



Working Paper

The Gatekeeper's Gambit: SYRIZA, Left Populism and the European Migration Crisis

Antonios A. Nestoras

Brussels, 02 February 2016

Table of Contents

Introduction	3
Migration and Populism: the New Frontline	3
Gateway Greece	7
‘The Biggest Migration Crisis since WWII’	7
Migration Trends and Policies, 2008 - 2014.....	9
2015: The SYRIZA Pull-Factor?.....	12
The SYRIZA Gambit	15
‘No Migrant is Illegal’	15
‘It’s all Europe’s Fault’	18
‘Pay or Pray’	21
The EU Reaction	24
Hot Spots and Relocation	24
The Turkish Counter.....	25
The Schengen GREXIT	28
Conclusion	32
A Common Migration and Asylum Policy as the Future of Schengen	32
References	34

Table of Figures

Figure 1 – The Network of Migration Routes into Europe.....	8
Figure 2 - Comparison Between Eastern and Central Mediterranean Routes	11
Figure 3 - Migrant and refugee arrivals to Europe by sea	13
Figure 4 - Destination Countries in the Mediterranean	14
Figure 5 - Fatalities of Migrants and Refugees in the Mediterranean	19
Figure 6 - The Relocation Scheme.....	25
Figure 7 - Daily Estimates of Arrivals 15 Oct - 17 Dec.....	27
Figure 8 - The Western Balkan Route(s).....	29

Introduction

Migration and Populism: the New Frontline

In January 2015, to round off a spectacular rise from 4.6% to 36% in less than 6 years, SYRIZA won the Greek parliamentary elections by a landslide. Much drama has come to pass since then: SYRIZA's promise to scrap EU bailout agreements put Greece's membership in the Eurozone under doubt; the possibility of a GREXIT rocked the markets and tested the integrity of the Euro; SYRIZA's confrontation with mainstream politics was measured against Greece's dire need for cash and came up short. In the end, after a series of Eurogroup meetings and EU Summits the Eurozone remained intact. In July, Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras conceded to extending the financial surveillance of Greece within the context of the previous bailout agreements in exchange for EU and IMF funding until 2018.

The extension of the bailout agreement, dubbed in Greece as the 'Third Memorandum', constituted a complete break from SYRIZA's electoral promises. It also came as a downright defiance of the referendum, called shortly before the agreement, with which the overwhelming majority of the Greek electorate rejected the EU proposals for a new bailout. At that point, the SYRIZA government seemed to have lost its popular legitimacy; subsequently, Alexis Tsipras called for snap elections in September – the second in only seven months.

Given the air of broken promises, SYRIZA came out of the elections remarkably untouched, at a loss of merely two seats in the parliament. Considering on the one hand that SYRIZA was purged from rogue far-left elements who insisted on anti-Euro positions, and, on the other, that Nea Demokratia – SYRIZA's only notable rival – failed to capitalize on the government's broken promises, the loss of a few seats was but a tint on Tsipras' armor. The most striking result was however that, after the elections, the country that anti-austerity populism rocked more than any other, elected a parliament where five out of seven political parties (accounting for an overwhelming 267 out of 300 seats) were, after all, in favor of an EU bailout agreement.

At first glance, the Greek parliament gave the impression that Eurosceptic populism conceded defeat. But that was not the case. It is true that day after

day SYRIZA has been easing its attacks on EU imposed austerity, but the EU was not yet off the hook. Alexis Tsipras may have shifted the focus from the division between pro and against the 'Memorandum' towards a discourse that divided the political system in the 'old' and the 'new', but at the same time he has found new issues to channel Eurosceptic and sometimes clearly anti-European sentiments. The migration and refugee crisis became one of those issues and emerged as the next frontline of the confrontation between populist and mainstream politics.

Concerns about migration were of course present in Greece before the latest elections. For many, fighting austerity, and halting immigration have been the two sides of the same coin, the source of the country's social and economic woes. As a matter of fact, the neo-Nazi Golden Dawn party based its electoral surge on anxiety over 'illegal immigration'. Nevertheless, in the second semester of 2015, as the Euro-crisis subsided, the migration's weighted importance increased.

The stakes were high from the beginning. Greece's geographic position put the country on the frontline of the migration crisis. As the migration flows were rising and shifting towards the Aegean – the Eastern Mediterranean route – Greece became the preferred destination for migrants and refugees: their gateway to Europe.

SYRIZA was keen on playing the role of the gatekeeper. The securitization of migration and EU's inability to respond to the crisis in a proactive manner created favorable conditions for populist entrepreneurs. Thus, SYRIZA was right to suppose that it could tap further into the electoral potential of the mounting migration and refugee crisis. Plus, the migration crisis was an opportunity to get back at the EU for forcing Tsipras' hand in the negotiations; it was a way to overcompensate for the concession he made in July's EU summit. SYRIZA's migration policy unfolded as a gambit, a careful calculation to win back the advantage lost in the Euro-crisis negotiations.

In the beginning, SYRIZA instituted a major shift from the migration policy of the previous Greek governments. It did not actively facilitate immigration of course, but, based on the premise that 'no migrant is illegal', SYRIZA made it clear that its left-radical government was a pro-immigration government. And although the cause of immigration is, without any doubt, war, poverty and

oppression in the Middle East, SYRIZA's welcoming gesture may have been another pull factor for migration flows. Second, as the tally of human lives lost in the Aegean soared, Tsipras spearheaded an assault on Europe's 'neo-colonial' meddling in the Middle East, the West's 'moral responsibility' in supporting the rebels in Syria and the 'neoliberal globalization' that is causing poverty everywhere in the world. In other words, for Alexis Tsipras, the migration and refugee crisis was 'all Europe's fault'. Finally, SYRIZA stated his intentions (sometimes expressed as a direct threat and sometimes as an insinuation) to wave through to Western Europe the migrants and refugees amassing in the Greek islands and cities.

In this regard, SYRIZA's emotional, Manichean fight against the 'corrupt, insensitive and alienated EU elites' in the name of the Greek people during the Euro-crisis did not differ much from SYRIZA's gambit as Europe's gatekeeper – the defender of European borders, values and culture and a champion of human rights. After all, Populism can be defined as a thin-centered ideology adapted for use by Left and Right radical parties¹ or, in other words, an empty shell that gives meaning to words and concepts according to the user and the circumstantial political context². SYRIZA is a case in point for exemplifying a lasting capacity for political entrepreneurship at the expense of mainstream European politics – lately within the context of the migration and refugee crisis.

Populist entrepreneurship hardly ever attains an ideological consistency, however it does entail a distinct linguistic style and a preference for simplified dichotomies. European radical parties express similar anxieties about the EU and they use populism in similar ways to increase their share of the ballot. For example, SYRIZA echoed internationalist, anti-globalization concerns expressed by numerous other left populist parties in Europe³. And even though SYRIZA called for an inclusive social justice (as opposed to the ethnic exclusion of extreme right Golden Dawn), its political appeal feeds on anxiety for further modernization, further European integration and further dilution of national sovereignty – as is the case with many contemporary left radicals⁴. In this sense, populism poses a coherent threat to mainstream European politics; and the migration and refugee crisis can be instrumental in the efforts of populist parties everywhere to continue mounting a serious challenge against democratic, liberal parties.

In examining the transformation and evolution of populist discourse against European integration, the Greek case is exceptionally significant. Not only because Greece is the only European country where radical parties managed to form a government; not only because this government is a showcase of a classic left-right populist alliance (SYRIZA's junior coalition partner is ANEL, a far right nationalist party); but mostly because the policies of the Greek government influenced the direction that EU integration seems to be taking. SYRIZA's gambit in the migration crisis has provoked an EU reaction (which was not necessarily a retribution, but) which took stock of the vulnerabilities of common European policy – in this case concerning migration control and border and crisis management.

In a sense, the recent policy developments on the EU level were a response to the weaknesses of the European project and its exposure to populist threats – especially in light of their potential to winning elections. The relocation plan, the hotspots approach, Turkey's upgrade as a pillar of European crisis management and finally the establishment of the European Border and Coast Guard, they are policies which, in addition to tackling the migration crisis, are also meant to defend (for example) the Schengen area against populist abuse and misappropriation.

Hence, the objective of this paper is not merely to describe SYRIZA's left-radical migration policy or the ensuing EU institutional reaction, but to provide one possible explanation of how we got where we are now. How did we get to the relocation plan? How did we get to the revival of Turkey's accession process? How did we get to the establishment of a European Border and Coast Guard with the power to operate, in exceptional circumstances, without a Member-state's approval?

A note on the paper's structure and a critical research limitation: first, the following sections do not follow a strict chronological timeline. Rather, they are divided according to themes. Here, the aim is not to provide a linear narrative but to expose how the different policies and issues unfolded since the intensification of the migration crisis. As for the limitation, the scope of this paper is indeed country-specific and does not reflect on similarities or differences among European left populism. Still, a country-specific analysis is always a contribution towards a wider comparative project from where scholars and policy makers can draw useful generalizations.

Gateway Greece

'The Biggest Migration Crisis since WWII'

In 2015 almost one million ⁵ migrants and refugees crossed the Mediterranean Sea hoping to reach the shores of Greece, Italy and other European countries⁶. Greece in particular is at the moment the main gateway for almost 80% of this migratory inflow⁷. Irregular immigration in 2015 was four times higher than the inflow of migrants and refugees recorded in the course of 2014 ⁸. Still, thousands more arrive each day fleeing from oppression, conflict and deprivation in a rising tide of people that has been described as the 'biggest migration crisis since the Second World War'⁹.

