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**On the Shores of Greece: EU Migration Policy in the 2015 Refugee Crisis
Through the Lens of the Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework**

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On the Shores of Greece: EU Migration Policy in the 2015 Refugee Crisis through the Lens of the Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework

How preference for political and national security over humanitarian aid and action highlights policy failings in light of the UN's Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework.

Introduction:

Migration is an extremely complicated issue impacting every corner of the globe. Factors ranging from political climate to economic conditions to societal disposition all contribute heavily to both emigration and immigration, creating unique landscapes wherever migration occurs. Today, one category of migration holding special prominence is forced migration, specifically that which results in asylum seekers and those classified as refugees. Globally, there are 79.5 million people who have been forcibly displaced from their homes, 26 million of whom are considered refugees.¹ These numbers are at their highest in modern history since the end of World War II.² This overwhelming reality of displaced persons demands action by both individual nations and the global community to effectively alleviate pressures of migrating population groups while also upholding the dignity and rights of those fleeing unsafe living conditions in their home countries.

The foremost multilateral voice on the global stage is the United Nations, boasting one hundred-ninety-three of the world's one hundred-ninety-five sovereign states. Their perspective is essential to understand the general support of the global community in the unfolding refugee

¹ "Figures at a Glance," UNHCR, June 18, 2020, <https://www.unhcr.org/en-us/figures-at-a-glance.html>.

²KERIDIS, Dimitris. "The Migration/Refugee Crisis and the (Un/Re) Making of Europe: Risks and Challenges for Greece." *Uluslararası İlişkiler / International Relations* 15, no. 58 (2018): 69-80. Accessed November 3, 2020. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26605009>. 71.

crisis. The United Nations has multiple connections to agencies which support refugees, as well as their own UN Refugee agency, otherwise referred to as the UNHCR. The official recognition of the crisis by the General Assembly of the United Nations in conjunction with an ongoing commitment to support the refugee crisis adds potency to international efforts. In 2016, the UN unanimously released the New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants which espoused a number of tangible commitments by Member States to uphold support for those on the move in the world today. A major component of the declaration was the Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework, also referred to as the CRRF.

The CRRF commits to four key objectives: to “ease the pressures on host countries and communities, enhance refugee self-reliance, expand third-country solutions, and support conditions in countries of origin for return in safety and dignity.”³ These elements have led to further actions on the betterment of conditions for refugees and migrants alike, and since February of 2018, this framework has been applied formally in a dozen nations.⁴ The framework stemming from the New York agreement highlights the need for a multifaceted and comprehensive response to issues of migration. Broken down into its four components, the framework can also be a strong measure of effectiveness of response to migration, especially the current refugee crisis beginning in 2015.

The UN High Commissioner for Refugees, Filippo Grandi, described the compact, saying, “the New York Declaration marks a political commitment of unprecedented force and resonance. It fills what has been a perennial gap in the international protection system – that of

³ United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, “New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants,” UNHCR USA (The UN Refugee Agency), accessed November 3, 2020, <https://www.unhcr.org/en-us/new-york-declaration-for-refugees-and-migrants.html>.

⁴ Ibid.

truly sharing responsibility for refugees.”⁵ This declaration surely is a milestone in international rhetoric and has made noticeable movements towards political action; but, in the context of the European theatre, it is not enough to look solely at intergovernmental declarations. International recognition of this refugee crisis shows that strides have been made in order to support migrants of varying classifications, as well as the receiving nations. However, the presence of an international agreement from the United Nations General Assembly does not automatically translate to effective action by individual governments or political and economic blocs such as the European Union. Instead, one must look deeper. Critical analysis of national responses in light of international policy is crucial to understand the conditions upon which migrants are arriving, the support they are receiving, and whether their human rights are being upheld as nations interact with vulnerable people groups.

This paper will break down elements of the EU’s response to the 2015 refugee crisis through the case of Greece in light of the four different components of the UN’s Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework. Through this analysis, the actualization of the goals will be tested. This is especially important and timely in the region of the Mediterranean and Europe in light of the beginning of the 2015 refugees crisis. This period saw an unprecedented number of migrants, most of whom were seeking asylum, flowing through a multitude of different routes across the Mediterranean with the end goal of finding refuge in the European Union. Before moving into the analysis of current migration policy as it applies today, we first need to understand who is coming into the European Union and the context into which they are arriving.

Migration Defined

⁵ Ibid.

Migration is a very broad umbrella under which multiple categories of population flows reside. In order to establish a working vocabulary around migration throughout the duration of this paper, it is helpful to define the different kinds of movements which contribute to displaced people groups globally, whether forced or voluntary. First, there are those who move, more or less, voluntarily from their country of origin. Under this category are migrants who are in search of better opportunities and thus move from place to place either within their own country or across international borders. Those who are considered migrants often follow economic push or pull factors in their patterns of movement.⁶

Similar, but not identical to migrants, are immigrants. The definition of an immigrant is someone who makes a conscious decision to move to a new country, often choosing specifically where they are going and voluntarily leaving their home with the goal of settling in a new country. It is possible they will become a permanent resident or citizen in their desired country of destination. An important note is that both migrants and immigrants are free to return to their country of origin whenever or if ever they choose to do so.⁷

On the other hand, there are those whose movement from their home is involuntary; these people can also be referred to as forcibly displaced. Under this category are asylum seekers and refugees. Although closely related, there are significant differences between those seeking asylum and those classified as refugees. An asylum seeker is anyone seeking international protection from war, violence, or persecution with a well-founded fear that if they return to their

⁶ “Migrants, Asylum Seekers, Refugees and Immigrants: What's the Difference?,” International Rescue Committee (IRC) (International Rescue Committee, December 11, 2018), <https://www.rescue.org/article/migrants-asylum-seekers-refugees-and-immigrants-whats-difference>.

