

Refugee or Migrant Status ? What Can We Expect Next ?

Iurian Sergiu-Dan
Jaradat Mohammad
„Valahia” University from Târgoviște
iurian_sergiu@yahoo.com
jaradat_hadi@yahoo.com

Abstract

The year 2015 was marked by debates about massive arrivals of asylum seekers across Europe, triggering what the press and politicians called either the "crisis of refugees" or "(im)migrants' crisis." The purpose of this article is to seek a way through the refugee-immigrant paradigm and to find out which of them is more relevant in the current migration crisis within the EU.

The main question the article aims to answer is: What effects produces each approach?

Key words: conflict, refugees, immigrants, status

J.E.L. classification: F22

1. An ideological conflict transformed into linguistic conflict: refugees or immigrants?

The magnitude of the migration phenomenon has come to surprise the public opinion, but also the European Union (EU) authorities, with different countries taking sometimes antagonistic reactions or changing their attitude and speech from one month to the next.

The thousands of people who went through harsh times crossing the Balkans every day, sometimes entering into conflicts with the border authorities, have caused disagreement between European Chancelleries and public opinion, including the terminology used: *refugees* or *immigrants*. [Andreescu et.al, 2016]

The controversy, which was visible not only on social networks but also in politicians' speeches and on important channels of mass communication, is not ridiculous if we think that the first term implicitly included the obligation of the EU states to receive them, according to the Convention on the Status of Refugees (signed in Geneva in 1951) and the other regulations in the field, while the second assumed that they have the freedom to receive them or not, in accordance with their own immigration policies and possibilities. [Bocancea, 2016]

2. We know how many they are, but we still do not know what they are

The "lingual refugee-to-immigrant war" appeared on the public agenda in the summer of 2015 as soon as the public and journalists became aware of the intensity and sustainability of the phenomenon, splitting up on the theme of the measures that were needed. That was the time to define editorial policies and terminology classifications, approached by some legal and by others rather ideological or emotional.

On the one hand, Al Jazeera has announced that it will use the term *immigrants*, the online publisher Barry Malone arguing that it would be "a dehumanizing instrument" and a "pejorative term." On the other hand, *Financial Times* chief editorialist Gideon Rachman explained that his newspaper would use it because it simply describes a fact and is consistent both with the situation of those who will be granted refugee status as well as with economic immigrants, some of those who travel to Europe, in fact, have this quality. The same position was adopted by *The Washington Post*, which reported that it uses the term *immigrant* as a general term for both refugees and economic immigrants and the *refugee* only for asylum seekers from war zones or suffer persecutions on the grounds of race, religion, nationality, membership of a social group or political opinion. A similar stance had the BBC,

who continued to use the phrase "*immigration crisis*", although it had contradicted the subject and had been the recipient of an online petition with tens of thousands of signatories asking him to give up this phrase. [Bocancea, 2016]

Beyond the disputes that existed, in fact, an ideological and not linguistic substrate, statistical data reported by Eurostat show that only 16% of asylum seekers from EU countries in the first quarter of 2015 came from Syria, 7% from Afghanistan and 4% of Iraq, most of whom come from Kosovo (26%). [Ghetau, 2016] In the second quarter, 21% were from Syria, 13% from Afghanistan and 6% from Iraq, while most (60%) came from other countries, including Albania (8%). Moreover, the authorities have found, over time, that the citizenship and identity declared by the asylum seeker were not always real. [Bocancea, 2016]

According to the UNHCR, published at the end of 2015, only arrivals by sea over the whole year were 1,006,768, approximately five times more than in 2014 and 17 times much more than in 2013, although in the previous years the situation of the conflict in Syria was serious. Beyond a general increase in the number of asylum seekers in 2015, we can notice a clear channeling of them on the Mediterranean route, as, compared to 2014, the number of arrivals at sea increased in a much larger rhythm than the total number of applicants of asylum. [Andreescu et.al, 2016] [Ghetau, 2016]

In fact, although there has been a steady increase over time in the flow of immigrants arriving at sea, we find that the number has exceeded the 100,000 ceiling for the first time just in August 2015, the same month that Germany announced that it was abandoning its application the provisions of the *Dublin Agreement* for Syrian Citizens, thus allowing asylum seekers arriving in Germany to remain in that country without being returned to the country state through which they entered the EU. [Ghetau, 2016]

The peak was reached in October 2015, when, despite initial estimates that winter will lead to a decrease in the flow, the number has doubled compared to August, recording 221,374 arrivals at sea throughout this period as well as the explosive growth of the black market of false Syrian passports, even German officials informing that almost a third of asylum seekers claiming to be Syrians were from other countries.