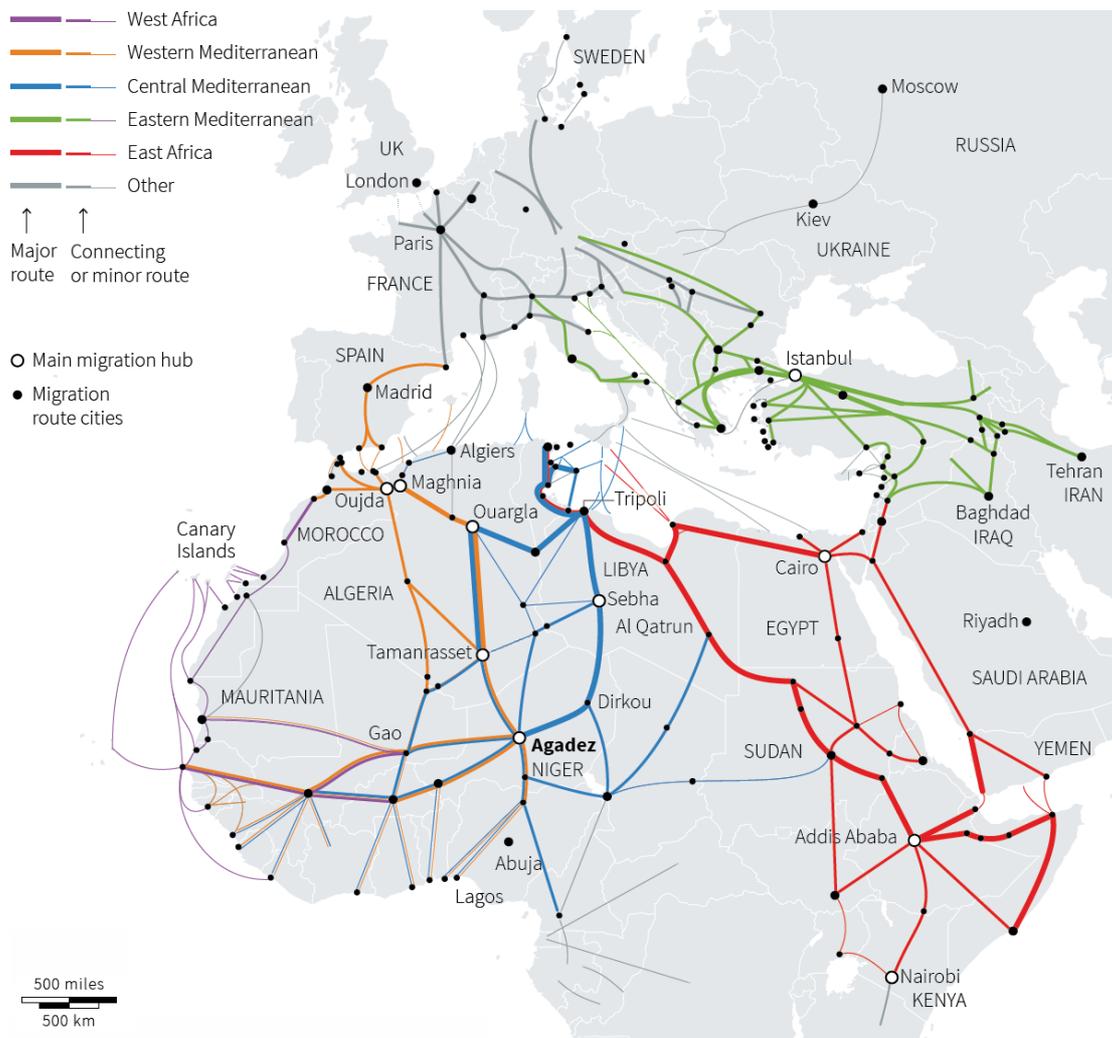
The origins of this migratory trend will probably have to be traced in 2011, on the onset of the so-called Arab Spring, when thousands of Tunisians went ashore the Italian island of Lampedusa seeking sanctuary from the political upheaval in their country. As the revolutionary wave swelled in the Arab countries of Northern Africa, more migrants and refugees from Libya and Egypt soon followed the Tunisians. Eventually, immigration from Northern Africa along with Iraqi and Afghan refugees fleeing their war-torn countries created the first peak of the migratory influx in 2012. Despite a temporary decrease of irregular border-crossings in 2013, the numbers have been rising steadily throughout 2014 to create the current state of emergency.

The most significant push factor for irregular migration in 2015 was the ongoing civil war in Syria – a bitter and messy conflict already in its fifth year – and the ensuing emergence of the ISIS terror state in the Middle East. Consequently, Syrians made up the largest percentage of migrants and refugees in 2015, with Afghans and Iraqis following from distance in the second and third places¹⁰. But the migratory stream heading for Europe includes also other Middle Eastern nationalities such as Pakistanis, as well as an increasing number of Sub-Saharan Africans, such as Eritreans, Nigerians and Somalis. This mixed migration has created a complex network of migratory flows (figure 1), which nonetheless followed three main routes from Africa and the Middle East into Europe via the Mediterranean, namely the Western, Central and Eastern Mediterranean routes.

The European Agency for the Management of Operational Cooperation at the External Borders of the Member States of the European Union, known as

Frontex, defines the Western Mediterranean route as the sea passage from North Africa to the Iberian Peninsula mostly traversed by Algerian and Moroccan nationals on their way to Spain and Southern France. The Central Mediterranean route pulls irregular migration from Northern Africa through Libya going ashore Italy and Malta. The Eastern Mediterranean route pulls irregular migration from Northern Africa through Libya going ashore Italy and Malta. The Eastern Mediterranean route refers to the passage of migrants and refugees from Turkish territory to Greece, Bulgaria and Cyprus.

Figure 1 – The Network of Migration Routes into Europe



Sources: European Commission; International Centre for Migration Policy Development (Map data); International Organization for Migration; Eurostat; UNHCR – Credit: Reuters

Sharing a several thousand kilometers long maritime and land border with Turkey, Greece occupies a very accessible position at the heart of the Eastern Mediterranean route. As a result, Greece is on the frontline of the migration and refugee crisis; in the course of the previous five years, Greece's geographic location has turned the country into Europe's main gateway.

Migration Trends and Policies, 2008 - 2014

Greece is not a destination for migrants and refugees, but a transit country on their way to other Member-States of the European Union; 90%¹¹ of the detected irregular migrants wanted to find asylum somewhere else in the EU, mostly in Germany and Sweden, for better assistance and employment opportunities¹². Considering that the country has been in economic recession for five consecutive years, during which unemployment has soared to almost 30%, it is only natural that the majority of migrants and refugees who cross the Mediterranean to Greece want to continue their journey to other EU Member States, either through the land route across the Western Balkans, or through ferry links to Italy or even by air to Greece's fellow Schengen Member-States.

For the years 2008 and 2009, the number of migrants using the Eastern Mediterranean route accounted for approximately 40% of all migrants arriving in the European Union¹³. The first surge in irregular migration across the Greek-Turkish land border was detected in 2010. Following the Greek government's request for assistance, Frontex deployed the first Rapid Border Intervention Teams (RABIT). The RABIT deployment had no lasting effect. By 2012, Greece had become the number one preferred point of entry into Europe: 51% of migrants and refugees entering the EU passed through the Greek-Turkish frontier¹⁴.

This increasing trend of migratory inflows (and the spectacular rise of the far right Golden Dawn) forced the previous Greek government to implement a number of policies with the aim to curb irregular migration. The Evros region along the land border with Turkey was identified as the main corridor of incoming migrants and refugees. Accordingly, the Greek government deployed a surplus of Hellenic police officers in the region (operation *Aspida*) and constructed a 12.5-kilometer barbed-wired fence. In the mainland, the Greek police commenced massive round ups and detentions of irregular migrants and refugees (operation *Xenios Zeus*); the government opened new detention centers aiming to increase its capacity for identification and deportation of migrants; the Greek Parliament voted an extension of the maximum length of detention period for migrants from 12 to 18 months and a reduction of the time allowed for irregular migrants to leave Greece if not

in detention centers (from 30 to seven days)¹⁵. These measures resulted in an overall decrease of border-crossings, but at substantial cost.

According to human rights groups and international organizations, the Greek policies of border and immigration management were detrimental to the basic rights and well being of the migrants and refugees. A reports from the Council of Europe expressed concerns for mistreatment during arrests by police, poor detention conditions and overcrowding of detention centers¹⁶; Human Rights Watch deplored the methods of arbitrary detention and ethnic profiling during raids in the Xenios Zeus operation¹⁷; the European Court of Human Rights ruled¹⁸ that Greece was in violation of Article 3 (prohibition of inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment) of the European Convention on Human Rights both because of the applicant's detention conditions and because of his living conditions in Greece¹⁹. Even from academic observers inside Greece, the impression was that the Greek asylum system has been non-functional for the past decade; and despite the new law on asylum policy in 2011, a backlog of unprocessed asylum applications left tens of thousands of migrants and refugees 'without documents, without assistance and without the means to make a living'²⁰.

In addition to these concerns for human rights violations, the Greek border management policies had another detrimental effect on the migratory trend. The increased border patrols and the fencing of the land border with Turkey produced a 'displacement effect' to the Bulgarian land border and the Greek sea border with Turkey²¹. From 2013 onwards, in a desperate bid to reach Europe, hundreds of thousands of migrants and refugees redirected their route from Turkey across the sea ashore the Greek islands of Kos, Chios, Lesbos, and Samos among others²². This dangerous crossing onboard unseaworthy vessels, rubber boats and dinghies exacted and still continues to exact a devastating toll on human lives.

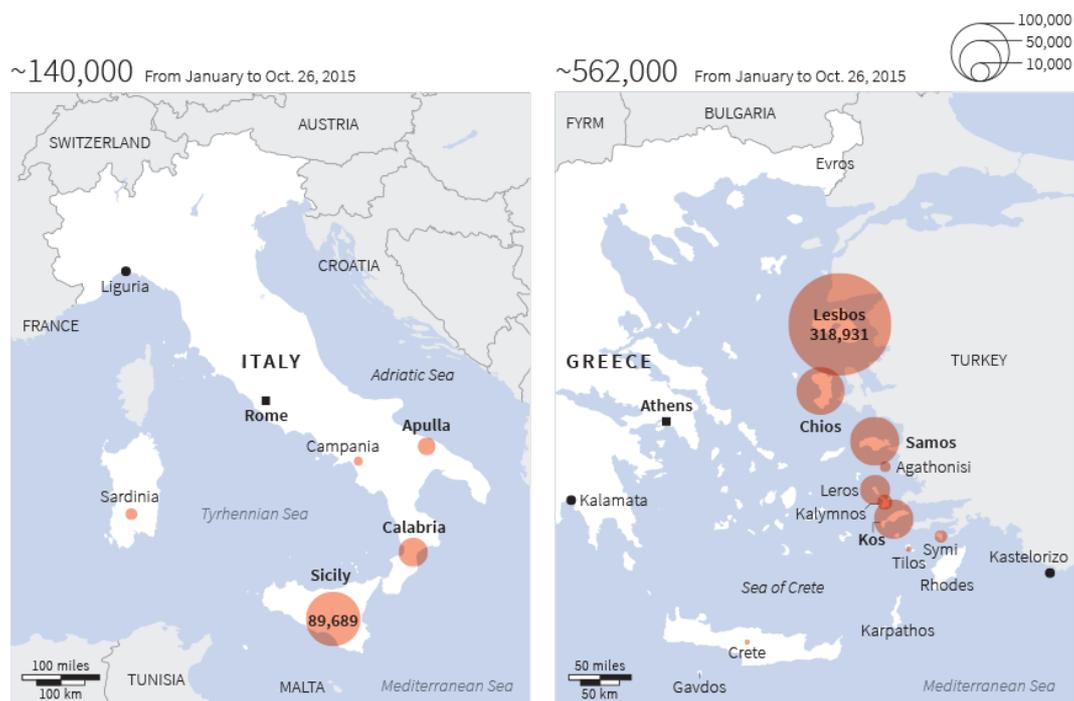
The questionable methods of border control and management will have to be considered within the context of the Greek economic crisis. The combination of recession and a notable increase in migration fueled the public's hostile attitude towards migrants and of course contributed to the bold rise of the Golden Dawn. The latter came to a standstill after a legal crackdown on criminal charges and thereafter it has been excluded from the mainstream media and by extent from the public debate. But that was not

enough to change public perceptions about the migrants. Small wonder that the new Migration Code (4251/2014) that the Greek parliament passed in 2014 did not go far enough in solving the problems of the Greek migration policies.

Although the new law detailed policies regarding the entry, stay, and integration of migrants from non-EU countries, it did not cover refugees and asylum seekers²³. It introduced several improvements and integrated standard European legislation on migration, but it was not meant to solve the problems related to refugees and asylum seekers and thus it was poorly equipped to manage increasing flows of irregular migration coming from the Middle East.