⁷ Ibid

home they or theirs will be harmed. Because of international law they are able to apply for protection in another nation if they make it to the border or entrance point of the country.⁸

Those applying for protection are considered asylum seekers until they have gone through the due processes required by law and are granted refugee status. Refugees are defined as those who have sought protection from war, violence, or persecution, are unable to return home, and have been given the status of refugee which officially recognizes their position and gives them special protections and rights.⁹ Simply put, all refugees were once asylum seekers, but not all asylum seekers will be granted status as refugees.

The European Context

With these definitions established, there is sufficient foundation to move on to the context of migration as a whole in Europe. Historically, migration in Europe has been shaped by voluntary migration; but, the current refugee crisis, beginning in 2015, has left the continent heavily impacted by a record-breaking influx of those seeking asylum in Europe. Since the European Union as a whole is extremely complex, a comprehensive view of EU migration policies would take much more dedication than this paper allows. Therefore, the following pages will look at EU migration policies as played out in Greece and its surrounding context. This narrow lens will be used to evaluate whether the current policies at play are effective in upholding the UN statements on the protection of refugees and asylum seekers, or whether they tend toward national interest and security.

⁸ Ibid

⁹ United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, "Asylum and Migration," UNHCR (The UN Refugee Agency), accessed November 23, 2020, <https://www.unhcr.org/en-us/asylum-and-migration.html>.

Before diving into the depths of the most modern stages of the refugee crisis in the Mediterranean theatre, it is crucial to take a few steps back in time and look at the regional context of migration patterns and incentives in order to understand the landscape upon which the crisis is currently growing. Europe has had a complex and dynamic relationship regarding migration, with much of the movement due to economic pressures and political relations and negotiations. While the movements of people in and out of the continent are not a new phenomenon, the directional flow of people as well as the reception of people groups has continued through multiple decades since the beginning of the 20th century, each with unique challenges and undertones that have shaped European migration policy up until the present day.

Early 20th Century

The first half of the century was dominated by war and its ever evolving ramifications. This left the region largely affected by the fallout of the two major world wars as well as civil unrest and the shifting of political alignments across the continent. Up until the end of World War II, Europe was largely a center of emigration with its population moving to the New World.¹⁰ While both World Wars drastically changed the landscape of Europe in terms of migration, one area in which it flourished in the wake of upheaval was in economic production. The demands of full-out war created a booming economy in Western Europe which was unable to be satiated by local markets. The absence of labor created demand for a new period in Europe: economic migration. This shift was supported as markets fostered largely inter-continental movement of people based upon labor demands. Growth of the economic landscape lent itself to

¹⁰ Corrado Bonifazi, "Evolution of Regional Patterns of International Migration in Europe," in *International Migration in Europe New Trends and New Methods of Analysis* (Amsterdam University Press, 2008), pp. 107-128, <https://library.oapen.org/handle/20.500.12657/35242>. 109.

a booming season of labor migration characterized by policy that promoted the influx of foreign workers into European markets.

This period of temporary and or circular migration¹¹ throughout Europe mainly saw workers from the Mediterranean and Eastern European nations moving to Western Europe. Policy that encouraged this vein of migration was promoted by individual nations “through official channels and well defined procedures.”¹² An example of these official channels was the Treaty of Rome of 1957 which brought into effect free circulation of workers throughout the European Economic Community (EEC). As incoming migrants were viewed by receiving nations as temporary residents and economically beneficial, their presence was largely regarded as positive and barriers to entry were relatively low.

In regards to refugee movements throughout Europe, the Cold War and its emphasis on conflicting ideologies heavily shaped the political and national security ramifications of refugee movements. Rather than seeing refugees as the enemy or ‘other’, through the eyes of governmental institutions they were regarded largely “as part of the struggle between the East and the West”¹³. During this period, refugees fit into the narrative of national security that European nations were writing around the great evil of the East and communism. The vilification of the West’s ideological enemy aided in the integration of refugees from the Cold War, as they were viewed as victims rather than intruders. However, these favorable conditions for migration did not last forever, both politically and economically.

¹¹ Definition seen on page 10

¹² Ibid 116.

¹³ Isotalo, Riina. "Politicizing the Transnational: On Implications for Migrants, Refugees, and Scholarship." In *Migration, Development, and Transnationalization: A Critical Stance*, eds. Schiller Nina Glick and Faist Thomas, 100-41. Berghahn Books, 2010. Accessed November 28, 2020. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt9qcpr4.6>. 109.

Late 20th Century and Beyond

Beginning in 1974, the economic landscape of Europe drastically changed as fallout from the oil industry rippled across a variety of markets, often resulting in decreased demand for labor. The resulting surplus of workers, included those who had migrated based upon economic motivations. Such imbalance led to increasing unemployment levels and consequently, heightened tensions between nationals and migrant workers. The economic recession seen throughout Europe “fuelled hostility, racism, and xenophobia towards certain ‘visible’ groups of resident migrants. In several European countries, violent anti-foreigners incidents occurred.”¹⁴

Even as economic tensions heightened due to the substantial contraction of labor markets, and national rhetoric and debates were turned onto the topic of migration, sometimes bitterly, Europe continued to experience rising asylum applications. This elevation in asylum seekers was met by heightened barriers to immigration into Northern and Western Europe as governments entertained policy that protected internal national interest rather than welcoming to incoming groups of people.

The climate of migration to and from Greece ran parallel to Europe as a whole. The Greek state was largely a center of emigration for the majority of the 20th century; but, this flow slowed and eventually turned inward again after the oil crisis of 1973 was felt across Europe. Fallout from the economic upset included the institution of restrictive immigration policies across the continent. Alongside these global and regional pressures were the difficulties that Greeks faced while integrating into receiving countries. This period came to a conclusion with the restoration of democracy in Greece in 1974 and the nations’ 1981 entrance into the

¹⁴ Van Mol, de Valk, Pennix, “Migration and Immigrants in Europe: A Historical and Demographic Perspective” 35-36.

