

Rethinking Asylum and Migration Policies in the Euro-Mediterranean Political Space

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Background

The tragedy of October 3rd 2013, when 390 refugees drowned just in front of Italy's island Lampedusa, shed light on a humanitarian crisis that, however, did not come unexpectedly. For many years people from the south - men, women and children – have tried to cross the Mediterranean and many of them lose their lives before they reach their destination: Europe. But even those who make it all too often do not find the life they were looking for, since Europe seems to be neither willing to accommodate the influx of people coming from MENA and Sub-Saharan countries nor even capable thereof. Thus, Europe is both, destination and destiny for many people who are forced to leave their home countries for very diverse reasons, far too complex to categorize them as either political or economic, legal or illegal.

Since the Arab uprisings culminated in an extremely ferocious civil war in Syria the influx of refugees towards Europe has increased again, forcing the EU and its member states to ultimately cope with the problem. In discourse the problem is treated as a humanitarian crisis, in practice, however, refugees are treated primarily as a security problem. There is a long tradition within Europe (and not only there) of perceiving any form of immigration as a threat, resulting in the securitization of two densely intertwined policy fields, asylum and migration. Efforts of the EU-Commission to renew the defective Dublin-convention are boycotted by member states, eager to keep refugees outside. Following the same logic, most of the doors for legal migration remain closed.

This scandal, which is a blow to the idea of Europe as a community of values, motivated us to organize a workshop project that wants to dig deeper. Although most issues related to migration are of major concern for policy makers on *both* sides of the Mediterranean, migration in the Euro-Mediterranean political space is mainly looked at through a European lens. The workshop set out to overcome this one-sided Western bias in regional asylum and migration studies. Instead of taking Europe's problems as a starting point, we wanted to – symbolically – follow the routes migrants take: Starting in sub-Sahara and across the MENA region where we laid the focus on Syria, Tunisia and Morocco, before arriving in Europe and here, exemplarily, in Germany and France.

Round table discussion and workshop at Helmut Schmidt University on November 18th and 19th

The “Rethinking Asylum and Migration Policies in the Euro-Mediterranean Political Space”

round table discussion and workshop were held at Helmut Schmidt University in Hamburg on 18th and 19th November 2015. Hertie School of Governance and Helmut Schmidt University jointly hosted the event within the framework of the Dahrendorf Symposium.

The event started with the public round table discussion “Fortress Europe? Rethinking European and German Migration- and Asylum Policies” on 18th November 2015. Olaf Scholz, First Mayor of Hamburg, held the keynote speech before the a panel discussion with practitioners, bringing together representatives from various political parties, the media as well as representatives from migrant NGOs. The round table discussion attracted some 400 guests including media representatives. The event ended with a theatre performance “Stop Checkpoint!” by Kaleidoskop Theater by and with refugees.



Theatre performance by Kaleidoskop Theater

The second day of the event was reserved for academic exchange. The workshop “Fortress Europa? Rethinking Migration and Asylum Policies in the Euro-Mediterranean Political Space” started with an introduction to the workshop by Prof. Dr. Annette Jünemann (Helmut Schmidt University Hamburg). Senior and junior academics from both sides of the Mediterranean then critically discussed the political, economic, legal and social dimensions of asylum and migration policies in the Euro-Mediterranean Political Space according to Chatham House rules.

The first panel discussion – “Migration - Root Causes and Routes” was guided by Cilja Harders (FU Berlin). The objective of this panel was to generate knowledge about the reasons that drive people out of their homes. Under-researched is also the long journey most migrants undertake. What shapes the life of so called transit migrants and what impact has transit migration on transit-countries? This question was examined by Prof. Dr. Hassan Boubakri (University of Sousse), who focused on the evolution of migratory flows on the southern shore of the Mediterranean since the 2011 uprisings and by Parastou Hassouri (independent researcher, UNHCR Ankara) presenting her critical assessment of common notions in migration discourse from strongly empirical perspective and her experience on the field. Furthermore, Prof. Dr. Mehdi Lahlou (National Institute of Statistic and Applied Economics in Rabat) presented his work on Morocco as a country of departure, transit and destination. His presentation stressed the multiple roles of transit countries.

The second panel – “Asylum and Migration Policies between Norms and Interests” – was guided by Prof. Dr. Annette Jünemann (Helmut Schmidt University). The panel stressed the migration policies as well as the crisis management in the EU and in the transit countries. A critical assessment of the EU’s asylum- and migration policy was complemented by an equally critical analysis of Euro-Med intergovernmental cooperation in both policy fields. Finally, the question raised, whether EU-comprehensive crisis management is an adequate framework to tackle the problems of mass-migration at its roots. Dr. Jan Völkel (Cairo University) contributed by presenting paradoxes of EU migration policies. Furthermore, Prof. Dr. Houria Alami M’ Chichi (Université Hassan II, Casablanca, AMERM) and Gerasimos Tsourapas (SOAS London) presented their research on management of migration flows in Euro-Mediterranean Relations and migration policies in Egypt.



Prof. Dr. Annette Jünemann (HSU)

The third and last panel “Countries of Destination – Countries of Integration?” focused on Europe as destination. It was guided by Dr. Fouad Marei (FU Berlin). The last hurdle that needs to be taken is the integration into European societies. Processes of integration were thus subject to controversial discussion during this panel. Special attention was given to current discourses on terrorism and Islamophobia as stumbling blocks especially for Muslim migrants. Julia Simon (Helmut Schmidt University Hamburg) started with a presentation on the representation of refugees and migrants in the EU discourse. Prof. Dr. Naika Foroutan (Humboldt University Berlin) presented her empirical results about identity and (Muslim) integration in Germany. Dr. Jana Sinram (Deutschlandfunk) concluded the panel with a presentation on Migration- and Asylum Policies in Denmark.

This event showed how important it is to take a look at migration from different kind of perspectives in order to come up with sustainable solutions in asylum- and migration policies. Overcoming the one-sided Western bias in regional asylum and migration studies and policies requires more interdisciplinary communication and discussion about the topic from various perspectives.

Publication of the research results in the edited volume “Fortress Europe?”

While the search for solutions is ongoing, one pattern seems to be emerging: Fortress Europe is in the making. Unfortunately, few of the measures consider the structural root causes and dynamics of migration, the motives of migrants or societal challenges more thoroughly. For that reason Prof. Dr. Annette Jünemann (Helmut Schmidt University Hamburg), Nikolas Scheerer (Hertie School of Governance Berlin) and Dr. Nicolas Fromm (Helmut Schmidt University Hamburg) edited a publication based on the results of the workshop. The volume (“Fortress Europe? Challenges and Failures of Migration and Asylum Policies”; VS-Springer 2017) includes contributions by many of the workshop participants and further pursues the research goals of the workshop event. Taking migration and asylum policies as a starting point, it analyses the various dimensions underpinning migration.

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