At the EU-Turkey Summit in November 2015, Donald Tusk, President of the European Council, made an important statement: "About 1.5 million people have illegally entered the EU in 2015. Most came through Turkey. Some seek shelter from the war and persecution, others are looking for a better life and some, a few, are thinking of destroying our values." (Reuters, November 29, 2015). ***So Tusk defined the entries as illegal and mentioned three categories included in the wave of immigrants: refugees, economic immigrants and (a few) terrorists.*** The chairman and German Chancellor Angela Merkel, unlike previous statements, in which she talked only about *refugees*, admitted at the same event that the issue includes an illegal immigration phenomenon.

It is strange that it took many months for political leaders and a part of the media to discover something that was obvious from the beginning: not all immigrants qualified for refugee status within the meaning of international regulations. Beyond the fact that many did not come from Syria or other areas of war, as it was believed at first, even in the case of those who met this condition, the discussion is legally much more nuanced.

3. European Union: chaotic behavior

The EU's behavior in the context of the immigration crisis has raised serious questions about its ability to effectively manage future crises. To say that the situation in Syria was the cause of everything that happened to be simplistic, being just a revealer that led to the emergence of other problems: a Western leadership crisis, the old ideological problems of the Union and the inability, after many years, to bring a common, viable and attractive ideal strategy. [Collier, 2014]

European leaders have emerged incapable of maintaining predictable and firm behavior, respecting their own previous agreements and understandings. In delicate moments, the Union gave the impression of inconsistency, confusion, fear of attacking frontal causes, and focusing only on cushioning effects, lack of anticipation of the consequences of events, denial of evidence, and search for scapegoats.

Outside the EU, Ukraine was chopped up by a more "playful" Russia, and the Middle East became a barrel of powder. Inside, the Union has faced growing security risks and rising ideological polarization. The unconvincing response of the leaders to these challenges is likely to alienate the ordinary citizen, and the declarations in a plain language, "fairly political", and the attempts to circumvent inconvenient information open a wide front to extremist leaders. [Ghetau, 2016]

For Eastern Europe, out of communism, the Western capitalist society still represents an ideal and values to which it wishes to relate. Instead of exploiting its enthusiasm to define her European identity, it sometimes responded with irritation, interdictions and templates to the West, as well as leaders who sometimes seem more interested in working with Russia than with the US. East Europeans who were hardly received in Schengen Area or who have not yet been accepted were considered somewhat "betrayed" when they found that if you are outside the borders of Europe and in large groups, you can enter uncontrollably without a passport or visa, and then receive social benefits higher than their wages. The arguments of the East, even those of a legal or security nature, have sometimes been answered only with the accusation of being primitive and xenophobic.

The Central and Eastern European countries, which have been missing out sometimes, or delayed the implementation of international regulations, EU rules and the *Dublin Agreement* from the outset, have been harshly criticized. They were called to vote on the establishment of mandatory resettlement quotas for asylum seekers after they had exercised their right to vote as they thought they were threatened that they might be taken out of the EU by Francois Hollande, who stood firmly against those odds.

But maybe nothing surprised so much as Germany's fluctuating attitude. In short, Angela Merkel explains to a girl in tears that "politics is tough" and that it is impossible to say the refugee "You can all come," the audience saw another Angela Merkel, who encouraged the arrivals in Germany and suspended the application of the *Dublin Agreement* in August 2015. On the one hand, Angela Merkel sent immigrant messages that Germany has the capacity and willingness to receive hundreds of thousands of them, and as they came they were pushing for accepting binding quotas on other countries in the EU that did not call anybody and, in some cases, were not wanted as a destination by immigrants. After an open position of the gates of Europe and the criticism of all cautious countries, Angela Merkel declared in mid-December: "We want to reduce, drastically reduce the number of those who come to us" (Agerpres, 13 December 2015) [Bocancea, 2016]

More than one million people have entered the European Union only in 2015 (they will probably be added not only to those who will come next in the same way, but also to hundreds of thousands who will come later through legal proceedings, in family reunification policies), constituting, as shown in the December 22, 2015 release of the International Organization of Migration, the largest migratory flow since the Second World War.