European Economic Community, also known as the EEC, which led to increased economic opportunity.¹⁵

Due to these economic improvements, after many years of emigration, population flows shifted and beginning in the 1980s, Greece instead became a center for immigration. Because of Greece's geographical location on the Mediterranean with Turkey to the east and Europe to the west, Greece was a central transit country for people from the Middle East, Eastern Europe, and Africa into the rest of Europe, a trend that is still seen today. As Greece transitioned from a country of emigration to immigration, their position as the only accessible entrance point to the European Union placed a heavy burden on the nation.

Moving into the 1990s and the first decade of the 2000s, the establishment of the European Union, along with the fall of the Iron Curtain, set off another period of migration trends across the continent of Europe. With political barriers dissolved, Central and Eastern European countries (CEE) had access to Europe in ways not seen before. An area which had previously been divided between East and West was no longer characterized by migration undertones seen in previous decades. Instead, a new set of attitudes developed, largely rooted in the emerging politics of the continent. This approach used humanitarian intervention in an attempt to keep the human flow out of high-conflict areas from spilling into more affluent regions of the continent. Fixed in the economic, political, and ideological security of individual nations, migration policy was built up around lines of social distrust of incoming migrants and refugees. Migration was marked by unfavorable market conditions, an elevated presence of

¹⁵ Chryssa Kassimi Charalambos Kasimis, "Greece: A History of Migration," migrationpolicy.org (Migration Policy Institute, March 2, 2017), <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/greece-history-migration>.

xenophobic right-wing parties with anti-immigrant rhetoric, and the reality that refugees were no longer “ideological trump cards in the global struggle between the East and the West.”¹⁶

In 1992, the Maastricht Treaty created an abolition of borders which lowered restrictions in intra-EU travel, effectively making movement throughout the union much more feasible. Just as border protection was integrated, so was the European economic market; this reality went hand in hand with growing restrictions on external border control and visa-regulation as the EU sought to protect themselves from the external pressures on the increasingly unified economic arena. For those the union did choose to let in, preference was given to migrants who held higher education and brought developed skill sets.¹⁷ In policy, rather than keeping migrants as a separate and temporary section of the population which had been the norm during previous decades of circular migration, the integration of migrants into the European system was moved to a more central position.

An important area to clarify in terms of migration patterns is the matter of circular and chain migration, which are seen within migration in and around the European Union. Circular migration, which was largely present in the middle of the twentieth century and continues in relevance today, has a multifaceted definition which differs depending upon the nation or context one examines. Despite its varying interpretations, a common theme that remains consistent within circular migration is it is largely based upon repeated, temporary or relatively long-term legal movements between one’s country of origin and at least one other country.¹⁸

¹⁶ Isotalo, Riina. "Politicizing the Transnational: On Implications for Migrants, Refugees, and Scholarship." 115.

¹⁷ Van Mol, de Valk, Pennix, “Migration and Immigrants in Europe: A Historical and Demographic Perspective” 38.

¹⁸ “Defining and Measuring Circular Migration,” Defining and Measuring Circular Migration § (2016), https://www.unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/stats/documents/ece/ces/bur/2016/February/14-Add1_Circular_migration.pdf. 3.

Circular migration built upon economic pressure or incentive lends itself to a system of movement that does not require integration of migrants into the receiving country, since the model is based on a rotation of migrants rather than permanent residency. Between the 80s and 90s however, migration patterns better represented by chain migration were seen in and around Europe. Stricter immigration policies in receiving nations resulted in migrants opting for more permanent migration rather than moving around in circular patterns. These two patterns of migration were met by polarized sentiments from nationals in receiving nations, as the depth of integration had a strong impact on the reaction of nationals.

The rhetoric seen throughout the continent in response to the changing nature of migration in and around Europe gives valuable insight into the model of migration upon which the EU is built. Just as migration policy championed and normalized intra-EU mobility and migration, the positive rhetorical tone towards those moving about the EU spoke highly of the growing legalized mobility on display. Yet, on the flipside of this affirmation was the growing criminalization of those coming in from the outside; increasing barriers for integration in policy and in rhetoric contributed to the disparity in viewpoints on migration.

It was in this polarized climate the 2015 refugee crisis began. The history of circular migration in the EU was established around economic principles and incentives. As this gave mobility to those who were a member of the EU and enforced higher barriers of entry for those outside the EU, the landscape upon which asylum seekers were entering into focused more on the economic and political ramifications of migration than humanitarian ramifications. Historically, systems were set up for both the migrant and the host nation to realize economic gain. In these systems, there was potential for migrants to return to their home country, a large

contrast to modern reality in which asylum seekers flee war and violence, with little hope to return home.

A New Era of Migration

With the context of internally focused nations and continent wide migration patterns, we turn our eyes to modern day Greece. Between 2014 to the tipping point of the refugee crisis in 2015, the number of asylum claims registered in Greece was around 9,430. By the end of 2015 the number had jumped to 13,250 applicants. Just one year later in 2016, the number of people claiming asylum in Greece more than tripled at 51,110 applicants for the year. Yet, asylum claims increased to an even greater degree, with the 2019 calendar year ending with a total of 77,275 new asylum applicants in the country.¹⁹ With such a drastic spike in numbers the interrelated questions that naturally arise are: what caused the numbers to spike and from where are the applicants coming?

