

Can migration flows
be considered a
security issue politics
essay



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For quite some time now, issues of migration flows and security have become concern for many leading ministers, politicians, the media and the electorate of the host countries. They have dominated politics and social sciences literature and surprisingly became a major contemporary theme in the main field of International Relations and its subcategories of international and domestic politics, international security studies, and human security. In many Western states, an abundance of anti-immigration campaigns appeared. For example, we see right-wing political parties who oppose migration on the ground that it poses a direct threat to their identity and security; therefore they demand tougher policies and restrictions on migration flows. This essay begins by discussing the historical background of migration with references to some of European countries. Then, it will explore the symptoms of migration, refugees and asylum seekers in the framework of the possibility that it may pose a direct threat to security in Europe. After establishing the different links between migration and security, the essay will focus on the development of treaties, policies and measures undertaken by the European countries in order to tighten up their security borders against unwanted immigrants, combat illegal and irregular migration, human trafficking and smuggling. Finally, the essay will provide a personal view, arguing that migration flows can be considered a security issue.

Migrations by people in large groups or individuals across vast distances are by no means a recent phenomenon. The term migration can be defined as 'the movement of people from one place to another'. (Migration and European Culture). Two types of human migration are very common: first,

internal migration, and second, international migration. A good example of internal migration is the movement from England to Scotland. A good example of international migration is the movement from Congo or Rwanda to America, Australia or Europe. The causes for migration can be divided into two main categories, the 'push' and 'pull' factors. 'Push factors such as, civil war, poverty, climate changes and political or religious oppression. Pull factors are for example, a chance of a better standard of living in general as well as political and religious freedom' (Migration and European Culture).

Historically, 'between the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries migration to North America from all parts of Europe and by Protestant and Catholic alike emigrated to North America, New Zealand, Australia, South America, and southern Africa' (Wolffe, 2004, p. 98). Undoubtedly, religious, cultural and political conflicts were inevitable between the new comers and the indigenous people in the New World. Buzan contends 'that a threat to population can arise from human migrations especially when the incoming population is of a different cultural or ethnic stock from that already resident' (Buzan, 1991, p. 93). Notwithstanding, migration has dominated the security agenda in the recent years 'mostly due to the unprecedented scale of the phenomenon that about 20.5 million foreigners living in Western Europe at the beginning of the twenty-first century' (Kicinger, 2004, p. 1). But what is migration? What is security? What are the main aspects of the migration-security link? These contested questions have no easy answers. According to Huysmans and Squire 'scholars have opened up a range of other challenging questions that are important to the analysis of the migration/security nexus (Huysmans and Squire, 2009, p. 11) questions such

as ' should migration be named a security threat? At which level it should be met - national or at international level such as the EU? Is migration already a threat or only a challenge to security'? (Kicinger, 2004, p. 3). Migration in Europe appeared in the years between the two World Wars. After the First World War, the refugee problem emerged in Europe as a result of ' the turmoil created by the break-up of the Ottoman, Austro-Hungarian and Russian Empire, which led to the displacement of more than 20 million people' (Turton, 2002, p. 28). After the Second World War, Europe was in crisis regarding shortage of laborers and desperately needed extra hands in the form of temporary immigrants' laborers to rebuild Europe's devastated cities. Hansen argues that ' in Europe, during the 1950s and 1960s, France, Switzerland, and Germany facilitated, through guest worker programmes, wanted temporary migration' (Hansen, 2000, p. 4).

Since the 1970s, many of the temporary migrant workers did not go home. However, they encouraged their families and invited them to join them in the host countries as family reunification. For the anti-migration campaigners, this family reunification is an exploitation of migration policies and procedures as they argue that ' migration is considered unnatural, and as something to be feared. The migrant as an outsider is viewed with considerable suspicion as to his/her intentions that are thought to be dubious' (Gupta, 2005, p. 115). Furthermore, these same groups exacerbate the problem of xenophobia especially towards ethnic minorities who have already settled in the host countries as genuine refugees and / or asylum-seekers. Scholars such as Ireland believe that migration in Europe is a complex process ' but Europeans today live in societies that have become

truly multicultural' (Ireland, 2000, p. 234). The issue of multiculturalism in Europe caused controversy in the realm of politics, social sciences and security studies. Boswell suggests that while a ' multicultural approach implies tolerance of cultural and religious diversity, robust anti-discrimination legislation, however this approach came under criticism for failing to deal adequately with the challenges of integration' (Boswell, 2005 p. 10).

For some, like the anti-migration campaigns and right-wing political parties, the phenomenon of multiculturalism started with mass migration of people who came from different backgrounds, cultures, religions and identities. One can argue that these, and other, factors may have caused direct threats to the security of the host countries and jeopardized European values, such as ' national heritage, cultural identity and social cohesion' (Vaughan-Williams and Peoples, 2010, p. 136). The European governments feared that the mass migration may threaten social stability in Europe. In addition, mass migration created xenophobia which hampers both assimilation and integration.

