turkey, Greece still welcomed 160,000 migrants during the first two quarters of 2016.⁴ Moreover, because of the coup of state in Turkey, there has been a resurgence of refugees. It is more noticeable that since the closure of the Balkan route, nearly 50,000 exiles have been stranded in Greece, waiting for resettlement in European countries. But the process of relocation is still slow to set up. Until 30 July 2016, 2,681 persons had been transferred, which represents only 4% of the planned number, i.e. 66,400 places before September 2017.⁵ In fact, by questioning the effectiveness of the EU in evacuating refugees, the Greek Minister for Migration Policy Yannis Mouzalas has even used “hypocrisy”⁶ to criticize European countries; on the other hand, the EU which often makes the negative comment on the measures and conditions for the resettlement of exiles in this country overwhelmed. Since 2011, Greece is still excluded from the referral system as conditions unable to accommodate refugees. But in 2016, the EU proposed implementing the Dublin Regulations, which would send back to Greece all asylum seekers who have entered the European soil via this country. In return, the refugee camps in Greece remain in a state of desolation. The Greek government blames it on European countries who do not share the burden of migration.⁷ In December 2017, hundreds of unaccompanied minors became the weight of both sides, while poisoning relations between Greece and the EU.

3. ITALY IN A DILEMMA

Because of its location between Europe and the African continent, the Mediterranean Sea is a “disaster zone”

³ Migrants: l'UE accorde une aide «humanitaire» d'urgence de 300 millions d'euros à la Grèce, 2, mars 2016. Retrieved from https://www.lemonde.fr/europe/article/2016/03/02/migrants-bruxelles-degage-en-urgence-300-millions-d-euros-pour-la-grece_4875167_3214.html

⁴ Crise des réfugiés: la Grèce prise au piège, 10 août 2016. Retrieved from https://www.lesechos.fr/10/08/2016/lesechos.fr/0211197115671_crise-des-refugies---la-grece-prise-au-piege.htm

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Crise des réfugiés: un ministre grec dénonce “l'hypocrisie” de l'Europe, le 26 décembre 2017. Retrieved from https://www.lexpress.fr/actualite/monde/europe/crise-des-refugies-un-ministre-grec-denonce-l-hypocrisie-de-l-europe_1971855.html

⁷ Les réfugiés de nouveau renvoyés vers la Grèce, le 9 décembre 2016. Retrieved from https://www.lemonde.fr/europe/article/2016/12/09/les-refugies-de-nouveau-renvoyes-vers-la-grece_5046287_3214.html

from which illegal immigrants enter the heart of Europe. Thus, it has become the route most frequently taken by Syrian, Iraqi, Eritrean, Egyptian and Somali refugees, being also considered the most lethal route, on which Italy serves as a transit point for illegal immigrants in passage to France, Germany, the United Kingdom and the Nordic countries and other developed states. According to statistics published by IOM, between January and May in 2016, 1,398 traffickers perished in the sea, and in the same period of 2017, 60,521 people arrived in Europe from the Mediterranean, including 1,530 victims, and 80 % of survivors entered the territory of Italy.⁸

In spite of the extremely dangerous way, the exiles rush towards this Mediterranean peninsula. Therefore, Italy is responsible for a major part of the settlement of refugees from Asia and Africa. Given the large number of homeless people, the Italian government does not have the capacity to relocate them, which has caused a series of problems such as the environment, health and public safety. In addition, newcomers have the real goal of going to more developed European countries like France, Germany, Switzerland and Sweden, not taking Italy as their long-term residence. The riots and violent cases committed by the migrants have caused the fear and the indignation of the local inhabitants. Unfortunately, the situation has been aggravated by the financial crisis, however, the aid of UE seems to be “a cup of water” to the enormous pressure of refugees.