In 2015, Europe as a whole received 1,325,000 asylum seekers, more than double any previous year since 1985.²⁰ The numbers since this spike have remained extremely high. Rather than white, Eastern Europeans who made up the majority of asylum applicants throughout the 20th Century until the collapse of the Soviet Union, since 2015, “those coming into Europe... were not European, Non-Christian, and culturally alien from the countries they were entering... all in a time period of increasing eurocentrism, islamophobia, and social nervousness.”²¹ More specifically, the majority of the refugees arriving on the shores of Europe are from the Middle

¹⁹ “Asylum and First Time Asylum Applicants - Annual Aggregated Data (Rounded)[tps00191],” EuroStat, September 1, 2020, <http://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/show.do?wai=true&dataset=tps00191>.

²⁰ “Record 1.3 Million Sought Asylum in Europe in 2015.” Pew Research Center's Global Attitudes Project. Pew Research Center, August 20, 2020. <https://www.pewresearch.org/global/2016/08/02/number-of-refugees-to-europe-surges-to-record-1-3-million-in-2015/>.

²¹ Keredis, “The Migration/Refugee Crisis and the (Un/Re) Making of Europe,” 72.

East, specifically Syria, Afghanistan, and Iraq. In the year 2015 alone, around half of the refugees in Europe were from these three nations. The largest number of asylum seekers fled from Syria, at 378,000, followed by Afghanistan at 193,000, and then Iraq at 127,000.²² Keep in mind, these numbers are only for the beginning of the crisis in 2015, and numbers have continued to increase.

From Syria to Greece

Before looking at the European perspective of receiving asylum seekers, it is important to examine the path taken by those coming to the EU. As seen through the history of European migration, who the migrants are and where they come from affects both policy and the cultural reception of those immigrating. Overall, those seeking refuge in Europe were largely fleeing violence due to the growing political destabilization due to unrest and war across their respective regions. We can look at the case of Syria, one of the main contributors to displaced persons today, as a starting point to the complicated journey of refugees in relation to migration policy in the EU. It is imperative to return to the starting point of migration patterns and trace their course in order to better understand the response. Since the means by which asylum seekers have reached the borders of the EU are extremely diverse, we will focus on the pathway from Syria, through Turkey to Greece as an entry point to Europe.

For Syria, the path began with war. The Syrian Civil War began in 2011, another domino falling as the Arab Springs swept across the Middle East.²³ The context of how the war began and events which followed are of extreme importance to the international scene, but what is

²² Pew Research Center's Global Attitudes Project, "Record 1.3 Million Sought Asylum in Europe in 2015." Pew

²³ Zachary Laub, "Syria's War and the Descent Into Horror," Council on Foreign Relations (Council on Foreign Relations, February 19, 2020), <https://www.cfr.org/article/syrias-civil-war>.

noteworthy in terms of migration patterns is that the Syrian Civil War has led to one of the largest displacements of people in modern history. To date, 5.6 million people have fled the nation as refugees, and another 6.1 million Syrians are living within the nation's borders as internally displaced people.²⁴

As Syrians left violent zones, large numbers crossed the borders of their country to neighboring nations such as Iraq, Lebanon, Jordan, and Turkey. Of these nations, Turkey received the highest number of Syrians fleeing violence with 3,644,342 total registered refugees entering the country as of February 7, 2019. It is likely a large number of unregistered Syrian refugees also reside in Turkey; estimates are close to four million. In total, nearly sixty-four percent of Syrians who have fled their country since the beginning of violence in 2011 are living in Turkey today.²⁵

Upon their entry into Turkey, which declared an open border policy at the beginning of 2011, Syrian refugees were initially greeted with a relatively open reception, yet one that was largely regarded as temporary in light of rhetoric utilised by the Turkish government framing refugees as 'guests' in the nation. Up until late 2015, the refugee situation in the nation was provided for by temporal humanitarian aid assistance rather than mid to long-term response. But, with the continuing influx of Syrian refugees settling mainly in urban areas (only 6 percent of Syrian were settled in camps)²⁶, the Turkish government began talks of extending policy which would support a larger refugee population over a sustained period of time. This extension was to

²⁴ Gülşah Dark Kahyaoğlu et al., ed. Karim Makdisi, December 2018. 5.

²⁵ Makovsky, Alan. "Turkey's Refugee Dilemma." Center for American Progress, March 13, 2019. <https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/security/reports/2019/03/13/467183/turkeys-refugee-dilemma/>.

²⁶ Fulya Memişoğlu and Hasan Caglar Basol, "Turkish Media's Response to the 2015 Refugee Crisis," *Alternatif Politika* 11 (2019): pp. 192-233, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/332343779_Turkish_Media's_Response_to_the_2015_Refugee_Crisis. 198.

focus on access to the public education system and the introduction of work permits in January of 2016²⁷.

Ultimately, this rhetoric was wrapped up in the context of the Turkish political climate of the day. At the same time the nation was dealing with the influx of refugees, it was also navigating two national elections in which the refugee issue was heavily politicized. This period saw refugees as a pawn in rhetoric over domestic policy as they “became a political instrument for opposition parties to criticise the incumbent government’s domestic and foreign policies”²⁸. Following the political rearrangement that ensued because of the 2015 elections, the rocky political foundation upon which Syrians found themselves did little to inspire confidence in their potential future in Turkey. Ultimately, the political rhetoric would go largely unfulfilled and “mixed messages from the authorities, combined with limited access to legal employment and education could be considered among the major push factors making European countries a better alternative.”²⁹ It was upon this foundation that those coming through Turkey were drawn to the European Union, creating the perfect storm of the European Refugee crisis beginning in 2015.

As refugees came to believe there was little stability in a future for them in Turkey, they sought out pathways to Europe. A report produced in January of 2016 from Syrians arriving on the shores of Greece showed the four main reasons for their “leaving Turkey... as: a) inadequate jobs compared to their skills, unmet basic living expenses and exploitation (41%), b) persecution or fear of future persecution, conflict or violence (14%), c) discrimination (16%), d) lack of education facilities (9%), and e) reunification with family abroad (8%).”³⁰ Looking beyond

²⁷Ibid. 199

²⁸Ibid.

