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**The European Experiment in Peril:  
Dynamics behind the Current Migrant Crisis and EU Identity**

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# **The European Experiment in Peril: Dynamics behind the Current Migrant Crisis and EU Identity**

Santiago Paez-Pardo<sup>1</sup>

With a population over 500 million, and a constituency of 28 states, the European Union is a behemoth when compared to other international organizations. Serving as an “economic and political partnership” among European countries, initiated through regional integration following World War II (Europa). It was instituted to create a stronger alliance among European states in order to prevent future conflict, foster cooperation, and attempt to create solidarity among members. To achieve such a vast goal, the objective was to enhance economic interdependence through integration of key industries in war production which would eventually lead to political and social integration—Schengen, the EU, the Euro, etc. Its legal framework was built upon a “complex system of treaties...[constantly] adapted...to meet the needs of a changing world and...expanding” organization. Member-states voluntarily agree to “transfer [some] sovereignty to EU institutions” where “many decisions [are then] made at the” supranational level. Thus, the EU has provided relative “peace, stability, and prosperity in Europe; helped raise living standards [and quality of life indicators]; launched a single currency [which has dominated international markets]; and is progressively building...a single...free Europe for goods, services, people, and capital” (US Delegation of the EU).

## The migrant crisis & EU values of democracy, human rights, and the rule of law

Rooted in Kantian tradition, democratic peace theory claims that democracies are less likely to engage in conflict with one another. In essence democratic systems combined with economic interdependence—universal hospitality—and international institutions enable for wars to become unlikely (Kant 1795). As a combination between a Sui Generis IO and RIA, the EU has evolved along these lines becoming solidified through economic integration that has spread to other areas.. Hence through its enlargement, it has united most of Europe under one flag while becoming a formidable economic and political force around the globe. “The desire of the peoples of Europe to transcend their ancient divisions in order to forge a common destiny, while remaining proud of their national identities and history” is a unique characteristic not seen in many international organizations. Thus, developments in European economic integration and political cooperation has led to the prodigious institution we know today, centered on the values of “respect for human dignity, liberty, democracy, equality, the rule of law and respect for human rights, including the rights of persons belonging to minorities” (Jaanika Erne 2010). The simple fact that member states are obligated to meet democratic criteria in order to be considered eligible for admission—Copenhagen conditions—allows for these societies to be “characterized by [a higher degree

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<sup>1</sup> As a first-generation immigrant, I’ve garnered firsthand knowledge regarding the complexity of migration, and importance of academia and upward mobility. Thus, expecting to graduate from the University of Miami Summa Cum Laude with three majors—Political Science, International Studies and Sociology—while currently working on campus, and abroad, as a teaching/research assistant for the Department Chair of International Studies. I’m currently member of the academic honor societies PSA, ADK, and NSCS as well.

of] pluralism, non-discrimination, tolerance, justice, solidarity and equality between men and women” which is a regional achievement of grand magnitude (Article I-2).

The idea behind a regionally integrated “area of freedom, security, and justice” bridges the “EU treaty relating to Common Foreign and Security Policy” and EU “development cooperation” goals: a nexus that includes “peace, security, sustainable development, solidarity and mutual respect among peoples, free and fair trade, eradication of poverty, protection of human rights, and compliance with international laws” (Article I-3). This has been possible through the EU’s position on social policy, and strong belief in human development over solely economic. Additionally, the European Social Model has not been fully achieved in Europe but demonstrates similarities in the structure, and functioning, of member states which tends to “support developed and interventionist policies, a robust welfare system that provides protections for all, efforts to contain inequality...[and works deeply in] promoting workers’ rights” standing in stark contrast to the “American-model of self-reliance, hard work, and pursuit of individual prosperity...” which many academics consider a myth more than a reality (Grant 2007). Regardless of the differences across the Atlantic, the EU’s social policy has its origins in the postwar reconstruction, and European integration experiment, driven by the “twin policy goals of sustainable economic development and improved living...conditions” (McCormick 347-348).

