

# TÄLLBERG FOUNDATION

*How on earth can we live together?*

## **Welcome to Lesvos**

Alan Stoga, Chairman, Tällberg Foundation

*“I thought I was doing a good thing.”*

*Kim M, a 39 year old tax inspector in Schleswig Holstein, Germany after he burned down an empty residence to prevent 6 Iraqi refugees from moving in, reported by Der Spiegel, February, 2015.*

By the end of last year, the total number of refugees worldwide exceeded 20 million. According to the UNHCR, forced displacement within and across national borders now exceeds 60 million; one person in every 122 on the planet has been forced to flee her home.

Europe will continue to be the ultimate destination for many of the people seeking refuge from the wars, terrorism, famines, droughts, and economic stagnation that plague important parts of the Middle East, Africa and the Balkans. Last year, more than 1 million refugees and migrants entered Europe according to the International Organization for Migration. But that might be an underestimate: Germany alone has reported processing more than one million arrivals.

Arguably, twice as many or more migrants—whether pushed by political instability or pulled by economic opportunity—should be manageable in a Europe with a population of almost 510 million. Indeed, some argue they should be welcomed since the population of many countries is in secular decline, and aging workforces need young workers. (However, increasing automation in manufacturing as well as in services has the potential to change both the nature of work and the demand for labor in ways that favor countries with

smaller, better educated populations).

Pope Francis has repeatedly made the larger, moral point. In November he said, “Behind these statistics are people, each of them with a name, a face, a story, an inalienable dignity which is theirs as a child of God.” Aiman Mazyek, chair of the German Central Council of Muslims, argued, “Morally speaking, there can’t be an upper limit to how many refugees we take in because of what our constitution says and due to our historical responsibility.”

Of course, quite the opposite is happening: the accelerating arrivals have touched off what has the makings of an existential threat not just to the EU (as an institution predicated on open borders), but to Europe itself with its historically Christian culture.

As British Foreign Secretary Phillip Hammond declared a few months ago, “Europe can’t protect itself, preserve its standard of living and social infrastructure if it has to absorb millions of migrants.” His thoughts have been reprised by politicians across the continent, from virtually every political perspective. Very few seem ready to stand with Chancellor Merkel, who has struggled to find a positive response to the crisis: “If Europe fails on the question of refugees, if this close link with universal civil rights is broken, then it won’t be the Europe we wished for.”

Why does Europe seem all but overwhelmed?

The easiest parts of the answer are:

- First, this may just be the tip of the iceberg: since more than 60% of the people who fled to Europe in 2015 were male, many of them probably intend to bring other family members when and if they establish legal status.
- Second, the push factors of war, climate degradation, terrorism, population explosion and economic instability are unlikely to weaken in the coming years. That implies future waves of refugees and endlessly increasing economic burdens.

- Third, the refugees are overwhelmingly Muslim, at a time when fears of Islamic terrorism are exploding and when Europe has become increasingly secular. This raises enormous questions of identity: who is a European? Or, more practically, who is a Swede, a German, a Pole, etc.?
- Fourth, the legacy of the financial and Greek crises has been a significant weakening of popular support for the EU and, arguably, of the European institutional framework as well as a concomitant rise in nationalism.

Indeed, whether as peaceful migrants or as terrorists, Muslims have become significant actors outside traditionally Islamic countries for the first time in the modern era. In the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century when the post war European experiment was launched, there were virtually no Muslims in Western Europe. Fifty years later, there were roughly 15 million; by the time the upsurge in migration began, Europe was home to around 20 million Muslims.

How on earth can we live together: the (mostly Christian in name, but increasingly not-so-religious in practice) Europeans and the still-quite-religious Muslims who are knocking on the door?

The Muslim refugees are fleeing terrorism and instability, not their religion or their culture. Yes, they are seeking better lives (or just to stay alive) but many if not most would have preferred to stay in their native lands. As Chris Caldwell asks in *Reflections on the Revolution in Europe*, “The question is whether Europe will change the Muslim migrants or whether the migrants will change Europe.”

