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QUESTION: ARE DEVELOPED COUNTRIES IN EUROPE AND NORTH AMERICA ARE PROTECTING THE RIGHTS OF REFUGEES

 Europe has been betraying refugees since Syria’s civil war began, but the situation is
worsening. Year after year, the EU has wrung its hands while Syrian President Bashar al-Assad
and Russian President Vladimir Putin have carried out well-documented atrocities against the
civilian population in rebel-held areas of Syria.
Increasingly, Europe’s focus has been on defending its borders against desperate civilians in
search of peace and a better life and keeping them out of the EU.
Now, the conflict is in its final stages, and Europe’s priority is not to raise the cost for Russia of
continued military action, or to aid Turkey in creating a zone of relative safety in Idlib by
deterring further assaults from Assad, or to help refugees make new lives in safe countries. It is
to “hold the line,” as European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen said when visiting
the Greek-Turkish border on March 3, 2020.
If von der Leyen really wants the EU to uphold the rules-based international order and to be
“ambitious, strategic and assertive” in its approach to the world, she has to focus on removing
the root cause of refugee flows, while ensuring that all EU member states comply with their
obligations to asylum seekers. Europe’s policy for the wretched civilians of Syria cannot be “out
of sight, out of mind.”

CAROLINE DE GRUYTER EUROPEAN AFFAIRS CORRESPONDENT FOR NRC
HANDELSBLAD
‘Yes. In its eagerness to keep illegal migrants out, Europe makes it almost impossible for
genuine refugees fleeing war and prosecution to seek asylum here. This right to seek asylum is
anchored in international law.
Since immigrants have almost no legal ways to come to Europe, they have become creative
and disguise as refugees. It is difficult to doublecheck their stories. Often, real refugees aren’t
believed either. It has become a mess.
There is a simple way out: we must open a separate track for migrants.
First of all, we should recognize that the only way to stop illegal immigration is to legalize and
regularize it. Europe needs migrants. It must open legal ways for them. We should agree on
how many workers we need, which ones, and where. We should open legal application
possibilities across the world. Those who obtain working visa can come by plane. As soon as
legal ways exist, no one will take dangerous illegal routes across the Mediterranean or risk
being beaten up by Greek or Bulgarian border guards. Smugglers will soon be out of a job. We
will be in charge.
Once the track for refugees becomes unclogged, we should reinforce this, too. We must let
them apply for asylum in their region, then let them come in a regular way by ferry or plane.
Afterward, they should be distributed fairly over EU member states: we decide the destination’

TEFAN LEHNEVISITING SCHOLAR AT CARNEGIE EUROPE
‘Yes, absolutely! In September 201 5, the EU was divided between those who wanted to give
refugees shelter and those who wanted to keep them out. In March 2020, member states and
EU institutions are all backing the efforts of Greece and Bulgaria to stop new arrivals.
Of course, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan’s cynical weaponization of refugees to
extort concessions from the EU cannot be justified in any way. But neither can one overlook the
fact that Turkey has taken in 3.5 million refugees and that the situation in Idlib is turning into a
vast humanitarian catastrophe.
Financial assistance to Turkey for hosting the refugees on its territory must continue despite the
deterioration of EU-Turkey relations. EU member states should also increase their resettlement
programs for refugees in Turkey. The 25,000 that have been resettled in recent years seem
embarrassingly few in light of the scale of the problem.
At the same time, the EU must urgently help (and put pressure on) Greece to improve the
situation on its islands and to upgrade its asylum system. Instead of panicky warnings about a
repeat of the 201 5–201 6 crisis, EU politicians need to focus on the concrete concerns of
refugees. Otherwise, their constant rhetoric on values will lose the rest of its credibility’.
MARC PIERINIVISITING SCHOLAR AT CARNEGIE EUROPE
‘Greece sealing its border with Turkey and temporarily suspending the processing of asylum
requests has understandably sent shockwaves through many circles in the EU.
The bigger shock, however, is what triggered this situation—that is, a small yet significant
exodus of refugees deliberately organized by the Turkish authorities in order to put pressure on
the EU and to divert attention from the military situation in Syria. This is the first time in this
region that a Council of Europe and NATO member country takes action against a fellow
member country by using refugees as pawns, busing them freely, dispatching 1 ,000 riot police,
sending the Turkish interior minister to tour the selected area, and disseminating fake news.
Clearly, this action wasn’t going to be tolerated by Greece and the EU because of the rogue
method used by an allied government.
This being said, the 201 6 EU-Turkey agreement is in clear need of revision and updating. Even
more importantly, the European asylum system is in need of a long-awaited modernization.
What is at stake here is the future of European democracy.
Without a proper asylum system, without a clearer agreement with Turkey, and without a
genuine foreign policy in critical regions such as Syria, issues such as refugee movements will
continue to put pressure on politics across the European Union.’
IVAN VEJVODAPERMANENT FELLOW AT THE INSTITUTE FOR HUMAN SCIENCES
It certainly seems so at the moment. There is a token effort of a minority of EU member states to
take in children who are stranded. The refugees seeking a haven of peace are seen by some in
Europe as “barbarians at the gates,” and the EU and national governments have reacted
viscerally. The memory of the summer of 201 5 lurks in the minds of leaders.
The EU is caught in a bind between the “hammer” of the obligation to live up to its proclaimed
values of defending and supporting human life and dignity and the “anvil” of its domestic political
environments in which the far right has been making significant inroads.
The answer is not to try and incorporate far-right, xenophobic arguments to save the
mainstream political arena. The populist worldview purports that European nations are in danger
of being overrun and, thus, are about to lose their soul, identity, and culture, and that the
continent faces dechristianization. Leadership is lacking to counter these narratives more
forcefully by putting the issue in perspective. More importantly, European-wide policies on
asylum and burden sharing have been sorely missing.
Finally, the EU has been derelict in thinking it did not need to play a role in the Syrian war. It left
the space open to other geopolitical actors. It is reaping the effects of its absence in the Middle
East.

REFERENCE

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