²⁹Memisoglu and Basol, "Turkish Media's Response to the 2015 Refugee Crisis," 200.

³⁰ Prof. Roderick Pace and Berta Fernandez, “Patterns of Migration Flows,” in *Migrants and Refugees: Impact and Future Policies .Case Studies of Jordan, Lebanon, Turkey and Greece* (European Institute of the Mediterranean, 2016), pp. 7-27,

motives and focusing on routes of transportation, those arriving in Greece were coming largely across the Eastern Mediterranean sea route through the Aegean Sea and ending on Greek islands such as Lesbos, which are closely situated to the coast of Turkey. As the desperation and demand for means by which to exit Turkey increased, so did the smuggling market of refugees across the sea. In this unregulated industry that rapidly developed overnight, the safety and seaworthiness of the transport utilized went unchecked as Greece's coasts were flooded by smugglers with those seeking asylum in the European Union.

The entrance to Greece through the Greek islands can be seen as the so called merging point between many different migration patterns and routes by Syrians as well as a variety of other nationalities. As Syrians arrived on the shores of Greece, European migration policy began to interact with the new wave of refugees and asylum seekers arriving at the border. As we will see, the European Union's response is exceedingly complex.

On the Shores

Of the 1.8 million sea crossings into Greece in 2015, one million were from Turkey across the eastern Aegean Sea. In order to curb these numbers, the European Union, which Greece relied, and still relies, heavily upon for economic and policy support, erred for a

https://www.researchgate.net/publication/331546054_Migrants_and_Refugees_Impact_and_Future_Policies_Case_Studies_of_Jordan_Lebanon_Turkey_and_Greece_Leader_and_Editor_European_Institute_of_Mediterranean_September_2016. 12.

deterrence focused approach to sea crossings. To do this, they employed physical acts of patrolling the waters through Frontex, the organization defined by the European Union as “the European Border and Coast Guard Agency, [which] supports EU Member States and Schengen Associated Countries in the management of EU’s external borders and fighting cross-border crime.”³¹

The words “fighting cross-border crime” in this definition immediately give off the undertones of a security focused approach to border control. The implementation of Frontex and border fences as a means of reducing the flow of refugees and asylum seekers across the Mediterranean placed a focus on the externalization of the growing refugee crisis along the fortified lines of an ‘EU versus the rest’ mentality. This approach came without a focus on the humanitarian needs greatly present amongst those seeking asylum in Europe. In a report which breaks down movements of migration cross the Mediterranean, the MEDMIG project writes

deterrence policies aiming at immobilising people in countries of origin or transit without concomitant access to protection, resettlement or humanitarian assistance will simply increase the extent of human suffering. The absence or slow realisation of safe and legal access to protection (resettlement or family reunification) increases the demand for illicit services, and thus also the exposure of migrants to smugglers and crime: it pushes people into taking ever more risky routes into and within the EU.³²

This lack of access to protection is seen acutely in the passage between Turkey and Greece as border policies which frame asylum seekers crossing borders as criminals to be deterred rather than those in need of humanitarian assistance have taken precedence in EU policy.

³¹ “Key Facts,” Frontex (Frontex, a Body of the European Union), accessed December 2, 2020, <https://frontex.europa.eu/faq/key-facts/>.

³² Heaven Crawley et al., “Unpacking a Rapidly Changing Scenario: Migration Flows, Routes and Trajectories across the Mediterran” (MEDMIG, March 2016), <http://www.medmig.info/research-brief-01-unpacking-a-rapidly-changing-scenario/>. 10.

The EU-Turkey Deal

Border walls were erected along the land route between Turkey and the rest of Europe, beginning with the building of a fence between the Bulgarian and Turkey border in December of 2013, forcing migrants and refugees thereafter to use the much more dangerous sea route from Turkey to Greece.³³ The principal routes taken by Syrians (as well as other people groups such as those from Afghanistan, Iraq, Somalia, Eritrea, and The Democratic Republic of the Congo) all come from Turkey one way or another. Listed in order the routes are “1) Syria [to] Turkey [to] Greece (45%), and 2) Syria [to] Lebanon [to] Turkey [to] Greece (19%). The rest come from Turkey (25%), and Lebanon or Jordan via Turkey (4%).”³⁴

With the Turkey transit as the central point of connection between asylum seekers and Greece, and effectively the rest of the European Union, in 2016 the EU decided to respond to the massive influx of people and the business of smuggling across the Aegean Sea with the EU-Turkey deal. The deal has largely been criticized for its externalization of the refugee crisis as well as its politicization of what many consider a humanitarian issue. This policy work is crucial in understanding current European priorities and sheds an interesting light on the compliance of EU migration policy to the Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework.

The agreement between Turkey and the European Union was signed on the 18th of March, 2016.³⁵ Its main aim was presented as targeting the business of smuggling migrants and asylum seekers across the Aegean Sea. The agreement revolved around a clause under which

³³Jovana Arsenijević et al., “A Crisis of Protection and Safe Passage: Violence Experienced by Migrants/Refugees Travelling along the Western Balkan Corridor to Northern Europe,” *Conflict and Health* 11 (April 16, 2017), <https://doi.org/10.1186/s13031-017-0107-z>. Table 1.

³⁴Pace and Fernandez, "Patterns of Migration Flows," 10.