Furthermore, it may play an important role in demographic security and implies that migration exacerbates the problem of population increase in Europe. Regarding internal security, governments fear that migrants would get involved in dealing with drugs, crimes, trafficking and smuggling in human beings activities, making use of all channels available both legally and illegally. Guild states that ' the image of the foreigners as a security threat because of his or her propensity to commit criminal offences is often seen in the press in many EU countries' (Guild, 2009, p. 115). Cultural identity is another factor raised with respect to the issue of security. The issue of ' hijab' (headscarf), Burka, and veil, for example, angered the hard

core right-wing parties especially in France and other European countries (Holland, Germany, Austria and Belgium) which eventually led to social and political clashes with Muslim communities

Throughout the 1980s, migration control especially on refugees and asylum seekers did become a hot topic in both political arenas and domestic public debates in European countries. Weiner sums it up, saying, ' migration and refugee issues are now matters of high international politics, heads of states, cabinets, and key ministries involved in defence, internal security, and external relations' (Weiner, 1992 - 1993, p. 91). The result of political debate was ' that opinions polarized and refugees often made the headlines articulating theatrical language and were negatively portrayed for racial policies' (Huysmans, 2005, p. 11). It is worth mentioning that the breakup of the former Soviet Union and the fall of the Berlin wall in 1990, ' provided fresh impetus for migration from Eastern Europe which became an easy gateway to the West, both for people from the former communist countries themselves and asylum-seekers transiting from further afield' (Telöken, 1999). As the pressure mounted on governments to focus on migration control, many Western governments have tightened up their security borders against refugees and asylum seekers. Warner contends that ' gate keeping has become the primary state function... the state must protect its borders because that is what states do' (Warner, 1997, p. 60).

Quite often, refugees and asylum seekers are portrayed as a burden and hazardous to the European culture, identity, and pose threats to social, economic and internal security. ' They are potential threat to collective

security and can be located within a security continuum that connects it with <https://assignbuster.com/can-migration-flows-be-considered-a-security-issue-politics-essay/>

issues such as terrorism and international crime', (Guild, 2009, p. 132-133 and Vaughan-Williams and Peoples, 2010, p. 136). Although migration and refugee issues have caused severe headaches for some politicians, ministers and governments, others have used such issues as a political propaganda to win electorate votes. For example, in August 2001, the Australian Prime Minister John Howard transferred many refugees, mainly Afghans who were rescued in the sea by a Norwegian freighter, to detention centres in a Pacific island (Nauru and Manus) rather than to Woomera (detention centre for refugees and asylum-seekers) in Australia. This move consolidated the Prime Minister ' and his coalition back into power for the third successive time... issue of refugees played an important role in securing this electoral victory and made refugee policy... a highly visible political issue' (Huysmans, 2005, p. 36-37).

In the same vein, Weiner contends that ' the very form and intensity of response to unwanted migrations is itself an indication that such population flows are regarded as threats to security or stability' (Weiner, 1992 - 1993, p. 125). In the same direction, in an article by Annika Savill in The Independent, which was published on Wednesday 16 September 1992, Douglas Hurd, the Foreign Secretary at the time, produced outstanding examples of migration as a security issue: ' Mr Hurd said that many of his European counterparts considered that migration among all the other problems we face - is the most crucial. Like the US of the 19th century, Europe is a magnet for people seeking greater opportunities, from the east and south . . . We have already seen, most obviously in Germany but also elsewhere in the Community, the tensions and antipathies which can result

from the inflow,'. But he warned that unlike 19th-century America, 'ours is not an empty continent' (Savill, 1992).

What is security? Security is an ambiguous and a contested concept which 'most of the literature that attempted analysis or prescription was, and to some extent still is, based on the concepts of power and peace' (Buzan, 1991, p. 2). Many readers associate the word 'security' with topics such as, military threats, war, international relations, diplomacy and strategic studies. Arguably, this general understanding of the concept has monopolized security and military studies throughout the Cold War era. Guild contends that 'security cannot be reduced to one element, but it can only be understood in relation to power - either more power provides more security or security is based on relationship among actors and thus not a commodity at all' (Guild, 2009, p. 6). But for Buzan and some international relations scholars this concept is too narrow and vague, therefore they demanded to develop and stretch the concept of security beyond such well known traditional topics. In the aftermath of the Cold War, some prominent scholars of the Copenhagen School, including Buzan, Waever and others, argued 'that the concept of security could be expanded...From 1980s onward a more general sectoral widening of security included societal, economic, environmental, health, development and gender' (Buzan and Hansen, 2009, p. 13). With time and space, the available literature on migration and security has increased considerably. However, the term 'security' has evolved and undergone significant changes to include more political, economic and social dimensions such as, environmental degradation, pandemic diseases (HIV/AIDS), transnational organized crime and

international migration. Cottey suggests ' that security therefore is not something that can be objectively defined or of which there is likely to be an agreed definition' (Cottey, 2007, p. 7). Scholars such as Mayron Weiner was ' the first to address the relationship between immigration and security issues, other scholars indirectly captured this linkage in their work on immigration and refugees in the US policy' (Lahav, 2003, p. 90).