On the other hand, EU policies in justice and home affairs have not been supranationalized to that great of an extent, or coordinated in a collective manner, allowing for ineffective responses to transnational issues in these domains—particularly relating to migration, thereby creating weaknesses in the organization’s scope when attempting further coordination (377-384). Nonetheless, the regulations pertaining to migration and asylum do fall in line with the European Union’s core values of respect for democracy, human rights, and the rule of law—yet concerns about its compliance has been contested with the recent refugee crisis, explicitly on a state-by-state basis (European Commission; European Policy Center). The conceptualizations of European values—or what it is to be European—as well the process of Europeanization—the spread of these ideas—is being hotly debated with progressives wishing to dismantle the upsurge in xenophobic and nativist sentiment towards refugees and fleeing migrants, while conservatives have revamped their efforts to tie security to the influx of foreigners in order to justify their anti-immigrant stance (Odmalm 2014). The success of the National Front in French elections less than a month after the Paris attacks demonstrates the increased nativist sentiment—“twenty-seven percent across the country” indicating substantial support from electorate, while the reaction of the V4 countries to the crisis exemplifies how certain nations have made such stances their primary method of dealing with this emergency (Mullen & Hume 2016; Behr 2015). The racial stigma provided by the Cologne attacks has also provided a free pass to scapegoat millions of individuals on the basis of a few while the confiscation policies of Denmark remind us of a darker time in European history (BBC 2016; Bilefsky 2016 NYT).

Following the barbaric attacks in Cologne and deplorable actions of the Danish polity, “conservative politicians [have been]... fueling xenophobic and racist notions by turning the issue of sexual violence against women as a tool to discriminate against” migrants “set[ing] a dangerous precedent [by] pitting the rights of women to the rights” of those fleeing in a polarizing fashion. Yet nothing is done in regards to the dire need for Germany to “tighten vague sex crime laws [since]...lack of consent to a sexual act must be enough for” it to be a criminal offense (Amnesty International 2016). This does not excuse the perpetrators whom should be punished to the full extent of the law. Thus, to understand the crisis, it is important to view it as a subterfuge “driven by a complicated mix of factors” with at least “three-quarters [of those making the daunting journey]...qualify[ing] for refugee status” (Banulescu-Bogdan and Fratzke 2015). With over one million migrants arriving by sea in 2015, eighty-four percent are coming from the

world's top ten refugee-producing nations. Hence, the top five immigrant nationalities according to the UNHCR include Syrian—48%, Afghan—21%, Iraqi—9%, Eritrean—4%, Pakistani—3%, as well as Somali, and Nigerians—2% each.

It is important to note that refugees are migrants related to forced migration; however, not all migrants are refugees. A refugee has been defined by the 1951 Refugee Convention as any individual who:

“...has a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality, and is unable to [return without serious risk to his/ her livelihood]...(UNHCR)

Furthermore, it is important to note that “asylum seeker[s are] defined as [individuals] fleeing persecution or conflict and are therefore [in the process of] seeking...protections.” Once the asylum seeker is recognized by the UNHCR, that individual becomes a refugee with certain inalienable rights, and protections under international law. However, the UN has expanded its interpretation of a refugee as any “migrant fleeing war or persecution... [even] before they... receive asylum” such as the current “prima facie refugee statuses” given to “Syrians and Eritreans” (Park 2015). Unfortunately, the current refugee and migrant crisis is lumped with the conceptual notion of economic migrants—a person who migrates to another country for better working or living conditions (Cambridge University Press). The most important difference between economic and forced migration is that the latter is forcibly displaced. Individuals migrate to preserve their existence with little to no protection from their own state, which in many cases may be the apparatus responsible for the persecution itself—i.e. Syrian, Eritrean, and Pakistani governments (Park 2015).

With many crossing into Europe due to the dire need to survive, the lengthy asylum procedures, as well as the state-by-state border control policies and acceptance rates, have forced these migrants onto more perilous routes through the Balkans or Mediterranean in order to reach Northern Europe, and other countries willing to accept them. Thus, the context behind these regions highlights forced migration and not the one based on economic concern. Likewise, Afghans attempting to escape the ongoing conflict with the Taliban have left in droves, while Eritreans fleeing forced labor are not far behind. Increased insecurity and crippling poverty have driven many in Iraq, Nigeria, Pakistan, Somalia, and Sudan to migrate as well (Park 2015). Nonetheless, the case of Syria and Iraq is unique due to the context behind the violence in this region, and how it has proliferated quickly.

### Syria and Iraq: understanding the context behind the primary source of refugees

Syria has been ravaged by a four-and-a-half-year intrastate conflict brought about by the proliferation of paramilitary and fundamentalists groups, each of which is vying for territorial expansion. This power vacuum was possible through the 2011 uprising against the Assad government whose family has held an iron grip of the country for over half a century. Thus, the Syrian government's response to the peaceful protests was to use a hard-handed and violent approach to civilian dissent, while targeting any type of rebel or resistance that threatens their sovereignty. These groups can include anyone from relatively moderate rebels such as the Free Syrian Army, Secular militias, and Kurdish groups—a coalition of Western supported fighters—to more extreme militants such as Al-Nusra, Al-Qaeda, and the most menacing Daesh. Many of these groups have crossed international borders, and have redrawn the map of Syria and Iraq in their favor through ruthless control of informal transnational networks that supply and fund their war efforts (Lund 2013).