³⁵ European Commission, “EU-Turkey Statement Two Years On,” April 2018, https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/sites/homeaffairs/files/what-we-do/policies/european-agenda-migration/20180314_eu-turkey-two-years-on_en.pdf. 1.

newly arriving irregular migrants to the Greek Islands, coming from Turkey, would be automatically returned to Turkey. In turn, for each Syrian who was returned another residing legally in Turkey would be resettled to the EU. In addition, Turkey would be responsible for monitoring the routes of irregular migration out of their country. Upon Turkish following of the given stipulations, the European Union committed to the disbursement of three billion Euros to Turkey along with further funding to support the burden of the Syrian refugees still residing in the country.

With the sea route between Greece and Turkey holding a central role in the movement of people into the European Union, from a security perspective, cooperation of some nature was necessary with Turkey in order to curb the massive influx of people into the EU and help maintain the external border of the Union. Looking purely at numbers, the EU-Turkey deal was successful in decreasing sea arrivals from Turkey as the daily average of new arrivals on the Greek Islands from Turkey dropped 97% from 6,360 arrivals per day in October of 2015 to a daily average of 80 in March of 2016.³⁶

Alongside the written and numerical dimensions of the deal come the more nuanced and political overtones which come from the context of previous EU-Turkey negotiations on Turkey's potential accession to the EU. Among the ideas of discussion was the need for Turkey to better align itself with the ideological values of the European Union, yet this shift never came to fruition. A rhetoric of political power negotiations rather than humanitarian aid have been seen at the forefront, and "the impression that the deal is the result of realpolitik and [that it] lacks a tangible EU membership vision for Turkey, at least for now, is reinforced by Turkey's lack of

³⁶ European Commission, "EU-Turkey Statement Two Years On," April 2018, https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/sites/homeaffairs/files/what-we-do/policies/european-agenda-migration/20180314_eu-turkey-two-years-on_en.pdf. 1

sincere commitment to reform the country in line with EU values.”³⁷ This dynamic, though never fully pursued by either side to the point of tangible action, still held serious ramifications as refugees became political capital in negotiations between the two entities in terms of EU-Turkey relations rather than the focus of the crisis at hand. Another piece at play in the cooperation of Turkey during the beginning of the deal was the prospect of Schengen Visa Liberalisation, which would have given Turkish citizens visa-free access to travel throughout the Schengen Zone.³⁸ This element furthered the political ramifications of the deal, only strengthening the ties between the European Union on the basis of political negotiations versus humanitarian aid efforts.

Despite the declining arrivals to Greece after the inception of the deal, the country of Greece has remained overwhelmed by those seeking asylum on their shores accompanied by a slow return rate of migrants to Turkey from the islands. Under the EU-Turkey statement, two years after the inception in 2016 there had only been 2,164 migrants returned, as well as a continued backlog of asylum applications in the country.³⁹ These factors point towards the unresolved nature of the EU-Turkey deal which effectively placed a much higher emphasis on the external border controls and politicized aspects of intergovernmental agreements rather than focusing on the resolution of root causes to the crisis and investment in the redistribution and integration of asylum seekers into Europe as a whole. Examining the crisis through the lens of borders and security, the EU has left Greece to bear an undue burden of arrivals on their shores.

³⁷ Pinar Elman, “The EU-Turkey Deal on Refugees: How to Move Forward,” ed. Wojciech Lorenz (PISM, 2016), https://www.pism.pl/files/?id_plik=21269. 4.

³⁸ November 30, December 2, and December 1, “Turkey Demands Schengen Visa Liberalization to Resolve Migration Situation,” SchengenVisaInfo.com, March 12, 2020, <https://www.schengenvisa.info.com/news/turkey-demands-schengen-visa-liberalization-to-resolve-migration-situation/>.

³⁹ European Commission, “EU-Turkey Statement Two Years On,” April 2018, https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/sites/homeaffairs/files/what-we-do/policies/european-agenda-migration/20180314_eu-turkey-two-years-on_en.pdf. 3.

Focusing mainly on arrival numbers without also placing priority on other areas of the crisis has left those seeking asylum stranded in Greece, and Greece stranded from the rest of Europe.

From a strictly policy perspective, the existence of the EU-Turkey deal could be considered an attempt to expand third-country solutions, one of the four objectives of the Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework. Yet, focusing primarily on the reduction of numbers of illegal border crossings from Turkey into Greece across the Aegean Sea rather than bolstering the sustainability of life for asylum seekers in Turkey cannot be considered a fulfillment of the CRRF. Has the EU-Turkey deal, as an expansion of third-country solutions, upheld physical borders and allowed for better protection of national security? Yes. But that is not what the CRRF set out to protect; instead, the framework was created for the protection of asylum seekers through political action. If the EU-Turkey deal largely protects stable nations but not displaced people, then it is not effective through the lens of the CRRF.

Greece on its Own

The EU-Turkey deal was not the only factor through which realpolitik put pressure on the Greek nation; the closing of the of the Balkan Corridor in combination with the Dublin system have both amplified and isolated the refugee crisis in Greece. The Dublin system, which is often referred to as the “cornerstone of the Common European Asylum System (CEAS),”⁴⁰ arose from a need for unified and organized allocation of responsibility between member states across the European Union in cases of asylum. The intentions of the regulation have been to aid in the protection of asylum seekers while preventing abuses of the asylum system from movement about the European Union outside proper governmental channels. With the EU lacking strong

⁴⁰ Susan Fratzke, “Not Adding Up: The Fading Promise of Europe's Dublin System” (Migration Policy Institute Europe, March 2015), <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/research/not-adding-fading-promise-europes-dublin-system>. 1.

internal borders due to the Schengen Zone, the CEAS has sought to establish a unified approach to asylum seekers arriving at external borders. This effort has attempted to create an equal distribution of responsibility amongst Member States by registering asylum seekers to the CEAS upon their point of entry into the EU.