And indeed in 2015, the irregular migration directed to Europe through the Eastern Mediterranean route overtook by a significant margin the Central route, which by that time was the main route of migration inflows (Figure 2). Although most of the migrants were Syrian refugees fleeing the civil war, the migratory flows were once again mixed with economic migrants of various nationalities²⁴.

Figure 2 - Comparison Between Eastern and Central Mediterranean Routes



Sources: European Commission; International Centre for Migration Policy Development (Map data); International Organization for Migration; Eurostat; UNHCR – Credit: Reuters

2015: The SYRIZA Pull-Factor?

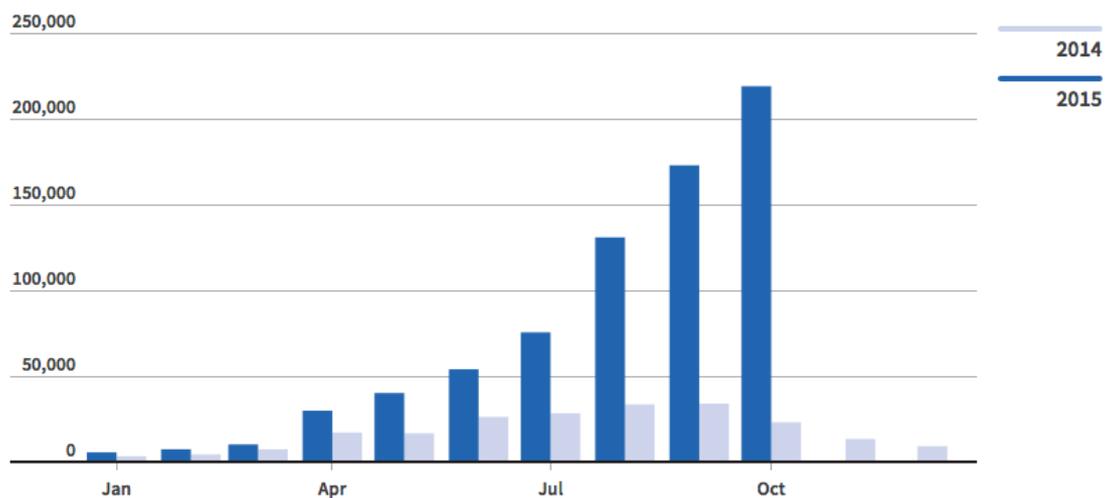
There should be no doubt that the decisive factors pushing immigration towards Europe are to be found in the messy battleground of the Middle East. The beginning of 2015 saw the Syrian war entering one of the most intensive phases; ISIS terror reigned in Syria and Iraq; the bloody siege of Kobane displaced the population of a whole city; in a desperate attempt to empty the opposition's recruiting pool, Assad loosened the restrictions on Syrians travelling abroad²⁵. At the same time however, the SYRIZA victory on January 25 enlivened the hopes of EU access for immigrants²⁶. It may have been obscured by its radical positions concerning the Euro-crisis, but SYRIZA's major shift in migration policy was always in the pipeline.

SYRIZA's intentions were made obvious before taking power, when Dimitrios Papadimoulis, a notable SYRIZA member and Vice-President of the European Parliament, proclaimed that the party would promote a 'common European immigration policy with obligations and rights'²⁷, while seeking additional funding for border control and management from the EU. Already from July 2013, the political declaration adopted in SYRIZA's inaugural congress called²⁸ for a radical change in Greek migration policy (paragraph 13/23) that should include a better protection of human rights, the closing down of detention centers and the 'legalization' of migrants and refugees without proper travel documents. A SYRIZA position paper circulated roughly a year later in September 2014²⁹ (four months before taking office) refined the declarations of the inaugural congress. The position paper referred to detention centers as 'concentration camps' (p. 4) and called for their replacement with areas of 'open hospitality' (p. 6); called for a 'permanent' and 'regular' legalization process for incoming and settled migrants (p. 7); proposed for the prohibition of repatriation procedures for migrants (p. 8). One of the immediate priorities of the future SYRIZA government would be to stop the detention of migrants without travel documents and to cease rounding up operations (Xenios Zeus) in the mainland (p. 10). And although, there was no explicit call to bring down the Evros fence, the document began with a reference that building a fence or employing Frontex is not an obstacle for 'those who seek hope' (p. 1). Thus, the overall intention was to institute a serious break with the migration policy adopted by the previous governments on humanitarian and ideological grounds.

The next section will discuss in detail how many of these initial intentions were translated into policies, considering that SYRIZA needed to form a coalition with ANEL, a right-wing socially conservative party with opposite views on immigration. SYRIZA did close down the detention centers, but the asylum process was barely touched. The Evros fence did not come down. However, even as the first months of the SYRIZA government were taken up by the negotiations with the EU for a new bailout agreement, there was indeed a notable departure from the Greek migration policy implemented in the previous years. Feeding on the failures of the previous governments to tackle the migration crisis, SYRIZA gave the impression of a major imminent change in the way Greece, as a gateway state to Europe, would treat migrants and refugees reaching its borders.

This impression seems to have played a part in the spectacular rise of illegal border crossings detected by Greek and European authorities in the entire Mediterranean from April 2015 onwards (figure 3), compared to the same period last year. Irregular immigration seems to have been surging to reach more than 200.000 detections only in October 2015, almost ten times more than the same month of the previous year.

Figure 3 - Migrant and refugee arrivals to Europe by sea

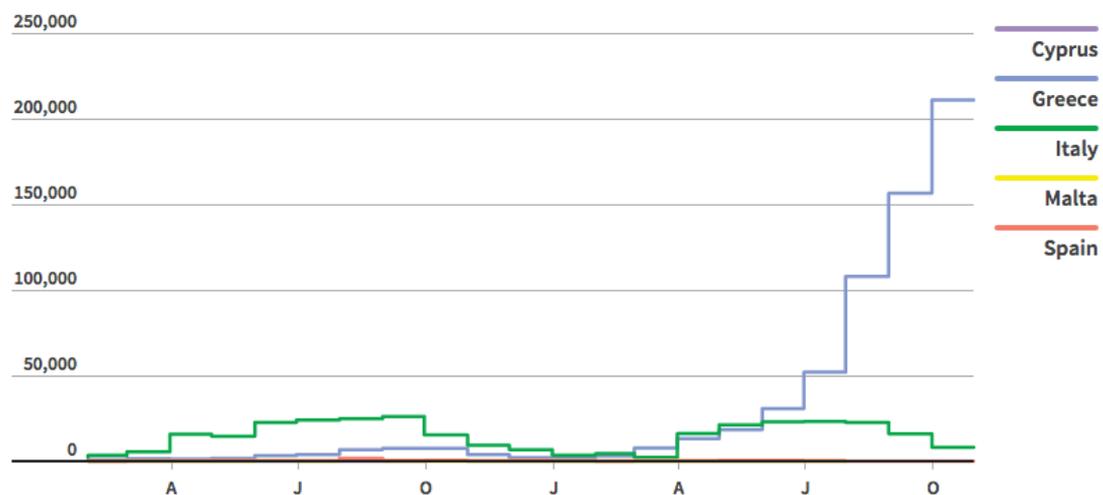


Source: European Commission; International Centre for Migration Policy Development (Map data); International Organization for Migration; Eurostat; UNHCR – Credit: Reuters

SYRIZA is for sure not causing the surge in immigration flows through the Mediterranean; conflict, poverty and terrorism in the Middle East are doing that. But, the numbers and trends seem to suggest that a correlation could

be mentioned between SYRIZA’s pro-immigration attitude and the fact that Greece has become, by far, the most preferred entry point in Europe for migrants and refugees from the Middle East. A fact that is all the more evident in the notable increase of immigration influx in Greece, in the first half of 2015, compared to other countries of the Mediterranean (figure 4). What is more woeful (for the safety of the migrants and refugees) is that this trend continued unabated for the rest of the 2015, despite the bad weather conditions during the winter.

Figure 4 - Destination Countries in the Mediterranean



Source: European Commission; International Centre for Migration Policy Development (Map data); International Organization for Migration; Eurostat; UNHCR – Credit: Reuters

The correlation of SYRIZA’s policy with the notable increase in irregular immigration, although implied by the numbers, it is not within the aims of this paper. SYRIZA’s migration policy as a pull factor for immigration inflows need to be studied elsewhere based on statistical evidence. Here, the focus is on the narrative that SYRISA used in order to justify its migration policy. The populist attitude of both SYRIZA governments towards immigration in 2015, in its rupture with the past governments, combined a strong internationalism (open borders, no person is ‘illegal’) with typical populist rhetoric raged against domestic and international elites (e.g. the moral responsibility of EU and Western ‘elites’). Ideological reasons notwithstanding, the ulterior motive of such a narrative was to achieve a relaxation of Greece’s bailout terms. The following sections will examine in detail the unfolding of SYRIZA’s pro-immigration rhetoric and policy and its reception on the European level.

The SYRIZA Gambit

'No Migrant is Illegal'

The migration crisis has sparked an international debate about the proper use of the words 'migrant' and 'refugee' or the appropriateness of the word 'illegal' to describe people arriving in Europe through irregular channels of migration. At the international level, a refugee is a person who 'owing to a well-founded fear of persecution for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinions, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country'³⁰. Accordingly, refugees are protected by international law: refugees should not be expelled or returned since their life and freedom could be threatened in their countries of origin; they are entitled to apply for asylum; the receiving states are obliged to ensure respect for their basic human rights, dignity and safety.

Quite the opposite, no universally accepted definition for "migrant" exists. The term 'migrant' could be understood as covering all cases where 'the decision to migrate is taken freely by the individual concerned, for reasons of 'personal convenience' and without intervention of an external compelling factor'³¹. For the migrants the motivation for moving is the hope of a better life, of finding work, or in some cases of better education. In any of these cases, the migrants are not under direct threat of persecution or death. In other words, unlike refugees who face impediments to their return, the migrants could safely return to their homes.

Another point of controversy in the 'battle over words to describe migrants'³² debate concerns the use 'illegal' to designate migrants who do not fulfill the administrative requirements for entering a country and, therefore, their movement takes place outside the regulatory norms of the sending, transit and receiving countries. Again, there is no clear or universally accepted definition of irregular migration. But, the use of 'illegal migrants' is considered to be an inaccurate and harmful description³³. Indeed, there is a long list of key international organizations and bodies asking for the adoption of the term 'irregular migration' or 'undocumented migrants'. This list includes the UN General Assembly requesting 'the UN organs and specialized agencies concerned to utilize in all official documents the term

“non-documented” or “irregular migrant workers”³⁴ and the Council of Europe preferring to ‘use the term “irregular migrant” as it ‘is more neutral and does not carry, for example, the stigmatization of the term “illegal”’³⁵. The European Parliament called on the EU institutions and Member States to stop using the term “illegal immigrants”, which has very negative connotations, and instead to refer to “irregular/undocumented migrants”³⁶, whereas the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights stated that the term “illegal immigrants” should be avoided and replaced by the internationally accepted definitions of “irregular” or “undocumented” migrants, which more accurately describe the situation³⁷.