International intervention through assistance of these groups, whether formal or informal, has also led to the proliferation of the conflict as well. These players in the war include the U.S—who has trained and funded anti-Assad forces; Russia—who has assisted pro-Assad forces through airstrikes and coordination; Iran—who has supported the Syrian government and groups, such as Hezbollah, fighting against the rebels; Saudi Arabia—who has bankrolled a myriad of extremist groups fighting Assad; Qatar—who has provided funding and military aid to a number of Syrian rebels; Turkey—who has been a reluctant ally in fighting Daesh until recently, and has been condemned for attacking Kurdish militias; France—who was the first nation to bombard Daesh in Iraq, and whose capital was recently hit by a Daesh affiliate attack; and Britain—who has been pivotal in coalition bombardments against Daesh (Zavis 2015). Once again this emphasizes the dynamics and complex interests in the conflict with international players stalling diplomatic action—UN Security Council differences on whether Assad should go—while engaging in ad hoc coalitions or unilateral warfare—Russian and Turkish bombardments of rebels and Kurdish forces—expecting that it will somehow bring about peace (Hille, Barker, and Dyer 2015). In the meantime, there are 4.6 million registered Syrian refugees with 2.1 million registered by the UNHCR, 1.9 million registered by Turkey, and approximately 30,000 registered in Northern Africa. To understand the vast numbers, 80,754 have arrived in 2016 with 403 registered deaths since the beginning of the New Year (UNHCR 2016). Another “two million” more are “fleeing persecution in Afghanistan, Iraq, and Somalia “ allowing this to “become a crisis that no amount of European [financial] generosity can address” with “the solution” being coordinated responses to “end these conflicts and the associated persecutions” (Ashraf 2015).

The international community has agreed on one thing, that Daesh is a problem for all and thus requires our immediate attention. As a young extremist organization, it was created after the turmoil of the Iraq War when Baathists were purged from important political positions, and its supreme leader traces its roots to the 2006 insurgent group known as the Islamic State in Iraq. As the Syrian civil war raged on, it fell out of good graces with Al-Qaeda in 2013, and began fighting Al-Nusra, Syrian government forces, and others for territory in undisputed areas of control (BBC 2015). As Baghdadi, the leader of Daesh, accumulated territory, he became head of a totalitarian state “impos[ing] his will over hundreds of thousands, especially those in their stronghold of Raqqa...order[ing] Christians to pay a protection tax or face death.” His implementation of draconian and puritanical Islamic law was “a way of legitimizing his new state... [by] terrifying the local population into submission” through policies such as amputations for theft, and whippings, stoning, and death for adulterers. Baghdadi has used fundamentalist interpretations of scripture that “most Islamic countries have abandoned...as outmoded” even extremist organizations. Muslims whom resist his rule are labeled as “apostates” with many “Sunni tribesmen and captured government soldiers” being “executed en masse and dumped in anonymous graves” for their dissent. Once securing his rule in Eastern Syria, “he set his sights on seizing...land in western Iraq” where many Sunnis were already fighting government forces” due to shutting them out of the military” and other positions of “power after the Americans left” (McCants Brookings 2015).

Its blitzkrieg on the second largest city in Iraq in the summer of 2014, allowed the group to seize Mosul as their official capital, which caught American attention quickly. Bombardments of the group became a priority with retaliations by Daesh of barbaric proportions—public executions, beheadings, and immolation of captives dressed in prison jumpsuits reminiscent of Abu Ghraib and Guantanamo (Salim and Naylor 2015). The raping and sexual slavery of young girls and women has also been used to demoralize an already vulnerable population whom, in many cases, desire nothing more than security (Wall Street Journal 2015). The further destruction of cultural heritage has been conducted in the name of religious purity through justifications of idolatry, as well as the desire to “eradicate the country’s many ethnic and

religious minorities” (Cullinane et al; BBC 2015). Coalition forces and airstrikes have cut their potential by 20-25% in the last year; however, Daesh has also gained new strategic cities of interest, such as Ramadi and Palmyra (Michaels 2015; Graff 2015). Unfortunately, the EU has simultaneously given Assad and Erdogan substantial decision making power through the proposed “Refugee Resettlement Plan” regardless of being considered “serial human-rights violators [that] have proved ready to attack” their own citizens, including those willing to fight Daesh—“the Kurds and the secular resistance” (Kingsley 2016; Mason 2016).