With the influx of people seeking asylum in the European Union beginning in 2015, the Dublin system has felt strong pressure to better manage the overwhelming number of applications. With higher numbers flooding to external borders, the management of asylum applications has faltered beneath the sheer amount of applicants. One main reason for this is “the ‘Dublin’ system operates on the assumption that, as the asylum laws and practices of the EU States are based on the same common standards, they allow asylum seekers to enjoy similar levels of protection in all EU Member States.”⁴¹ Yet, this assumption does not necessarily hold true.

Greece can be seen as a key example of how this assumption of the Dublin system has faltered in light of the 2015 refugee crisis. Still recovering from its own recent political and economic turmoil, Greece was not ready to accommodate the large numbers of applicants coming across its sea borders. It is said of the Dublin system that in regards to arrivals, “numbers of applications do not... take into account the *capacity* of Member States to process and accommodate additional asylum seekers. Asylum systems that lack proper reception facilities or adequately trained staff may find it difficult to accommodate additional applicants for international protection.”⁴² Greece most certainly was, and still is, on the low end of capacity in comparison to their fellow Member States, yet they are also dealing directly with extremely high numbers of asylum seekers.

⁴¹“The Dublin Regulation” (UNHCR, ECRE), accessed 2020, <https://www.unhcr.org/4a9d13d59.pdf>.

⁴² Susan Fratzke, “Not Adding Up: The Fading Promise of Europe's Dublin System”¹⁰.

This disparity not only has put pressure on the nation and its people, but also on the vulnerable population of those seeking asylum. Despite multiple international protections of asylum seekers, including the commitments in the CRRF, the result of the uneven pressures in the Dublin system can be seen to hurt those who are in lesser positions of power both on a national and individual level. Susan Fratzke, a Policy Analyst and Program Coordinator at the Migration Policy Institute writes:

While some Member States believe Dublin is essential to the effective operation of their asylum systems, others feel it unfairly burdens them with additional responsibilities that jeopardise their ability to provide protection. Asylum advocates have continually expressed concerns that Dublin interferes with asylum seekers' ability to quickly access protection, and may expose them to additional, unnecessary risks by returning them to Member States that lack the capacity to effectively process their applications or by separating them from family members.⁴³

This split between perceived essentiality of the system by some nations and the expression of concerns over the quality of protection given by others highlights a tension which stems from the enormous task of creating a unified approach to migration policy for a body of states that vary heavily in position and makeup. This tension reveals a deeper dimension of complexity within the asylum system, as what is working for protecting the national security of some nations is not effective in supporting other nations or upholding the international rights given to those seeking asylum and refuge in the European Union. The challenge of putting forth a system through which both national security of all states as well as the rights of asylum seekers are upheld is by no means a simple task, and the Dublin system has well-intentioned beginnings; yet, the acceptance of the system with no regard for its inadequacies does a severe disservice to any means of progress.

⁴³ Susan Fratzke, "Not Adding Up: The Fading Promise of Europe's Dublin System" 3.

When stripped down to the level of individual nations, the Dublin system has resulted in Greece bearing a large initial burden of incoming asylum seekers, especially those from Syria. As the Dublin system “pushes responsibility for examining claims to Europe’s external borders—and to states that may be ill-equipped to handle this additional burden... It [also] causes delays that put the individuals and families subject to its provisions at risk for hardship and even rights violations.”⁴⁴

In addition to the pressures resulting from the Dublin System, Greece has also felt the pressure of the closing of Balkan corridor, a once major outlet in the Eastern Mediterranean route. The country by country shut down of borders by the Balkan states in order to preserve national security made the land route from Turkey impassable. This essentially forced all flow of those seeking asylum through the sea route from Turkey to Greece, therefore increasing the number of asylum applicants coming into the nation. This major influx at a time in which Greece had little of the resources needed to appropriately respond not only left the asylum seekers stranded, but the nation of Greece seriously isolated in carrying the weight of the crisis.

At the beginning of 2015, rhetoric coming from the top of the European Union’s migration policy gave the sense that the weight of the crisis would be shared by Member States. Policy was largely focused on solidarity and shared responsibility of the relocation of refugees by Member States of the EU.⁴⁵ Yet when looking at the actual number of relocations by other nations in the European Union from Greece and Italy, only two nations, Finland and Sweden, relocated more than 50% of the numbers they had committed to. The two nations who had

⁴⁴ Susan Fratzke, “Not Adding Up: The Fading Promise of Europe's Dublin System” 7.

⁴⁵ Angeliki Dimitriadi and Antonia-Maria Sarantaki, “The Refugee ‘Crisis’ in Greece: Politicisation and Polarisation amidst Multiple Crises” (CEASEVAL RESEARCH ON THE COMMON EUROPEAN ASYLUM SYSTEM , November 2018), http://ceaseval.eu/publications/11_Dimitriadi_Sarantaki_WP5_Greece.pdf. 8-9.

committed to the highest numbers of relocation were France and Germany, yet both fell far short of their commitments. Germany had committed to 27,500 and only took 32%, and France committed to just under 20,000 yet in reality only took 23%.⁴⁶ These numbers give a small glimpse into the disproportionate weight that Greece has felt as a result of multiple areas of failure to achieve intra-EU solidarity in response to the refugee crisis.

This failure is magnified when looking at the CRRF's goal of easing the pressures on host countries and communities. Not only have asylum seekers been let down by EU migration policy which favors the security interests of selective nations, but less affluent countries such as Greece have also been left without adequate support. Greece, through the policy of the Dublin System, has been left with the responsibility of registering unbearable numbers of asylum seekers with little help through relocation efforts to other European nations (or back to Turkey under the EU-Turkey deal), despite their rhetorical commitments. The physical turning away of asylum seekers through the closing of the Balkan corridor has also compounded pressures on the host country of Greece. With modern EU migration policy built upon these realities, the goal of the CRRF cannot be fulfilled in the context of the 2015 refugee crisis without seeking the development of policies that do not only seek national security but also adequately ease the burden of migration for all.