Greek politics was not left untouched by this debate and SYRIZA did have a rather conscious left radical stance on the designation of migrants. For the inaugural declaration of SYRIZA³⁸, the migratory inflow was ‘the result of the neoliberal, capitalist globalization’, which produces ‘victims of war’ and deprives people from the ‘basic means for survival’; migrants and refugees are then modern equivalent of the ‘damnés de la terre’³⁹. With this typical left-leaning internationalism SYRIZA recognized the migration crisis strictly as a ‘class-struggle’ and a matter of humanitarian concern.

Although in subsequent position papers the migrants were distinguished from refugees and asylum seekers, the public discourse of SYRIZA kept the distinctions blurred. To some extent, Syrian refugees fleeing their country because of the civil war were equalized to Kosovar, Pakistani or Nigerian migrants that were moving to Europe for economic reasons. Nevertheless, migrants and refugees are two terms that have distinct meanings and carry different legal obligations on behalf of the receiving state: confusing them leads to problems for both migrants and refugees. Blurring the two terms takes attention away from the special legal protections refugees need. It can undermine public support for refugees and the institution of asylum at a time when more refugees need such protection than ever before. That said, SYRIZA was for sure one of the first political parties in Greece to protest against the use of ‘illegal immigrants’ to describe the influx of people from Africa and the Middle East.

From the beginning of 2015, the Deputy Minister for Immigration Policy, Mrs. Tasia Christodouloupoulou (who was also a well-known human rights lawyer in left-leaning circles) let it be known that her primary objective was to stop the

usage of the word 'illegal' describing the migration inflow. SYRIZA's next move was to close down the detention centers opened by the previous governments. In early February, Deputy Interior Minister for Public Order and Civil Protection, Mr. Yiannis Panousis visited the 'Amygdaleza' detention center, following the suicide of one of the detainees. 'Detention centers - we're finished with them', Mr. Panousis told the reporters waiting for him outside. 'I'm here to express my shame, not as a minister but as a human being', and he continued 'I couldn't believe what I saw. I really could not believe it. This must change and it must change immediately'⁴⁰. Shortly after, in collaboration with the Ministry of Immigration Policy, Mr. Panousis closed down Amygdaleza and released the detained migrants on the streets of Athens.

At that time, the deputy minister for immigration policy announced that the migrants would be accommodated in 'open centers of hospitality' created in empty state buildings, abandoned military camps and vacant apartments. And if that were not enough, then the migrants would be put 'in the ministry building hallways'. But the problem with closing down the detention centers was of course that there was no infrastructure ready to house migrants and refugees in any other way. By April 2015, the result of this policy was a spectacular increase in the number of migrants and refugees living in even worse conditions on the streets and pavements of downtown Athens and other major cities. Simultaneously, the unexpected surge of people arriving in the Greek islands only made things worse, in the sense that they had to remain where they came ashore because there was no infrastructure in the mainland that could accommodate them – either as 'guests' or as 'detainees'.

In a televised session of a meeting of elected officials from local authorities, after repeated complaints by Athens Mayor Giorgos Kaminis that migrants cannot be simply set loose in the capital's downtown areas, the reply of minister Christodouloupoulou was there were no migrants in the center of Athens – they were simply out during the day to 'catch some sun'.

Eventually, the SYRIZA government would build a facility to accommodate migrants and refugees. The 'open hospitality infrastructure' of 'Elaiona' with a capacity for 700 people, welcomed the first refugees in August 2015. Plans for two more additional refugee camps were announced in September and

one month later works began to increase the capacity of Elaionia by 500 more places until the end of 2015. But that was too little, too late.

'It's all Europe's Fault'

It has already been mentioned how the inaugural declaration of SYRIZA perceived the migratory stream as 'the result of the neoliberal, capitalist globalization'. This mix of anti-capitalism, anti-globalization rhetoric did not diverge from the leitmotifs of populist Left in Europe, which is characterized by an aversion to the US, the global economic system and the imperialist 'West' in general. The migration crisis was an ideal opportunity for SYRIZA to recast radical socialist and communist motifs.

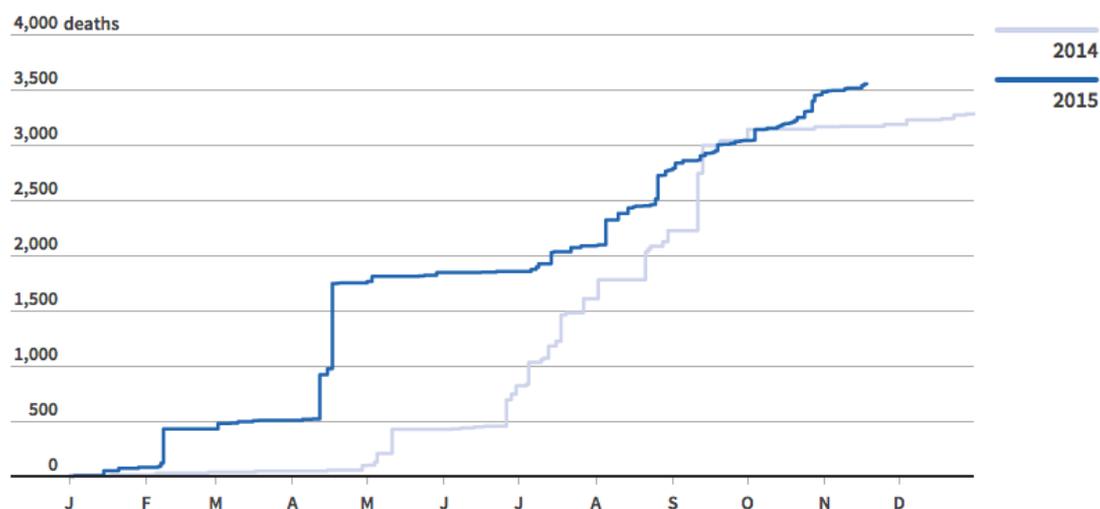
This is what happened when in September 2013 – less than two months after SYRIZA's inaugural congress – the first resolution of the newly established Central Committee of the party was vehement against a possible western intervention in the Syrian civil war. The resolution criticized the US as well as major EU member-states for supporting an Islamist and extremist opposition in Syria. Even though the Central Committee deplored Assad's authoritarian regime, the resolution rejected the Western 'imperialist and neo-colonialist strategies' in the region. NATO was cited in particular as a 'dangerous tool of intervention and destruction of the new world order'. Accordingly, a SYRIZA government, the resolution said, should aim at the permanent closure of NATO military bases and the exit of Greece from NATO. The resolution stated that a 'bloodbath' in Syria caused by 'imperialist interventions' will create another 'refugee wave' towards Europe and Greece. In which case, Greece should host the refugees in open areas – not in detention centers that need to be closed down and emptied from all refugees *and* migrants.

The idea that Europe and the West was to blame for the war in Syria and for the ensuing migration and refugee crisis was a motif that was used throughout the first year of SYRIZA's government. When the Greek and European publics were shocked by the images of hundreds of dead migrants and refugees floating in the Mediterranean, this reference to Europe's moral responsibility became even more powerful and evocative. In 2015, migrant deaths in the Mediterranean reached more than 3.600, despite life-saving actions by Europe's governments and civil society⁴¹.

The day after the most dramatic of these deplorable events, the drowning of the three-year-old Syrian-Kurdish boy in the Aegean Sea, whose death made global headlines, SYRIZA's Prime Minister, Alexis Tsipras released a recorded message concerning the migration crisis. 'Yesterday's picture of a three-year old, deceased in the Aegean Sea', Alexis Tsipras said, 'is a powerful punch in the stomach for all of us – and especially for Europe'. Tsipras accused Europe of initial indifference and embarrassment in front of a 'world drama'. A drama, he said, that was 'created by the erratic foreign policy and the military interventions from the West'⁴².

On behalf of SYRIZA, Tsipras seems to have spearheaded this attack on European foreign policy concerning Syria and the wider region of the Middle East. A dramatic increase in fatalities during the months of April, August and September (About 800 perished in a single shipwreck in April, see figure 5) was a perfect opportunity to mount the pressure on EU concerning its moral responsibility in the migration and refugee crisis.

Figure 5 - Fatalities of Migrants and Refugees in the Mediterranean



Sources: European Commission; International Centre for Migration Policy Development (Map data); International Organization for Migration; Eurostat; UNHCR – Credit: Reuters

In one instance, after a meeting of the Greek government on the migration crisis early in August, Prime Minister Tsipras declared that even though the host countries such as Greece and Italy are called exclusively to address the enormous problem, the aggravation of the migration crisis is 'a result of the military intervention by the West in these countries and particularly in Syria

and Libya, previously in Iraq and Afghanistan⁴³. In another, Tsipras delivered some of the hardest-hitting comments yet accusing the EU for sidestepping its responsibilities over the migrant crisis. 'I feel ashamed as a member of this European leadership, both for the inability of Europe in dealing with this human drama' Tsipras told the Greek parliament during prime ministers' question time, and he referred back to the case of the drowned three-year old, '[certain European countries] shed hypocritical crocodile tears [...] for the dead children on the shores of the Aegean'⁴⁴.

Tsipras' handling of the migration crisis and the alleged moral responsibility of Europe for the mess in the Middle East became eventually a major contention issue in the September Greek parliamentary elections. During his election campaign, Tsipras did not spare the usual accusations. In his final electoral rally he stated that Europe's attitude in the refugee crisis represents a deeper crisis, a break from its tradition, ideals and core values. 'When the Mediterranean turns into a watery grave, and the Aegean Sea is washing dead children up on its shores', he said in an evocative tone, 'the very concept of a united Europe is in crisis, as is European culture'⁴⁵. Then he went on to compare the migration crisis with the Euro-crisis: 'If a united Europe only respects rules of fiscal discipline ... and leaves each member state to its own devices in a major crisis, this is not a Europe of its founders, and nor can it have a future'.

According to Tsipras and SYRIZA, the migration crisis was just another turn of the screw for European solidarity. And it is obvious that a left-radical activism against the capitalist, neoliberal forces of the globalization is an extension of SYRIZA's clash with Europe over terms of the bailout agreement during the previous months, which was also portrayed as an ideological crisis caused by capitalist greed and neoliberal policies. SYRIZA attempted to exploit this connection further; after the Greek government accepted an involuntary bailout agreement in July – that SYRIZA seemed reluctant to implement in full – the migration crisis would be given even more prominence in SYRIZA's rhetoric. First to compensate for the concessions that the radical party made in the course of the negotiations and second to reapply some pressure to the EU for some kind of economic relief or loosening of the terms of the bailout agreement. As this argument would go, the migration crisis is a European problem, not a Greek one; or at least it is too big to be resolved by one or

two member-states. Collective action is needed and solidarity must be extended to the member-states that lift the largest share of the burden – especially if their budgets are strained at the same time by an economic crisis and severe austerity measures.