With around 30,000 foreign fighters in the group itself, Daesh has established a state through the same practice of conquering and submission imposed by medieval rulers (Norton-Taylor 2015). Its ideology is based on creating animosity between the East and West, playing on the ideas of extremist action centered on the marginalization and mistreatment of Muslims. Their conceptualizations of jihad are not metaphorical but taken as literal extremist interpretations. They consider themselves the only true believers, while labeling all non-believers, and supposed impure Muslims, as seeking to destroy Islam itself. Violence is then used—such as beheadings, crucifixions, and mass shootings—to terrorize their enemies and populations into compliance (McCants 2015). This ideological war is what garners its support, and one of the main reasons for continued recruitment, which is worsened by nativist sentiment in Europe that fuels this mistrust among these communities. Unfortunately, increased hostility among these subgroups may actually enhance gravitation towards such violent actions, since increased marginalization of certain minorities propagates the idea of East vs. West that Daesh wants to instill, and can then legitimize (Robins-Early 2015).

Moreover, Daesh has begun attacking territories outside its area of control through its affiliates, such as the downing of a Russian commercial airliner killing 228 people in Egypt; multiple explosions in Beirut killing hundreds; the execution of 38 tourists on a beach resort in Tunisia; various bombings in cities throughout Nigeria; 128 people killed in various coordinated attacks in Paris; and the most recent case of an affiliate attack in an affluent Mall in Jakarta (Burke 2015; Turnball 2015). Its sources of funding are diverse making it the world’s wealthiest extremist organization with the US treasury claiming they earned several millions per week solely through the sale of crude oil smuggled into bordering nations, and even sold inside its territory of control—a yearly total of \$100 million. Likewise, kidnappings have garnered them \$20 million in ransom payments, while robbing banks, looting antiquities, sexual slavery, and extortions of people living in areas under their control, has also served as an important source of revenue (Fowler 2015; Cochrane and Fuller 2016). Hence, its desire to establish a caliphate, and consequent state that derives its legitimacy and power through domination, exploitation, and violence is something which is inconsistent with values of democracy, human rights, and the rule of law. Peace and reconciliation is not something this group will consider, and is one of the main dynamics driving the current refugee crisis, as well as Assad.

#### Europe’s obligation to assist: justification for condemnation of nativist sentiment

As the refugee and migrant crisis worsens, European countries are taking different actions, many positive and some that hinder progress, to address this influx of people. Since the case has been made that the majority of migrants coming are fleeing violence, insecurity, and persecution due to failed states that do not respect the rule of law or human rights in adjacent regions—the Middle East and North Africa—it is our obligation to accept these immigrants and address underlining problems associated with this upsurge in migration. It is imperative that the EU takes a unified action to house, shelter, and assist those arriving

daily in a manner that is just and fair, especially since the European Commission has stated that this is the largest humanitarian crisis since World War II (European Commission Press). Frontex, the EU agency in charge of border security, has highlighted the seven most common migrant paths many take, which have become dangerous due to rouge state policies: they include the multiple sea routes; the circular route through the Balkans; the western Balkan route; and the eastern border route through the Caucasus's (Frontex).

With this rapid flow of migrants, the Schengen agreement has been in a state of limbo with EU states like “Bulgaria, Hungary, and Croatia” erecting barb-wired fences, and V-4 countries implementing intensive border policing mechanisms, thereby creating mass accumulations of migrants who are deciding to take different paths. Even Germany, an immigrant-receptive country with a history of Middle Eastern migration—Turkish-German minority—has instituted “internal border [controls] with Austria” to decrease the numbers arriving (Larive 2015). Chancellor Angela Merkel has been a vital supporter of humanitarian assistance with her government stating that it will be taking in over one million refugees by the end of 2015, the most among any European nation (Reuters 2015). Yet her discourse in regards to multiculturalism depicts a xenophobic view of European identity—white and Christian—whether it is conscious or not, while the devastating blow that Schengen has sustained may not be alleviated after the crisis, and its notion of serving as a symbol of European unity among all—the “value of the free movement of European citizenry”—is in danger of becoming nonexistent (Barigazzi 2015).