Although France has shown a welcoming attitude for migrants, its border is never a line of defense to easily cross. Indeed, it has strengthened control of the frontier with Italy, by increasing the number of guards. At the same time, Emmanuel Macron, the new president, always focuses on the acceleration of repatriation and strict differentiation of migrants' status. According to the “Dublin Agreement”, asylum seekers who do not meet the conditions will be returned to the countries of entry. In addition, Switzerland, Austria, Spain and other countries have closed their borders with Italy. Therefore, “Dublin Agreement”, as a catalyst, sparked contradictions between Italy and its neighbors. Meanwhile, the wave of “anti-immigration” triggered in this overburdened country, so the attitude of the government has quietly changed. The refugees, who moved and faced the refusal of some countries, form a “pendulum effect”, becoming a thorny problem for all the states. In this case, the European countries also tried to solve the problems through negotiation. In early July 2017, France, Italy and Germany convened a “mini-summit” to confront the crisis, and then, at the “Tallinn conference” in Estonia, Macron agreed

to welcome political refugees from Italy; on August 28, 2017, a “four-country summit” (France, Italy, Germany, Spain) took place in France on the “migratory wave”. Because of differences of interest, their efforts failed to reach a definitive and effective agreement.

4. QUOTA SYSTEM AND RELOCATION PLAN

In September 2015, the European Union decided to establish a quota mechanism to distribute reasonably the migrants between the member countries. In this way, the European Commission has allocated the first batch of 120,000 asylum seekers. The principle of quotas has been created primarily to ease the pressure on Greece and Italy. However, some countries reject quota distribution, such as: the Czech Republic and Slovakia; the other countries, either lacking a clear attitude to implement the principle, like Poland, or being accused of not having implemented it effectively, like France. In short, the quota system has not been favorably applied from the beginning.

According to a relocation strategy, the EU has planned to migrate 160,000 people to Europe, after the agreement with Turkey in March 2016, it is decided to reduce the number to 100,000.⁹ In fact, the Member States have 28.7% of the initial target and only 46,000 migrants were resettled. Some countries have explicitly opposed mandatory quotas, such as Poland, the Czech Republic and Romania. Hungary and Slovakia even went to court to reject the quota principle, but they were dismissed in early September 2017. Finally, Slovakia accepted 16 people out of 902 asylum seekers, and the Czech Republic admitted 12 against 2,691 quotas.¹⁰ On the contrary, the Republic of Malta is the only one to open the door to all expelled; Norway voluntarily participate in the resettlement plan, accepting the quota distributed; Finland achieved 94%, Ireland 76.5%. In addition, Germany has admitted the most refugees, at the same time, Angela Dorothea Merkel has issued a strict distinction of the status of migrants. France is a special case, because the government promised to host 30,000 exiles, in fact 4,000 resettled.¹¹

Quite clearly, as far as the quota system is concerned, EU country members do not reach a unified agreement, while dissenting voices still exist that impede the implementation of the delocalization strategy. Jean-Claude Juncker, President of the European Commission is in favor of a compulsory quota system, but this proposal seems a declaration of war to some countries. Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban sees it as “a crazy idea”.

⁸ La source: l'organisme international des migrations. Retrieved from https://www.google.fr/search?q=%C3%A9volution+de+la+situation+dans+la+m%C3%A9diterran%C3%A9e&source=lnms&tbm=isch&sa=X&ved=0ahUKewiT76uPgPfxAhXEipQKHZVW BfkQ_AUCigB&biw=1366&bih=574#imgrc=JUw8JEiFTXQdmM

⁹ UE: la fin des quotas de répartition de réfugiés entre les Etats membres, le 26 septembre 2017 Retrieved from <http://www.rfi.fr/emission/20170926-union-europeenne-point-politique-relocalisation-migrants>

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid.