'Pay or Pray'

The intention to use the migration crisis in order to leverage some form of financial relief – extra funds or relaxed bailout terms – or simply to claim a moral high ground was evident from the beginning of SYRIZA's term in power. Following its first electoral win in January 2015, SYRIZA was eager to use the so-called 'geopolitical importance' of Greece as a bargaining chip in the hard negotiations with the EU on the bailout deal. Alexis Tsipras and several members of his cabinet reminded everyone that the Greek crisis was about more than the money – it was a matter of regional security, stability and the safeguarding of EU's unity. Money could be found elsewhere. If Europe would not pay, the SYRIZA narrative went, then Russia or China or whatever combination of emerging world countries could finance the Greek debt. Shortly after forming the government, the Greek foreign minister implied that Greece would block further EU sanctions against Russia and went on to visit Moscow.

Around the same time, Defense Minister Panos Kammenos, leader of far-right ANEL party and SYRIZA's junior coalition partner in government, introduced Greece's 'Plan B' of acquiring funding from a source other than the EU and IMF. At the same time, Deputy Foreign Minister Nikos Chountis (a former MEP) stated that Russia had already offered economic help, which would be considered only when all other options were 'exhausted'⁴⁶. In time, SYRIZA's Russian mannerism created a media hype concerning the strategic implications a GREXIT for Europe and the West⁴⁷, the geopolitical dimension of the Greek crisis⁴⁸ and Tsipras' détente with Putin⁴⁹.

An essential part of this geopolitical argument was the attempt to connect the Euro-crisis with the migration crisis and bargain with Greece's position as a gateway to Europe. This is not a hypothesis or an intent, which was read between the lines of official statements: Kammenos did not hold back neither his words nor his intentions when he threatened to send migrants including jihadists in Western Europe, first published in the Italian newspaper La Repubblica⁵⁰. 'If they deal a blow to Greece, then they should know the

migrants will get papers to go to Berlin', Kammenos threatened. 'If Europe leaves us in the crisis, we will flood it with migrants, and it will be even worse for Berlin if in that wave of millions of economic migrants there will be some jihadists of the Islamic State too'. As if he wanted to make sure his message was clear, he declared that EU's passport free "Schengen" travel zone left the Eurozone vulnerable⁵¹. 'If they strike us, we will strike them', he concluded⁵². Later, the Greek vice minister Giannis Panousis issued a similar warning while the Greek Foreign Minister, Nikos Kotzias, warned that Greece could become the entry gate for 'millions of immigrants and thousands of jihadists' if the country's economy collapses.

The Greek threat was not empty. SYRIZA had already closed down the detention centers that the previous government has opened, *page 16*, while the new centers of open hospitality were not yet functioning. Migrants and refugees were amassing on the streets of Athens. The government was shocked with a scandal in March that concerned an official document (allegedly a ministerial circular) stipulating a change in migrant detention policy: the circular specified that undocumented migrants and refugees entering Greece would not be detained. Instead, they would be given a period of thirty days to leave Greek territory. After the initial outrage – the circular was in full breach of the Schengen and Dublin agreements – Minister for Public Order and Citizens' Protection Yannis Panousis ordered the withdrawal and cancellation of the circular claiming that he never approved of such a document. In April, Minister of State Alekos Flampouraris, speaking on national television declared that the only solution would be to give Greek passports to the migrants and to allow them to travel to Western Europe⁵³.

Subsequently, for the quarter of April to June, Frontex reported record numbers of transit migrants and refugees through the Western Balkans who entered the EU via Greece, and which suggested that the migration pressure recorded in the Aegean was also reflected in the Western Balkans. In fact, Frontex recorded a 663% increase of illegal crossings in the Western Balkans, compared to the same period in 2014⁵⁴. This unauthorized migratory movement inspired the Greek Deputy Minister for Immigration, Tasia Christodouloupoulou to announce on national radio, rather amusingly, that the migrants are no longer 'catching some sun' in Athens but instead they 'disappear'. 'There is enough room for those who wish to be accommodated.

The rest just go along their way', she mused. The Minister said she preferred to speak with 'insinuations', because some things cannot be said in public – Europe was listening⁵⁵.

This blend of non-detention policies with open or insinuated threats seem to suggest that if SYRIZA did not facilitate the movement of migrants and refugees towards Western Europe, at least it turned a blind eye to their irregular transit through Greek territory. Which is to say that either way, consciously or unconsciously, the Greek government acted in breach of the Schengen and Dublin agreements and in clear disregard for the obligations of the country as a member of the EU. This conclusion triggered a trend of 'fence building' along the Western Balkan migratory route and drew heavy criticism from Germany and other EU member-states. Since the second parliamentary elections in Greece, which resulted in another clear SYRIZA victory, the narrative of Alexis Tsipras and his left radical party seems to have gone full circle returning to a defense of an open border policy on humanitarian grounds. 'Greece can guard its borders perfectly and has been doing so for thousands of years (sic)' the new Greek migration minister, Yannis Mouzalas said in a recent interview, 'but [Greece guards its borders] against its enemies. The refugees are not our enemies'. 'Resettlement is the required and the most appropriate solution,' Mr. Mouzalas continued 'But Europe is responding slowly to the problem'⁵⁶.

The EU Reaction

Hot Spots and Relocation

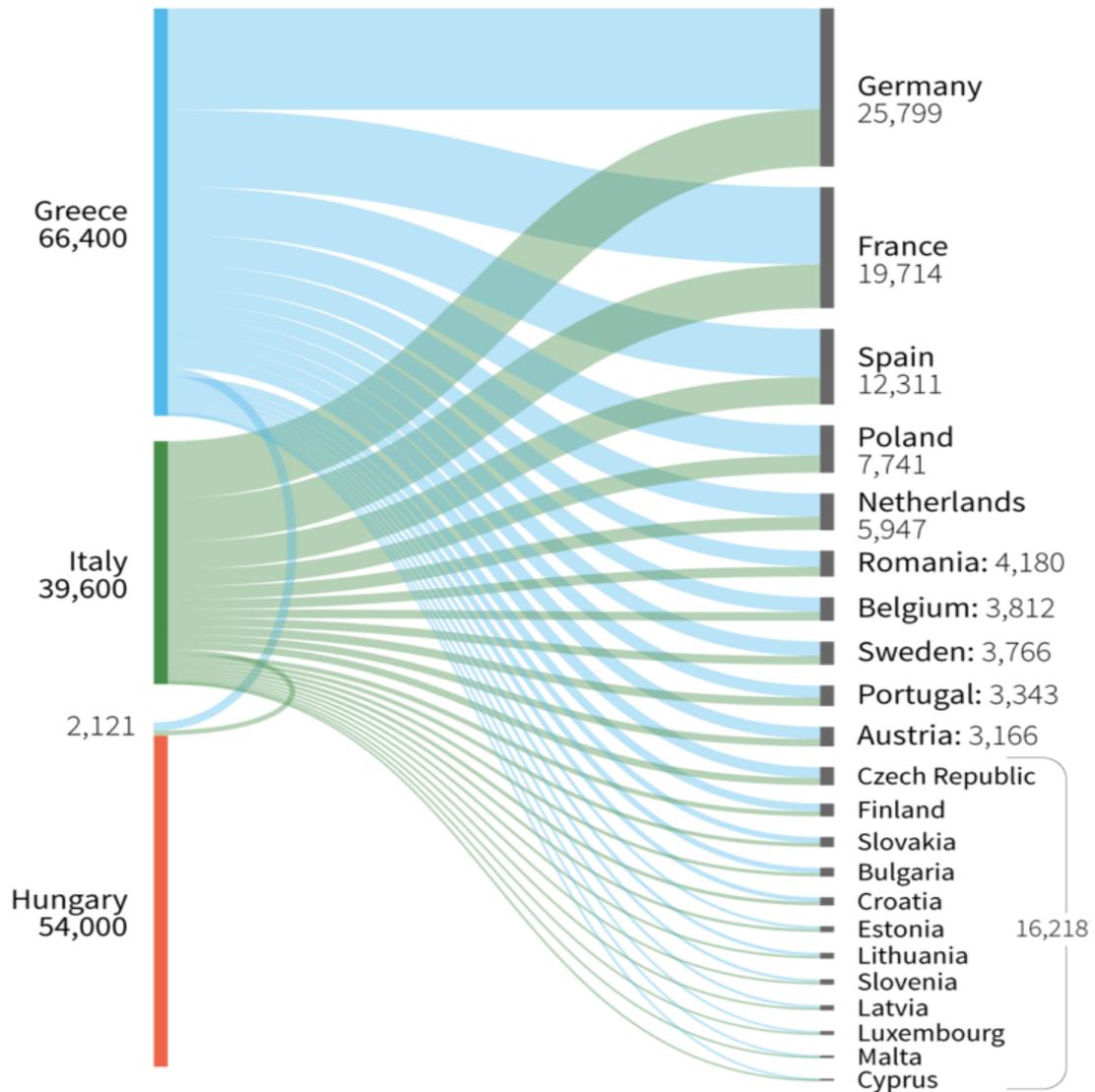
In the beginning, the erratic behavior of the SYRIZA government was lightly dismissed. Following the open threat of the Greek Defense Minister, Panos Kammenos, the Austrian Interior Minister, Johanna Mikl-Leitner, was right to reply that 'there are very clear rules in the European Union, and these migrants will be sent immediately back to Greece'. Dutch Prime Minister, Mark Rutte referred to the same threats as 'idiotic', 'too bizzare and nonsensical'⁵⁷. But the reality proved to be much more complicated, especially considering the relative inefficiency of the Greek authorities to control and duly register an inflow of almost 700.000 migrants and refugees who arrived in Greek territory.

Yet, the overall EU response to the migration and refugee crisis was rather halfhearted and seemed sometimes to be completely ad-hoc. At most times, it was focused more on controlling and securing the external EU borders than devising a broad strategy to deal with the migrant and refugee crisis. For instance, the European Agenda for Migration, a Commission proposal for dealing with all aspect of the crisis, came as late as 13 May 2015⁵⁸. The first set of implementing measures came two weeks later. The Agenda included a proposal to activate, for the first time, the emergency response mechanism under Article 78(3) of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union, to set up an emergency relocation scheme to assist Italy and Greece. Relocation was a plan to distribute among Member States (figure 6) 120.000 refugees who were legally entitled to international protection⁵⁹. Irregular migrants remained the responsibility of the receiving nation according to the Dublin agreement.

Also the communication described the new 'Hotspot' approach, according to which the European Asylum Support Office, Frontex and Europol would support frontline Member States in identifying, registering and fingerprinting incoming migrants. Refugees would be immediately channeled into an asylum procedure, whereas Frontex would assist Member States in coordinating the return of irregular migrants. The hotspot approach came with an additional EUR 60 million in emergency funding to 'support the

reception and capacity and to provide healthcare to migrants in the Member States under particular pressure⁶⁰.

Figure 6 - The Relocation Scheme



Source: European Commission – Credit: Reuters

The Turkish Counter

Throughout 2015, but especially after the summer months, when SYRIZA’s unreliable migration policy seemed to have backfired, the Greek government was keen to remind Europe that Turkey is partially to blame for the overwhelming surge in irregular immigration and refugee crossings of the Aegean Sea. The argument was, rightly, that Turkey is the main transit state for migratory flows and therefore responsible for controlling these flows

through its territory. This accusation, however accurate, was perhaps also a way for Greece to deflect some of the heavy criticism concerning its own inefficiency in registering the migrants and refugees and controlling their drift to the Western Balkan route and ultimately to Western Europe.