Through the Lens of the CRRF

The United Nations' stance on refugees and asylum seekers brings a critical perspective to the 2015 refugee crisis. As the crisis, seen in both Greece and the European Union, has been based largely upon national security preferences rather than effective humanitarian aid, the lens

⁴⁶ Stefano M Torelli, "Migration through the Mediterranean: Mapping the EU Response," ECFR (European Council of Foreign Relations, April 17, 2018), https://ecfr.eu/special/mapping_migration/. The failure of intra-European solidarity graphic.

of the Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework allows for necessary accountability. Seen in the New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants, the four measures that the United Nations' Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework laid out were to “ease the pressures on host countries and communities, enhance refugee self-reliance, expand third-country solutions, and support conditions in countries of origin for return in safety and dignity.”⁴⁷

Looking at these goals with a comprehensive view of the history of migration in Europe, pressures that have led to migration from Turkey to Greece, and the effects of EU migration policy on both nations such as Greece and asylum seekers themselves, the fulfillment of the United Nation's CRRF in the context of the European Union is questionable. As seen played out in Greece, the European Union has shown preference for national security and let down those to whom the UN granted importance in their commitments to “ease the pressures on host countries” and to “expand third-country solutions.” As stated at the onset of this paper, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, Filippo Grandi, declared that the goals of the CRRF were instituted to fill “a perennial gap in the international protection system – that of truly sharing responsibility for refugees.”⁴⁸ Yet, this sharing of responsibility has not happened.

In terms of easing the pressures on host countries, EU migration policy has been inadequate in reducing the pressure the 2015 refugee crisis has put on Greece. With the country receiving an undue burden of the migration flow from Turkey, exacerbated by closure of the Balkan corridor, as a host country, Greece has been overwhelmed rather than relieved by asylum seekers. Adding to this increased pressure is the congestion in the asylum process caused by the buildup of applicants under the Dublin System. Beyond the effects to the nation of Greece is the hurt caused to the very people seeking asylum, for whom the CRRF was instituted to protect.

⁴⁷ United, “New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants,”.

⁴⁸ United, “New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants,”.

Amidst a very complicated crisis, the current standing of EU migration policy has not measured up to the CRRF and has been responsible for isolating both the host country of Greece as well as those seeking asylum.

It is not enough to just say the EU Migration policy does not fulfill the goals of the Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework. This claim, however supported, would end up just as useful as the unfulfilled rhetoric of shared responsibility seen in European nations, which is of little value to the hundreds of thousands of displaced people stuck living at the mercies of EU migration policy. Instead, the existence of the unfulfilled CRRF should serve as a motivator against complacency and passive acceptance of a system which does not fully support nations like Greece receiving the initial weight of immigration and those seeking asylum. Navigating the complexity of this modern refugee crisis in Europe has been and will continue to be nuanced and without simple solutions. Even so, it is imperative that policy reform would actively and comprehensively apply the goals of the Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework to the EU migration system. Only until this happens will policy be able to uphold both the national security of European nations *and* the rights and integrity of those seeking safety on its shores.

Personal Statement

I grew up hearing about refugees and displaced people on the news, but the topic always seemed to be an issue for another person in another place. Oh how wrong I was! About four years ago, I first learned about how strongly the Bible commands us to love and welcome the foreigner. Reading verses such as Deuteronomy 10:19 and Leviticus 19:34, I was struck by the importance the Scriptures place on caring for those who are displaced from their homes around the globe. Knowing the weight which the Bible places on loving the marginalized, I was drawn towards the subject matter of refugee and migration issues both in my academics and in personal experiences. But, it was not until when I spent the month of January, 2020, volunteering in Moria

Refugee Camp on the island of Lesbos, Greece, that my heart completely broke for the refugee and foreigner and I was hit by the full weight of my previous apathy.

The month was spent working amongst men, women, and children who were just like me, apart from being born half a world away. Because of the lot they were given, they had to flee thousands of miles away from war and violence with no end in sight. I heard countless stories of horror and loss and grief. One woman, around age 70, broke down sobbing in my arms with no warning. I had no words with which to comfort her. Another young girl, about 4 years old, recounted to me over a cup of tea shared with her family, the story of how her uncle had lost both of his arms from a bomb explosion. I cried that night knowing that no young child should ever have to carry those images in her mind. Tragically, these stories are not isolated events; one would be hard pressed to find a single person in Moria who didn't have a horrific experience of the same nature.

Yet, amongst such sorrow I was also struck by the joy and spirit that was alive in the people of Moria. I was greeted time after time by a smiling face or a laughing child. Families built up their tents into larger structures from pallets and tarps, and small businesses selling traditional Afghani food or household items popped up all around camp. Those who had fled everything they knew only wanted to create a new life for themselves and their children; yet, they were faced with the seemingly insurmountable challenge of registering for asylum in the European Union. Walking away from Moria filled with both sorrow and joy, I was left with the weight of brokenness seen not only in camp, but also in the asylum system in Europe which was leaving so many families without a place to call home.

It was from this place of concern that I entered into writing this paper. As my experiences in Greece combined with my convictions to love the refugee, I felt it necessary to explore European migration policy because of its drastic effects on the lives of people whom I have met. Through gaining a fuller understanding of the realities of migration in Europe, it is my hope that better policy is enacted which both acknowledges national security *and* upholds the dignity of those living as refugees within their borders. It is my belief that as Christians, it is necessary to engage in areas of brokenness, including at a political level. In doing so, I hope that the love of Christ and the fullness of the redemption found in Him would be seen by a world which is in desperate need of the King who is making all things new.

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