Italy, apparently a beneficiary, also wants the principle applied on a voluntary basis. In France, there is also disagreement about the system. From the beginning, the French government has immediately expressed support for the plan, but the right-wing parties showed mistrust and resistance to the distribution of quotas. In principle, the number of people distributed is determined by the GDP, the population, the unemployment rate and the number of resettled exiles. In recent years, France has been caught up in social chaos: economic decline, high unemployment rate, frequent terrorist attacks. Moreover, for historical reasons, there are a huge number of immigrants from Africa, Asia and Eastern Europe. As a result, a considerable part of the French does not approve of receiving refugees. At the same time, from 2009, the number of asylum seekers has increased year by year, in particular from 2015 to 2017 (2015: 80,075, 2016: 85,726, 2017: 100,412). Accordingly, the number of exiles accepted over the last three years has also increased sharply: in 2015, more than 5,000 compared to 2014, in 2016, still more than 7,000 with 2015.¹² Obviously, France, like the other countries, is under enormous pressure from refugees. It explains why the law of refugees has become an important factor which would have a great influence on the situation.

5. THE FRANCO-GERMAN ALLIANCE AND THE NEW FRENCH REFUGEE-IMMIGRATION LAW

Germany serves always as a “point of reference” for other countries on the refugee problem. Angela Dorothea Merkel, the German Chancellor, opened the door to millions of refugees in 2015. However, with the continued arrival of migrants, the capacity of Germany has been strongly questioned. As a result, the related policies have undergone a turnaround, the government started to execute a strict control, proposing an annual cap of 200,000 people. From 2017, Germany began to implement the “Starthilfe Plus” program. According to different refugee status, the authorities decided to pay between 800 and 1,200 euros to facilitate the voluntary return of exiles to their countries. In the first quarter of 2017, Germany repatriated 12,545 refugees, the number equals the total repatriation in France during 2016.¹³ As one of the main powers of the EU, France has always welcomed the arrival of refugees. In January 2017, Emmanuel Macron,

¹² 100,000 demandes d’asile: ce que nous disent les chiffres, le 8 janvier 2018. Retrieved from <https://www.leparisien.fr/societe/100-000-demandes-d-asile-ce-que-nous-disent-les-chiffres-08-01-2018-7489287.php>

¹³ Immigration, Emmanuel Macron définit une ligne ferme pour sa future loi, 2017-09-05. Retrieved from https://www.lepoint.fr/politique/immigration-emmanuel-macron-definit-une-ligne-ferme-pour-sa-future-loi-05-09-2017-2154778_20.php

on the occasion of visiting Germany, declared that the resettlement of migrants was an obligation of the European countries. In September 2017, France promulgated the refugee-immigration reform plan, affirming that the new law would refer to the current policy of Germany. The French president also stressed the cooperation with the countries of origin and transit. To this end, the government appointed an immigrant ambassador Pascal Teixeira da Silva who was the first to occupy this position.¹⁴

In February 2018, the new law was promulgated, consisted mainly of three aspects: firstly, France insists on a firm crackdown on illegal immigration, stating:

The increase in the maximum duration of administrative detention, 45 to 90 days, with a possible extension of 15 days (three times in a row maximum) if the foreigner obstructs his removal; the offense of unauthorized crossing of borders outside the Schengen area, punishable by one year’s imprisonment and a fine of € 3,750 if the person does not pass through a controlled point.¹⁵

Then, the government is urged to improve the efficiency of the reception, examination and repatriation of refugees, for this purpose, the new law states:

The reduction from 120 to 90 days of the deadline for filing an asylum application after entry into France. Beyond, the file will be treated, but can be treated in accelerated procedure; the reduction from one month to 15 days of the deadline for appealing to the National Asylum Court (CNDA) and the development of video hearings, so that they can be carried out remotely.¹⁶

In addition, the authorities propose the possibility of granting aid to foreigners in detention who expresses the will to voluntary return, by referring to the “Starthilfe Plus” plan of Germany. Finally, the law provides for three measures to facilitate the integration of migrants: “The extension of the ‘talent passport’ to new categories; facilitated installation of student researchers; protective provisions on the right of residence for the victims of domestic violence”.¹⁷ Once the new law was promulgated, it has caused strong social repercussions. Some people find the government’s effort insufficient, because “the law does not respond to the scale and gravity of the immigration challenge”,¹⁸ others believe that this reform