In September after the second parliamentary elections, the new Minister for Immigration, Yannis Mouzalas, was quoted saying that 'Turkey is the door and Greece is the corridor; Europe should not treat Greece as the door'⁶¹. With every opportunity, Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras never failed to remind Turkey's responsibility in managing the migration flows and to ask for Turkey to be invited to participate in the EU summits on migration. In one instance, he said that 'everybody knows that at the end of a [migratory] corridor, there is an entrance; if we cannot agree with the country guarding this entrance [Turkey], then it will be difficult to find a solution'. 'We will follow through with our commitments to establish five hotspots by the end of the year', he continued, 'but I am wondering what will happen with the responsibilities among other countries on the migration issue'⁶². In another he repeated that 'Turkey plays a major part, a key role in the current [migration] developments' and he concluded by saying that Greece would be supporting an agreement for the 'substantial control of the refugee flows from the neighboring country to Greece'⁶³ – or that Europe's cooperation with Turkey has the potential to 'stop the refugee flows' and save lives in the Aegean⁶⁴.

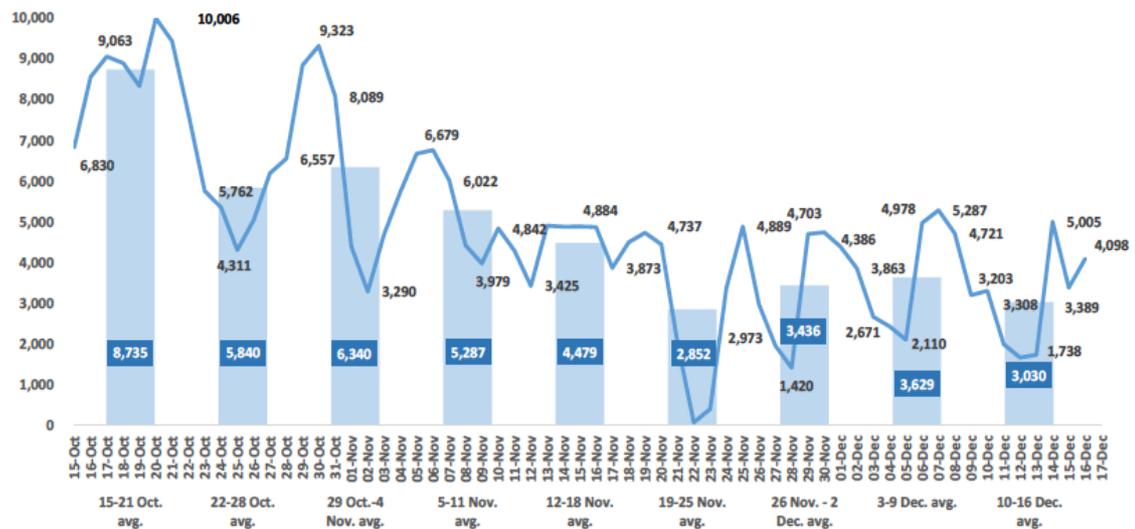
Greece's cooperation with Turkey seemed to have featured high in the Tsipras' agenda, however, when the European Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker proposed that the two countries should set up joint border patrols, he was scorned by SYRIZA ministers for diluting the Greek sovereignty in the Aegean. 'This was an unfortunate statement by Mr. Juncker,' said the Greek migration minister. 'The joint patrols have never been on the table. They have no point anyway, as they wouldn't help ease the situation'⁶⁵. This incident foretold of the futility of harboring a bilateral agreement between Greece and Turkey; subsequently, the President of the European Council announced in twitter later the same month that he had called a EU-Turkey Summit on 29 November 2015.

The weekend before the summit, as if to illustrate Turkey's critical role in the migration crisis, a sharp decrease was recorded in the number of arrivals to the Greek Aegean islands. Only 155 and 336 people crossed the Aegean on

22 and 23 November⁶⁶ – the lowest number since the beginning of the crisis. The trend reversed to ‘normal’ right afterwards with some 8.500 people crossing on Monday and Tuesday (figure 8).

Figure 7 - Daily Estimates of Arrivals 15 Oct - 17 Dec

Greece



Source: IOM – Credit: IOM

In the summit’s statement, the EU and Turkey agreed⁶⁷ to ‘re-energize’ Turkey’s accession process by opening chapter 17 of the negotiations (a concession presaged in the conclusions of the informal EU council of 15 October 2015⁶⁸) and to reinforce high-level dialogue through structured meetings and the organization of summits twice a year. The EU committed also to providing an initial three billion financial aid to Turkey to help it cope with the humanitarian aspects of the refugee crisis.

Instead of a mere invitation to a EU summit, as the Greeks expected, the EU had convened a full-scale diplomatic occasion where everyone, including Turkey, was bound to win some and lose some. On the one hand Turkey assumed a formal obligation to do its part in stemming the migration flows, but on the other it gained the revival of its dormant accession process, which was suppressed by a Cypriot and (informal) Greek veto. Turkey’s role in the EU decision-making process was formally upgraded; EU-Turkey cooperation was recognized as a foundational component in the EU crisis management architecture. As if this was not enough, financial aid – long awaited from the Greek side – was extended instead to Turkey.

The Schengen GREXIT

Finally, the Council decisions necessary for the implementation of the relocation plan were taken on 14⁶⁹ and 22⁷⁰ September. It is not difficult to imagine how crucial was the hotspot approach to the implementation of the relocation plan. In order for it to work, every migrant entering the EU needs to be registered, fingerprints need to be listed in the Eurodac database, with the aim to distinguish between the refugees legally entitled to international protection (and thus participate in the relocation) and the irregular migrants who will remain in the country of entry according to the Dublin protocols. However, even by December 2015, the hotspots in the Aegean were not fully functional and the migrants and refugees that were heading to the Western Balkan route were, by and large, unregistered. Such a realization raised many a concern about the integrity and indeed the viability of the Schengen area.

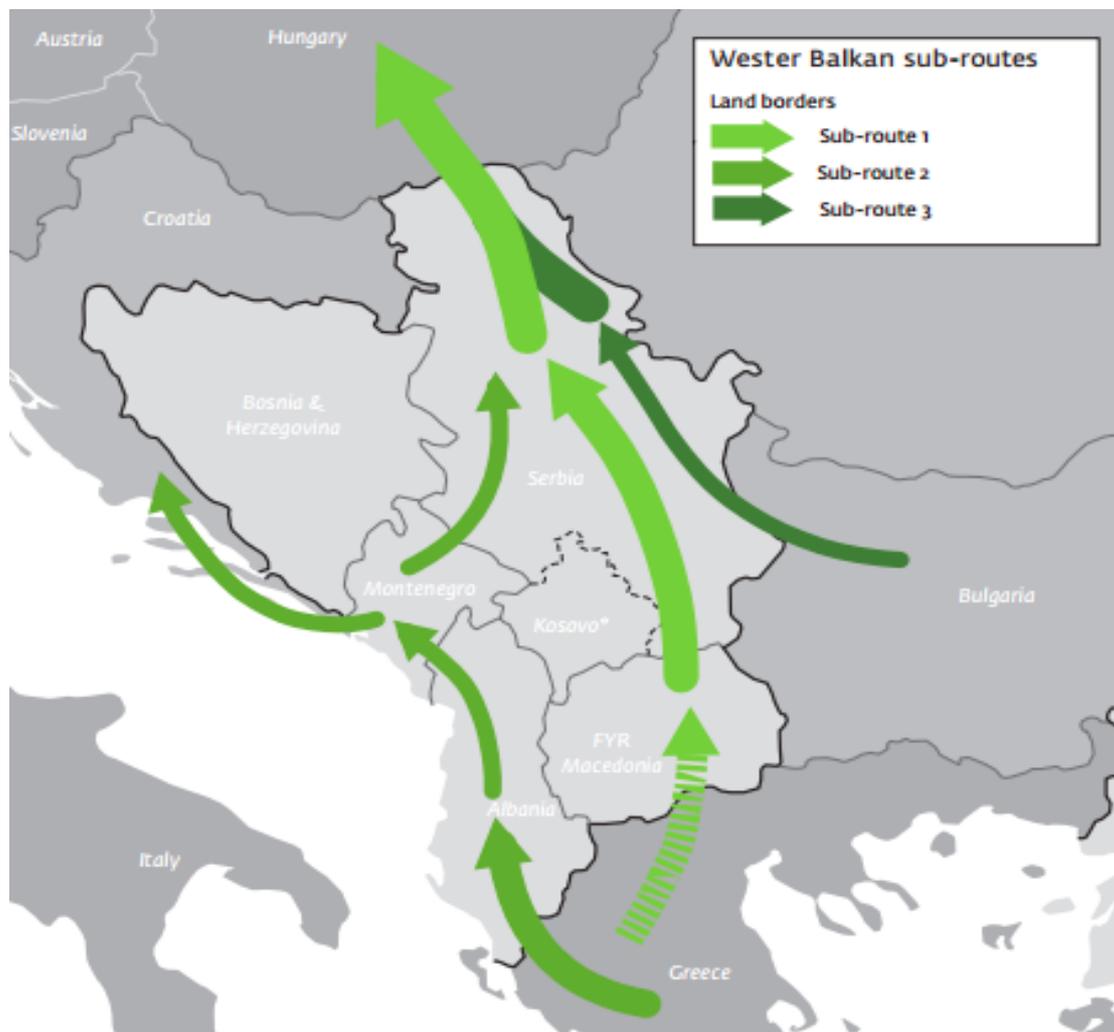
Consequently, starting from the summer months, the countries along the Western Balkan route responded by closing borders and erecting fences (or adopting plans to erect fences). Hungary was the first to do so; Croatia, Austria and Slovenia followed. FYROM, the main entry point for migrants and refugees from Greece into the Western Balkan route (figure 7) was the latest addition to this list. As a result, thousands of unregistered migrants were found trapped at the Greek frontier with FYROM.

The Leaders' Statement⁷¹ welcomed Greece's intention to increase reception capacity to 30.000 places by the end of the year and committed to supporting Greece and UNHCR to provide rent subsidies and host family programmes for at least 20.000 more. It also included a rather vague reference to financial support for Greece and the UNHCR. Quite the opposite, the statement was explicit about a significant strengthening of Frontex presence and support to Greece for 'registering and fingerprinting activities' in the Aegean Sea (Joint Operation Poseidon). On the frontier with FYROM, Frontex should also assist Greece in the registration of refugees and migrants who 'have not yet been registered in the country'. In this respect, the plan mentioned the need for immediate bilateral border-related confidence-building measures between Greece and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia.

The Western Balkan summit delivered a subtle tick-off for SYRIZA's approach to the refugee crisis. It confirmed allegations that not all refugees and migrants arriving in Greece were registered according to Schengen

obligations (Eurodac in particular). The statement reaffirmed as well that all migrants that were not refugees (basically those who did not come from Syria, Afghanistan or Iraq), they would be returned to the country of first entry according to the Dublin regulation. President Juncker did not leave room for any doubt on this matter: ‘We have made very clear that the policy of simply waving people through must be stopped’⁷², he said after the meeting.