In order to combat illegal migration in Europe and deal with unwanted mixed flows of refugees, asylum seekers and others who were using illegal routes to beguile the migration system and restrictions, various and tougher measures of migration security were introduced by the European governments to prevent the abuse of the system. Taylor claims ' that the measures are contained in the Hague Programme, a five-year plan for the field of freedom, justice and security' (Taylor, 2005). Some of these measures, for example, aimed at ' preventing asylum seekers from arriving at the state's border in the first place, send asylum seekers back to countries through which they had passed, encourage member states of the EU to apply the refugee definition more narrowly and apply deterrence, such as the increasing use of detention, and restrictions on the right to work and access to social welfare' (Turton, 2002, p. 42). Politically speaking, these measures on migration, refugees and asylum seekers played an important role in bringing member states of the European Union even closer to the union than before. The member states of the European Union went further regarding restrictions and policies on migration, refugees and asylum seekers.

Metaphorically speaking, they wanted to build one strong Fortress in Europe with a solid iron-gate as a security protection against immigrants and mixed

flows of refugees. Taylor contends that ' at the end of 2004, the European Union (EU) agreed further measures strengthening Fortress Europe. Ministers from the 25 EU member states established the basis for a common asylum system... and the wider sharing of information by national police forces and security services' (Taylor, 2005).

Fortress Europe, in the form of treaties, conventions and steps, which have been taken by the member states of the European Union to accord their policies on immigration, is overwhelmingly tough and very restrictive. Some of the measures, which are summarized here: the 1990 Dublin Convention: ' its aim was to ensure that one member state would take responsibility for examining a claim, thus preventing asylum-seekers from shopping around for the most favorable country in which to ask for asylum', the 1990 Schengen Convention: ' its aim was to reinforce external border controls whilst allowing free movement within participating states', the 1991 Maastricht Treaty: ' this empowered Justice and Home Affairs Ministers to establish a framework for a European-wide asylum policy and introduced the concept of EU citizenship', the 1992 London Resolutions: ' ministers in London responsible for immigration approved three non-binding resolutions and conclusions' and the 1997 Treaty of Amsterdam: ' this includes a commitment by member states to develop a common immigration and asylum policy within five years, but the treaty came into effect in 1999'. (Turton, 2002, p. 42-23).

Since the 9/11 attacks on the American soil, the London bombings in July 2005 and other bombings across Europe, the issue of security became once again a hot subject for debate among politicians and topped social, economic <https://assignbuster.com/can-migration-flows-be-considered-a-security-issue-politics-essay/>

and political agendas particularly those of Western governments. Given that the 9/11 attacks were carried out by terrorists from Al Qaida and not by the refugees or asylum seekers, the European governments once again raised the issue of security in relation to migration. The European countries have maintained excessive 'securitisation' actions within migration policy frameworks as politicians and media portrayed migrants, asylum seekers and refugees, especially from Asia and Middle East, as potential terrorists abusing immigration policies and procedures. Vaughan-Williams and Peoples argue that 'moves towards the securitization of migration were already well underway prior to the events of 9/11... In the aftermath of 9/11 and bombings in Madrid and London, has been the particular focus on Muslim communities' (Vaughan-Williams and Peoples, 2010, P. 137). These actions and efforts by European countries to strengthen their external borders and tighten up their immigration policies caused immense controversy in the realm of politics. On one hand, anti-migration elites have argued that these common policies and rigorous law measures are mainly against bogus asylum-seekers, refugees and illegal immigrants. On the other hand, migration supporter elites and some of the NGOs argue that these measures have 'caused thousands of deaths of refugees and asylum-seekers and as well marginalized, criminalized and sidelined many genuine of them' (Hogan, 2002).

In conclusion, migration flows opened new debates in the domain of domestic and international security and foreign relations. Over the past decades, the concept of security has significantly changed to include several other categories in the realm of politics and social sciences. This essay

briefly discussed the historical background of migration and concentrated on refugees and asylum seekers as the main themes for societal and security analysis. From the essay point of views, the philosophy of multiculturalism played an important role in security, xenophobia has created racial tensions which sometimes led to violence between the host population and the immigrant communities and definitely illegal migration poses threats to the social stability and internal security of host countries in Europe. In addition, the essay agrees that the European countries have the right not only to secure their borders against illegal migration, but also to have the right to defend and protect the values they espouse such as social stability and cultural identity. The territorial integrity, economic and political independence of the European countries need to be protected from the danger of migration exploitation. Securitization of migration is not new, but the 9/11 attacks have stirred up the process of securitization and the building up of the so-called Europe Fortress to keep unwanted immigrants out of Europe. The European countries remain the favourite destination for both legal and illegal immigrants regardless of how tight border controls are. Immigrants, refugees and asylum seekers who fear persecution at home or are intent on escaping war and poverty will keep the hopes of reaching European countries alive. Such hopes could be pipe dreams.