Likewise the Dublin regulations stipulates EU member obligations in regards to asylum, which has been vastly ignored since the majority of refugees who enter are not welcomed by certain EU states; and thus, continue their journey to other more accepting nations. According to these regulations, refugees must request their asylum petition and biometric screenings in the EU country they enter, which demonstrates how nationalistic policies undertaken by Eastern European countries have stopped, or hindered, the processing of asylum requests. On the other hand, Germany and Sweden have held their arms open, accepting large proportions of those entering Europe, while “France and the UK have been more cautious”. Thus, these unilateral state policies demonstrates the limits of deepening EU integration, cooperation, coordination, and compliance that has provided the region with such prosperity—European Bloc (Larive 2015).

Internal domestic politics in the EU may be an underlining catalyst in worsening the problem with many right-wing populists and nationalist parties blaming all social problems, and decline of the European economy, on the changing demographics of the EU—immigration and integration. They purport links between the refugees and terrorism, and hide their racist, xenophobic, and nativist sentiments behind a veil of security. Their propaganda depicts the conflict as one between Christian Europe and the Muslim world—similar to Anders Brevics interpretations of the clash of cultures (Bangstad 2015). As the philosopher Noam Chomsky states, “the more you can increase fear of drugs and crime, welfare mothers, immigrants and aliens, the more you control society.” Thus, political parties such as the Marie Le Pen’s National Front, the DPP in Denmark; UKIP in the UK; the Freedom Party in Austria; the Swedish Democrats; the Alternative for Germany—a small anti-EU party; the Jobbick party in Hungary; and many more are gaining ground across Europe (The Week 2015). All these parties have at some point or another supported, and advocated, neo-fascist policies, with many reviled until recently brought about by a more difficult socioeconomic climate in the post-2008 era. Due to the economic crisis, falling euro exchange rate, and increasing unemployment, the scapegoating of vulnerable communities rose—i.e. Romas, immigrants, and Muslims. Anyone considered an “other” by white European nativist standards was now beginning to be viewed, to a greater degree, as a problem.



The European Commission has warned of the disintegration of the EU, both physically and ideologically, highlighting Europe's diverse multicultural past. The nuanced arguments made by President Jean-Claude Juncker claiming that the incoming migrants will be less than one percent of the total EU population are vital in fighting increased anti-immigrant sentiment not "in line with [the EU's] common values" of integration, human rights, and humanitarian assistance (Juncker 2015). It is important to make the comparison of Europe's refugee acceptance to that of neighboring Middle Eastern countries taking in the majority of those fleeing and with fewer resources. Furthermore, implementation of a coordinated and comprehensive quota system that spreads the burden of the refugee crisis evenly across the Union needs to be addressed—ensuring that countries defying such policies, or implementing them in a discriminatory and bias manner, are punished through legal means—Denmark, Norway, Finland, V-4 countries, and Gulf-states (Traynor 2015; Daley 2015). Countries not in the EU but with strong economic and political ties to the Union should be influenced through a soft power approach as well.

In regards to Common Foreign and Security Policy, Mediterranean Border States should receive greater assistance with monitoring of open waters in order to address the thousands of migrants dying at sea, and to tackle the informal transnational human smuggling networks that enable for this to occur. The current Triton operation has to be increased heavily, and expanded to cover much more open-ocean than stipulated in the fine print, which could be possible through greater allocation of funds to Frontex (Larive 2015). Furthermore, Germany and Sweden should dismantle their internal border controls due to their immense influence in the EU—soft power—which will disincentivize Eastern European states from maintaining or erecting more fiscal barriers reminiscent of the Iron Curtain. Hence, accepting those fleeing is the most effective action that can be taken internally, and is "key to the successful absorption of foreign nationals within European societies (Garavoglia 2015). However, the EU must not ignore the dynamics behind the migrations themselves. This can be achieved through increased foreign aid, diplomatic channels to speed up the peace process, and military, as well as humanitarian assistance, to address the conflict in a manner that comprehensively deals with insecurity, poverty, extremism, and other underlining issues pervasive in these volatile regions.

Therefore, EU values of human rights, democracy, free movement, and integration—economic, political, and social—and Europe's obligation to aid regions affected by the most complex and arduous conflicts today—Syria, Iraq, Eritrea, and Sub-Saharan Africa—is what will define historical interpretations of European identity. Either Europe will be seen as a shining example of humanitarian assistance, or this crisis will be viewed as a draconian, isolationist, and anti-immigrant period in EU history. With bordering states—Jordan, Lebanon, and Turkey—taking the bulk of the migrants, and even Latin American nations, with little resources, opening their arms to refugee families, the EU must step up as a world leader in dealing with this humanitarian concern, since it is "high time for Europe to reclaim a leading role in human rights" (OHCHR 2015).

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