Figure 8 - The Western Balkan Route(s)



Source: Frontex – Credit: Frontex

In November, following the conclusions of the meeting, the head of Frontex Klaus Resler sent a letter to the Greek national authorities to set up an operational force that will assist with the implementation of the summit’s plan. In the letter Resler said that Frontex is ready to help Greece with registration of refugees and migrants who are not already registered in the country in order to avoid the departure of those who do not fulfill Schengen

requirements. Part of the mission of the operational force would be to conduct border surveillance activities in the nearby area, to ensure that people do not attempt to circumvent controls. Following the respective reference in the Leader's Statement, Resler requested the agreement of the Greek national authorities on the participation of observers from third countries, particularly FYROM, in the operational force.

Three days later, in November 30, the deputy Minister for Migration Yiannis Mouzalas Immigration Policy and Deputy Citizen Protection Minister Nikos Toskas sent a joint letter to EU Commissioner for Migration, Dimitris Avramopoulos, which enclosed the letter received from the head of Frontex. The two members of the Greek government expressed surprise and disappointment with the proposals of Frontex, which could not be accepted by Greece. The two ministers deemed the proposal as being too broad and falling outside Frontex competences.

The Greek refusal to sanction the Frontex operational force was received as a refusal to follow through with commitments made in the Leaders meeting for the Western Balkan route in October. And it was met with outrage in Europe and particularly in Germany. One day later, in December 1, the *Financial Times* published an extensive article referring to the risk of Greece's expulsion from Schengen (also citing the letter of the two Greek ministers to the European Commissioner)⁷³. The *Financial Times* wrote that 'given the severity of the crisis, EU officials are vexed by Athens's refusal to call in a special mission from Frontex, the EU border agency [...] and its failure to revamp its system for registering refugees'.

The Schengen GREXIT was quickly avoided in the subsequent of Justice and Home Affairs Council on 3 December. The Council meeting outcome stated that Greece had 'agreed an operational plan with Frontex for a new operation at the Greek border with the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, where the agency will assist with the registration of migrants'⁷⁴. The Luxembourgian Presidency stated that the Schengen 'acquis' must be protected for all its members and that 'everyone expressed a strong wish to ensure that free movement within Schengen is preserved. But Schengen will only work if the rules are respected'. Nevertheless, this situation with unregistered migrants allowed to cross borders and Greece's refusal to sanction a Frontex operation in its territory has provoked a more profound change in how the EU will enforce Schengen provisions in the future.

That this change was underway it was already evident in a letter to Migration Commissioner Avramopoulos jointly signed by the French and German interior ministers Bernard Cazeneuve and Thomas de Maizière dated 3 December. 'It is clear that the control of common external borders should be rapidly reinforced,' they said and called for a 'substantial reinforcement' of the EU's Frontex border agency in cases of serious deficiencies in the control of external borders. As a result, the European Commission was compelled to present a proposal for a set of measures to manage the EU's external borders and protect the Schengen area. The proposal, which was presented on December 15, included a regulation for the establishment of the European Border and Coast Guard. The latter will replace and reinforce the Frontex mandate as an agency that will share responsibility for border management with the Member-States. The most important – and most contentious – aspect of the new agency is that it may be given the right to intervene, without a Member-State's approval 'when the control of the external border is considered to be ineffective to an extent which risks the functioning of the Schengen area'⁷⁵.

Apparently, the establishment of the European Border and Coast Guard, with a reinforced mandate, came at a time when the Schengen area was under strain by both an external (migratory flows) and an internal (SYRIZA's policy) pressure. Overall, the EU reacted to the crisis included with more integration, more pooling of sovereignty and more institutionalization. And this is not the first time that a crisis that puts the European project under question, finally leads to deeper EU integration. In fact, the EU summits dealing with the migration and refugee crisis are the latest of a series of critical events these past few years, which have created new institutions or processes on the EU level, representative of the crisis/integration model that seems to drive the EU forward.

Conclusion

A Common Migration and Asylum Policy as the Future of Schengen

SYRIZA's policy of relaxing the migration rules without putting in place an operational structure for the reception of migrants and refugees has done little or nothing for protecting their rights and wellbeing. SYRIZA's gambit, by overlooking Greece's responsibility to record and thoroughly register incoming migrants and refugees, has sparked a trend of erecting fences, of re-enacting border controls and has put the future of the Schengen zone in question. In addition, Athens's blame game with Brussels and Ankara has had the exact opposite results from what was expected by SYRIZA. Instead of taking some pressure off Greece and obtaining some kind of financial leverage, Turkey has been upgraded within the EU crisis management architecture and it has landed a considerable financial assistance for managing migration. Finally, Greece (and Cyprus) was obliged to concur with the re-enactment of Turkey's EU accession process.

As if this was not enough, in the beginning of 2016, the scenario according to which Greece could be forced to exit the Schengen zone, even if temporarily, returned to the public debate. It should be noted however that a formal or informal Schengen GREXIT would only make things worse; Greece would become Europe's storehouse for migrants and refugees – with disastrous effects for its social cohesion; the humanitarian situation of migrants and refugees would hardly improve; the integrity of Schengen would be breached, perhaps irreversibly.

The migration and refugee crisis is far from over; but it has been suggested that, in the past, the EU demonstrated an institutional paradox whereby every crisis reinforces European integration. According to this interpretation, instead of signaling institutional failure or integration fatigue, crises are rather the engines of progress of European integration⁷⁶. The Euro-crisis can be considered as such a 'constructive' crisis. A number of institutions were created to avert disaster: the European Financial Stability Facility; the European Stability Mechanism; the Six-Pack and Two-Pack; the European Semester; and the Fiscal Compact. The Eurozone became deeper and more integrated when many feared for its survival and this could be the case also for the Schengen area.

The EU's institutional response to the migration crisis, intrinsically connected to SYRIZA's erratic migration policy, was a number of integrative steps taken in the course of the previous year; including the relocation plan, the hotspots approach, Turkey's upgrade as a pillar of European crisis management and, finally, the establishment of the European Border and Coast Guard. However, this integration spur will only be meaningful if it is a long-awaited first step towards a common European migration policy, a policy that has been emphatically absent in the previous years with dire consequences for the wellbeing of migrants and refugees; likewise for the social cohesion within and between member-states.

Europe must be able to control its external borders and to regulate migratory movements, but this does not mean that Europe must become a closed fortress. As the Greek case has shown, erecting fences cannot control migration in periods of crises; walls and fences can merely redirect migratory flows at the cost of human lives. Based on this experience, the EU should focus its resources on a comprehensive migration and asylum policy and a border management system with common and functional rules - always cherishing the values of humanism, solidarity and responsibility that make up the precious core of the European project.

At the same time, the Schengen zone cannot work properly without effective border control. The European Coast Guard is a positive step towards sharing responsibility for the surveillance of EU's external maritime borders. It is also a show of solidarity with financial and material means. However, solidarity in sharing the burden of increased migration between Schengen member-states is only compatible with a rigorous method of documentation for migrants and refugees. Accurate registration and documentation of migrants and refugees will also help ensure respect for their human rights as postulated by international and European law. Finally, precise data collection will help the policy makers devise a long-term migration policy sector by sector, country by country on the basis of specific member-states needs for skilled or unskilled jobs.

If the EU fails to introduce and implement such a comprehensive migration and asylum policy, then the integrity of the Schengen zone will be threatened by questionable and diverging migration policies in the Member-States. So far, in Greece, SYRIZA's handling of the migration crisis shows that much.

References

- ¹ Mudde, C. (2004) The Populist Zeitgeist, *Government and Opposition*, 39(4), 541-63
- ² Taggart, P. (2000), *Populism*, Buckingham: Open University Press
- ³ March, L. (2009), Contemporary far left parties in Europe: from Marxism to the mainstream? *Internationale Politik und Gesellschaft*, p.1
- ⁴ March L. and Mudde C. (2005), What's left of the Radical Left? The European Radical Left after 1989: decline and mutation, *Comparative European Politics*, 3, p. 23-49
- ⁵ United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, *Refugees and migrants crossing the Mediterranean to Europe*, 11 September 2015, available from <http://data.unhcr.org/mediterranean/regional.php>
- ⁶ IOM Press Release of 08 December 2015; available from <http://www.iom.int/news/iom-monitors-mediterranean-arrivals-fatalities>
- ⁷ <http://data.unhcr.org/mediterranean/country.php?id=83>
- ⁸ <http://data.unhcr.org/mediterranean/country.php?id=83>
- ⁹ Statement of Secretary General Ban Ki Moon at High Level Meeting on Migration and Refugee Flows; available from <http://www.un.org/sg/statements/index.asp?nid=9077>
- ¹⁰ United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, *Refugees and migrants crossing the Mediterranean to Europe*, 11 September 2015, available from <http://data.unhcr.org/mediterranean/regional.php>
- ¹¹ United Nations High Commission for Refugees, *The Sea Route to Europe: the Mediterranean Passage in the era of Refugees*, p.11: available from <http://www.unhcr.org/5592bd059.pdf>
- ¹² Frontex (2014) *Annual Risk Analysis 2014*, p. 49, available from http://frontex.europa.eu/assets/Publications/Risk_Analysis/Annual_Risk_Analysis_2014.pdf.
- ¹³ Frontex *ibid*.
- ¹⁴ Frontext, *Annual Risk Analysis 2013*, p. 20, available at http://frontex.europa.eu/assets/Publications/Risk_Analysis/Annual_Risk_Analysis_2013.pdf
- ¹⁵ Frontex, *ibid*. pp. 22-3, available at http://frontex.europa.eu/assets/Publications/Risk_Analysis/Annual_Risk_Analysis_2013.pdf
- ¹⁶ Council of Europe. (2014) *Report to the Greek Government on the Visit to Greece Carried Out by the European Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CPT)* from 4 to 16 April 2013. Available from: <http://www.cpt.coe.int/documents/grc/2014-26-inf-eng.pdf>.
- ¹⁷ Human Rights Watch. (2013) *Unwelcome Guests*. Available at: <http://www.hrw.org/reports/2013/06/12/unwelcome-guests>.
- ¹⁸ Case of M.S.S. v. Belgium and Greece (30696/09), Judgment passed on 21 January 2011, available from [http://hudoc.echr.coe.int/eng-press?i=003-3407679-3824378#{"itemid":\["003-3407679-3824378"\]}](http://hudoc.echr.coe.int/eng-press?i=003-3407679-3824378#{)