¹⁴ Une réforme prévue pour le premier semestre 2018, le 13 septembre 2017. Retrieved from <https://www.france-terre-asile.org/accueil/flexicontent/slider/une-reforme-de-l-asile-prevue-pour-le-premier-semester-2018>

¹⁵ Droit d’asile: les principales dispositions du projet de loi, le 19/02/2018. Retrieved from https://www.lexpress.fr/actualite/societe/droit-d-asile-les-principales-dispositions-du-projet-de-loi_1986057.html

¹⁶ Droit d’asile: les principales dispositions du projet de loi, le 19/02/2018. Retrieved from https://www.lexpress.fr/actualite/societe/droit-d-asile-les-principales-dispositions-du-projet-de-loi_1986057.html

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ France: Le projet de loi sur l’asile suscite la controverse, 22.02.2018. Retrieved from <https://www.aa.com.tr/fr/monde/france-le-projet-de-loi-sur-lasile-suscite-la-controverse-1071203>

encroaches on human rights. Thus, demonstrations and opposition activities broke out throughout the country. On February 21, 2018, protesters gathered in the Place Saint-Michel in Paris to denounce the injustice of the project of asylum-immigration law.¹⁹ France and Germany, as the two main EU powers, would have a major impact on the other European countries while Brexit gets closer. Sweden, which recently declared “We can no longer look at ourselves as a very welcoming country”,²⁰ by modifying the conditions of family reunification.

According to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), migrants in Europe have decreased in the first half of 2017. Compared to the same period in 2016, the number of transits by the Mediterranean has fallen considerably. In reality, the arrivals in Italy from North African have been declining since early July²¹. The change is mainly due to the blockade of the Mediterranean and Balkan routes. Despite this, many people risk their lives to come to Europe through trafficking networks. As a result, the mortality rate at the point of entry remains high. Between January and June 2017, 2,253 people perished or disappeared in the Mediterranean.²² At the same time, the number of arrivals in Spain has obviously increased. According to statistics from the International Organization for Migration (IOM) dated August 10, 2017, 8,183 immigrants have landed in Spain since January, equivalently three times more than the same period in 2016. Moreover, most of them came from West Africa, who, for avoiding Libya, chose the

route from Morocco to Spain. In sum, the solution of the refugee crisis is not an achievable goal in the short term.

In recent years, the EU has sought to establish a common asylum system and improve the legal conditions for immigration so that refugees can be resettled reasonably and fairly. Faced with the enormous pressure of the “migratory influx”, the European countries have realized the importance of co-operation. Although the number of arrivals in 2017 has decreased, people staying in Europe are still a hidden danger in host and transit countries. In view of the exemplary role of Germany and France, all members of the EU strive to find practical and effective ways to resolve the crisis in solidarity.

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¹⁹ Personne n'est illégale, manifestation contre la loi d'aile-immigration à Paris, le 21 février, 2018, <https://fr.sputniknews.com/france/201802211035235332-manifestation-loi-asile-immigration-paris/>

²⁰ Micro européen. La nouvelle réforme du droit d'asile en France, le 24 février, 2018. Retrieved from https://www.francetvinfo.fr/replay-radio/micro-europeen/micro-europeen-la-nouvelle-reforme-du-droit-d-asile-en-france_2603232.html

²¹ HCR | Parallèlement à une baisse des arrivées de réfugiés et de migrants en Europe, abus et décès persistent, 2017-08-28. Retrieved from <https://asile.ch/2017/08/28/hcr-parallement-a-baisse-arrivees-de-refugies-de-migrants-europe-abus-deces-persistent/>

²² Ibid.