Although the granting of aid to persons entitled to international protection is an obligation and must continue to exist, a responsible attitude from the UN and states is needed, which should focus on solving the causes of refugees at source, clarifying at the same time, the legislation so as to make the *asylumshopping* phenomenon rather impossible and reduce the abusive use of the *Convention* beyond its original purpose. [Bocancea, 2016]

Such an approach risks not only creating economic, social and security problems, but also discriminates against other people who, although they are looking for a better life, are honestly obeying the restrictive regulations of immigration law. It may also be an incorrect treatment for those who would indeed require international protection, but who either lose themselves in a mass of immigrants or find a public opinion already embarrassed by integration issues in the host countries of a wave of migrants who practiced *asylumshopping* but were presented as refugees.

Supposedly generosity becomes a prodigy when it has a price that can go up to break the balance and social peace in a Europe that has been working for half a century to be united, peaceful, prosperous and protected from extreme ideologies. As has been noted in history, the generosity of an idea does not relieve it of catastrophic consequences when applied irrationally, against social reality, or when transforming into social engineering. [Ghetau, 2016]

Also the current state in which Europe finds it self, the state where more and more extremist politic parties have gain power and where more and more eurosceptics voices call upon the division of the EU, it would be a safe thing if the EU would take a step back and look at the immigrant- refugee paradigm from two different equitable perspectives:

a). In regards towards the honest working people coming from all around the EU to seek for work, and trying to benefit in some way from the politics their countries have spent years, tens of years, and billions so that their people can benefit from a prosperous and peaceful EU, where many see a real trade between the producers of goods from the West and the working class from the East, it would be equitable to say that it wouldn't be fair to the working class of Europe, the one who contribute actively to the positive working migration within the EU, if the illegal migrants would benefit in anyway from the system they didn't help create. Therefore it is not a productive thing to do, the scenario where the EU accepts illegal migrants. The consequences of such betrayal would give voices to the European nationalists and extremists and would create an even bigger wave of instability within the EU borders.

b). In regards toward the honest people, the refugees that stay close to their countries and that try to contribute and sometimes even sacrifice their lives so that peace can be achieved in their homeland, it would be unfair to them if the EU would start throwing around acceptances for asylum seekers. It would send message to all of the conflict zones (where tens of millions of people have refugee status) that the EU borders are open for every refugee and all you need to do is jump the fence or cross the sea, making the EU borders and the whole EU security policy useless.

More than that, EU has contributed only in 2016 with over 11 billion euros to the Syrian crisis, without taking into consideration other conflict zones where the EU offers assistance. The EU isn't to blame for the Middle East crisis as much as other international organizations that bare a big part of the guilt in creating an unpredictable environment.

Therefore, for all these 3 reasons, it is not correct on the EU's behalf to either accept and call them as immigrants (or illegal migrants) nor to encourage in any way the movement of large scale of asylum seekers.

4. Conclusions

The correct acceptance of the word would be illegal migrants, and, in acceptance with the exceptional circumstances their homelands find themselves in, the illegal migrants should be silently taken care of, in a ratherly passenger environment, while the EU takes urgent action in coordinating plan to secure the sending country and reconstruct it, while the illegal migrants would be sent back once the situation would be settled.

Such rather cold approach at first sight, would have benefits such as: securing the borders, but most importantly keeping a safe and stable, unified Union within the borders without raising any extreme voices.

The EU citizens who feel there is an even bigger need to help the ones in need, could do that by entering NGO's that offer help and assistance to the refugees in refugee camps near their homelands, or offer their individual financial support.

5. References

- Andreescu, A., Andreescu, D., Bardaş D., 2016. *Efectul migrației asupra securității României și a Europei*, București: Rao
- Bădescu, I., Mihăilescu I., 2003. *Geopolitică, Integrare, Globalizare*, București: Mica Valahie
- Bocancea, S., 2016. *Marșul asupra Europei. Noi dimensiuni ale migrației*, Iași: Headline
- Chican D., Peterliceanu E., 2013. *Noul Orient Mijlociu- Între „Primăvara arabă” și „Haosul constructiv”*, București: Proema
- Collier, P., 2014. *Exodus: Immigration and Multiculturalism in the 21st Century*, London: Penguin Group
- Ghetau, V., 2016. *Populația Uniunii Europene și migrația*, available at: <http://www.contributors.ro/global-europa/populatia-uniunii-europene-si-migratia/>
- Stoicovici, M., 2013. *Migrația populațiilor și perspectiva sa social și lingvistică*, București: Ed. Univ. Naționale de Apărare „Carol I”
- Stiglitz, J., Cortina, J., Ochoa- Reza, E., 2013. *New Perspectives on International Migration and Development*, available on-line at: <https://issuu.com/columbiaup/docs/cortina-new-excerpt>