For what it’s worth, Caldwell is not optimistic about the outcome: “When an insecure, malleable relativistic culture meets a culture that is anchored, confident and strengthened by common doctrines, it is generally the former that changes to suit the latter.” Of course, that was the same answer that Michel Houellebecq offered in his satirical *Submission* which became so controversial (if not often actually widely read) after the *Charlie Hebdo* attack.

This is the scenario feared not only by Europe's growing right wing, anti-immigrant politicians and their disciples, but also by many across the political spectrum. Last October, Gallup reported that 52% of Europeans wanted to see decreased levels of immigration; there has been a significant rise in anti-migrant violence across Europe; Polish, Hungarian and other "leaders" have refused to accept any Muslim refugees; the European media is full of stories that conflate the immigration and terrorism narratives.

Terrorism is, in fact, a different issue. Europe obviously has a terrorism problem with roots in radical Islam. Thousands of Europeans have answered the call to jihad and have fought or are fighting in greater Syria. This cadre of trained and radicalized fighters has already committed atrocities in Europe and undoubtedly will continue to do so. But why assume that immigrants fleeing terrorism will either aid their persecutors or themselves become radicalized after they settle in European safe havens?

The actual risk might be a different one. Just as the Palestinian refugee camps have metastasized into breeding grounds for Hamas and Hezbollah, how Europe-bound Muslim refugees are treated in the long run will matter. Brookings Institution's Dan Byman argues, "If the refugees are treated as a short-term humanitarian problem rather than as a long-term integration challenge, then we are likely to see this problem worsen. Radicals will be among those who provide the religious, educational, and social support for the refugees – creating a problem where none existed. Indeed, the refugees need a comprehensive and long-term package that includes political rights, educational support, and economic assistance..."

Of course, overwhelmed EU and national politicians and bureaucrats are mostly focused on the immediate problems of aiding, registering and allocating (or, conversely, rejecting) the people who have successfully run the gauntlet into Europe. It is precisely the sense of crisis that prevents serious discussion of long-term issues. At the end of last year, *Der Spiegel*

editorialized, “Integration only works if the state doesn’t lose control, and Germany at present has lost control.”

But “integration” begs a larger question, anticipated twenty years ago, when Samuel Huntington published his famous article, *The Clash of Civilizations?* and predicted that one of the key fault lines would be between Islam and the West. Surely Caldwell, Houellebecq and politicians across the map would agree that is a good description of what is happening.

But, can a clash of civilizations be avoided? In *Political Islam, World Politics and Europe*, Bassam Tibi, a Syrian-born academic living in Germany, answers “Yes, if my fellow Muslims join in and bid farewell to jihad...Europe holds the potential to become an example of an Islamic embracing of cultural modernity on cross-cultural grounds.”

Tibi’s basic argument is Islam as practiced, for example, in Indonesia is compatible with modernity and democracy, but that political Islam—the version proselytized by the Wahhabis throughout the Middle East and Africa—is not. Again, the question of identity: will their new European experience transform immigrant Muslims—or, at least, the vast majority—into Muslims who will accept the separation of church and state that is basic to European democracy? Will radical imams and other teachers, already a significant presence in Europe, let them?

And then there is Turkey, the historical hinge between Europe and the East—and, since the end of last year, Europe’s proposed “solution” to staunch immigrant flows. It is hard to imagine that idea will end well: can Europe really outsource its ethical dilemma to a revanchist demagogue who has demonstrated his willingness to use fear and force not only to win elections, but to rearrange the country's legal and political structures in his favor?

President Erdogan aside, it seems clear that many European leaders believe any sustainable “solution” will involve efforts to discourage future migrants, whether or not it is ethical or whether or not it is even possible. In the long run, perhaps, this could be done through a

combination of peace keeping, diplomacy and massive investment in development on a scale that would dwarf the Marshall Plan.

Unfortunately, there appears to be little or no appetite for such an initiative among the leaders of the major powers, the United Nations or the EU; indeed, the United States has essentially refused to be a meaningful part of any solution, even though its benighted “war on terror” was an important contributor to today’s crisis.

In the short run, the more likely path—indeed, the path that Germany seems to have negotiated with Turkey (and, before that, Spain with Morocco)—is to incentivize nations on Europe’s periphery to prevent migrants from crossing the borders. Can this be done in ways that are compatible with Europe’s values?

King Canute probably had more luck with the tide.