-
- ¹⁹ Human Rights Watch. (2011) *The EU's Dirty Hands: Frontex Involvement in Ill-Treatment of Migrant Detainees in Greece*. Available at: http://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/reports/greece0911webwcover_0.pdf.
- ²⁰ Triandafyllidou, A. (2014) *Migration in Greece: Recent Developments in 2014*. ELIAMEP. pp. 3-4, Available at: http://www.eliamep.gr/wp-content/uploads/2014/10/Migration-in-Greece-Recent-Developments-2014_2.pdf.
- ²¹ Triandafyllidou Ibid. p. 3,
- ²² Triandafyllidou, A. (2013) *Migration Policy in Southern Europe: Challenges, Constraints and Prospects*, ELIAMEP, Available from: <http://irma.eliamep.gr/wp-content/uploads/2013/10/Migration-policy-in-Southern-Europe.pdf>.
- ²³ For a detailed discussion of the Migration Code see Triandafyllidou, A. (2014) pp. 4-5, *Migration in Greece: Recent Developments in 2014*. ELIAMEP. Available from: http://www.eliamep.gr/wp-content/uploads/2014/10/Migration-in-Greece-Recent-Developments-2014_2.pdf.
- ²⁴ United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, *Refugees and migrants crossing the Mediterranean to Europe*, 11 September 2015, available at <http://data.unhcr.org/mediterranean/regional.php>
- ²⁵ *8 reasons Europe's refugee crisis is happening now*, Washington Post of September 18, 2015, available from: <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/worldviews/wp/2015/09/18/8-reasons-why-europes-refugee-crisis-is-happening-now/>
- ²⁶ *Syriza Victory Brings Hope for Immigrants of EU Access*, Bloomberg of January 25, 2015, <http://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2015-01-25/syriza-victory-brings-hope-for-immigrants-of-eu-access>
- ²⁷ *SYRIZA massages foreign policy goals as it smells power*, Bloomberg of 14 January 2015, available from: <http://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2015-01-14/syriza-massages-foreign-policy-goals-as-it-smells-power>
- ²⁸ http://www.syriza.gr/pdfs/politiki_apofasi_idrytikou_synedriou_syriza.pdf
- ²⁹ http://www.syriza.gr/theseis/pros_diavoulefsi_metanasteytiko.pdf
- ³⁰ Art.1(A)(2) of the Convention relating to the Status of Refugees, Art. 1A(2), 1951 as modified by the 1967 Protocol. Also, Art. 1(2), 1969 Organization of African Unity (OAU) Convention defines a refugee as any person compelled to leave his or her country "owing to external aggression, occupation, foreign domination or events seriously disturbing public order in either part or the whole of his country or origin or nationality." Similarly, the 1984 Cartagena Declaration states that refugees also include persons who flee their country "because their lives, security or freedom have been threatened by generalized violence, foreign aggression, internal conflicts, massive violations of human rights or other circumstances, which have seriously disturbed public order."
- ³¹ International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families, Adopted by General Assembly resolution 45/158 of 18 December 1990
- ³² BBC, *The battle over the words used to describe migrants*, 28 August 2015, available from: <http://www.bbc.com/news/magazine-34061097>

-
- ³³ Human Rights Watch, *Dispatches: Why We Should Outlaw "Illegal"*, available from <https://www.hrw.org/news/2014/06/24/dispatches-why-we-should-outlaw-illegal>
- ³⁴ United Nations General Assembly, *Measures to ensure the human rights of all migrant workers*, 3449, 2433rd plenary meeting, 9 December 1975
- ³⁵ Council of Europe, Parliamentary Assembly, Resolution 1509, "*Human Rights of Irregular Migrants*"
- ³⁶ European Parliament resolution on *the situation of fundamental rights in the European Union 2004-2008*, Paragraph 159, 14 January 2009
- ³⁷ UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Navi Pillay, 12th session of the Human Rights Council, 22 September 2009
- ³⁸ http://www.syryza.gr/pdfs/politiki_apofasi_idrytikou_synedriou_syryza.pdf
- ³⁹ The reference to L'Internationale is actually made in the document, p. 9.
- ⁴⁰ Reuters, *Greece pledges to shut immigrant detention centers*, available from <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-greece-politics-immigrants-idUSKBN0L10MJ20150214#hpYJvHqRExKg3X55.99>
- ⁴¹ IOM Press Release, 08 December 2015, *Mediterranean Arrivals, Fatalities*, available from <https://www.iom.int/news/iom-monitors-mediterranean-arrivals-fatalities>
- ⁴² Available from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9rumzg1Rv5c>
- ⁴³ Statement of the Prime Minister of Greece on the issue of the Refugee Inflow, 07 August 2015, available from <http://www.primeminister.gov.gr/2015/08/07/13931>
- ⁴⁴ Reuters, *PM Tsipras says shamed by Europe's handling of migrant crisis*, 30 October 2015, available from <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-europe-migrants-greece-tsipras-idUSKCN0SO11A20151030#VRPieTSU3ZiHx3jl.97>
- ⁴⁵ Reuters, *Migrant crisis emblematic of deeper malaise in Europe: Tspiras*, 18 September 2015, available from <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-europe-migrants-greece-tsipras-idUSKCN0RI2AU20150918#QED2UUGeplpeyHXy.99>
- ⁴⁶ Reuters, *Greek defence minister says Greece has Plan B if EU rigid on deal*, 10 February 2015, available from <http://www.reuters.com/article/eurozone-greece-kammenos-idUSL5NOVK12S20150210>
- ⁴⁷ Stavridis J. What are the Geostrategic Implications of a GREXIT? *Foreign Policy*, 1 July 2015, available from <http://foreignpolicy.com/2015/07/01/what-are-the-geostrategic-implications-of-a-grexit-greece-nightmare-eu/>
- ⁴⁸ *Keeping Greece in the Euro is about far more than just money*, Financial Times of 18 February 2015 available from http://www.ft.com/intl/cms/s/f98c73b6-b761-11e4-981d-00144feab7de,Authorised=false.html?siteedition=intl&_i_location=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.ft.com%2Fcms%2Fs%2F0%2Ff98c73b6-b761-11e4-981d-00144feab7de.html%3Fsiteedition%3Dintl&_i_referer=http%3A%2F%2Fforeignpolicy.com%2F98b2a88728883efe5c024e6fe8650345&classification=conditional_standard&iab=barrier-app#axzz3f8m612FM see also Kaplan R. D., *The Greek Crisis is About More than Money*, The Wall Street Journal of 30 June 2015, available from <http://www.wsj.com/articles/SB11486026120286184909004581077960515036484>

-
- ⁴⁹ Bechev D. (2015), *Playing the Putin Card: What's Behind the Greek Prime Minister's Alliance with Moscow?* *Foreign Policy*, 8 April 2015 available from <http://foreignpolicy.com/2015/04/08/playing-the-putin-card-greece-alexis-tsipras-in-moscow/>
- ⁵⁰ *La minaccia di Kammenos alla Germania: "Se Ue ci abbandona, vi sommergeremo di migranti mescolati a jihadisti"*, *La Repubblica* of 09 March 2015, available from http://www.repubblica.it/esteri/2015/03/09/news/la_minaccia_di_kammenos_alla_germania_se_ue_ci_abbandona_vi_sommergeremo_di_migranti_mescolati_a_jihadisti_-_109102086/?ref=twhr&utm_source=dlvr.it&utm_medium=twitter
- ⁵¹ *Greece's defence minister threatens to send migrants including jihadists to Western Europe*, *The Telegraph* of 09 March 2015, available from <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/islamic-state/11459675/Greeces-defence-minister-threatens-to-send-migrants-including-jihadists-to-Western-Europe.html>
- ⁵² *Greece threatens to unleash wave of migrants on the rest of Europe 'including Isis jihadists'*, *The Independent* of 10 March 2015, available from <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/greece-threatens-to-unleash-wave-of-migrants-on-the-rest-of-europe-including-isis-jihadists-10097432.html>
- ⁵³ Interview of the Greek Minister of State to Mega Channel, 09 April 2015 extract available from <http://www.protothema.gr/politics/article/466613/flabouraris-den-tha-uparxei-kamia-auxisi-ston-fpa/>
- ⁵⁴ Frontex, *Western Balkans Risk Analysis Network Quarterly Report – WB Q2 2015* available from http://frontex.europa.eu/assets/Publications/Risk_Analysis/WB_Q2_2015_report.pdf
- ⁵⁵ Interview of the Greek Deputy Minister for Immigration to VimaFM, 18 August 2015
- ⁵⁶ *Wall Street Journal, Greek Minister Rejects Criticism Over Allowing Transit of Migrants*, 25 October 2015, available from <http://www.wsj.com/articles/greek-minister-rejects-criticism-over-allowing-transit-of-migrants-1445772236>
- ⁵⁷ *New Europe, Dutch PM: Greece would leave Schengen "very quickly" if refugee threat acted upon*, 16 March 2015, available from <http://neurope.eu/article/dutch-pm-greece-would-leave-schengen-very-quickly-if-refugee-threat-acted-upon/>
- ⁵⁸ *A European Agenda on Migration*, COM (2015) 240 final, Communication from the commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions, available from http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/home-affairs/what-we-do/policies/european-agenda-migration/background-information/docs/communication_on_the_european_agenda_on_migration_en.pdf
- ⁵⁹ *Ibid.* p. 4
- ⁶⁰ *Ibid.* p. 6
- ⁶¹ *Wall Street Journal, Greek Minister Rejects Criticism Over Allowing Transit of Migrants*, 25 October 2015, available from <http://www.wsj.com/articles/greek-minister-rejects-criticism-over-allowing-transit-of-migrants-1445772236>
- ⁶² Statement of the Prime Minister of Greece before the EU Summit on the Migration Crisis, 26 October 2015, available from <http://www.primeminister.gov.gr/2015/10/26/14225>

-
- ⁶³ Statement of the Prime Minister of Greece after the EU Summit on the Migration Crisis, 26 October 2015, available from <http://www.primeminister.gov.gr/2015/10/26/14227>
- ⁶⁴ Statement of the Prime Minister of Greece during the visit to Lesbos island with the President of the European Parliament, 05 November 2015, available from <http://www.primeminister.gov.gr/2015/11/05/14263>
- ⁶⁵ Wall Street Journal, *Greek Minister Rejects Criticism Over Allowing Transit of Migrants*, 25 October 2015, available from <http://www.wsj.com/articles/greek-minister-rejects-criticism-over-allowing-transit-of-migrants-1445772236>
- ⁶⁶ International Organization for Migration, Press Release 27 November 2015, available from <http://www.iom.int/news/mediterranean-migrants-latest-developments-1>
- ⁶⁷ Meeting of heads of state or government with Turkey - *EU-Turkey statement*, 29 November 2015, available from <http://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2015/11/29-eu-turkey-meeting-statement/>
- ⁶⁸ *Conclusions of the European Council*, 15 October 2015, available from <file:///Users/antonios/Downloads/EUCO-conclusions-15102015.pdf>
- ⁶⁹ COUNCIL DECISION (EU) 2015/1523, 14 September 2015, Establishing provisional measures in the area of international protection for the benefit of Italy and of Greece available http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=OJ:JOL_2015_239_R_0011
- ⁷⁰ COUNCIL DECISION (EU) 2015/1601, 22 September 2015, Establishing provisional measures in the area of international protection for the benefit of Italy and Greece available from http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?qid=1443182569923&uri=OJ:JOL_2015_248_R_0014
- ⁷¹ Leaders' Meeting on Refugee Flows Along the Western Balkans Route, *Statement* of 25 October 2015, available from http://ec.europa.eu/news/2015/docs/leader_statement_final.pdf
- ⁷² Reuters, *Balkan, EU leaders agree to coordinate on migrants*, 25 October 2015, available from <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-europe-migrants-plan-idUSKCN0SJ12L20151026>
- ⁷³ *Greece Warned EU will Reimpose Border Controls*, Financial Times of 1 December 2015, <http://www.ft.com/intl/cms/s/0/463dc7a0-982b-11e5-9228-87e603d47bdc.html>
- ⁷⁴ Outcome of the Justice and Home Affairs Council, 3-4 December 2015, available from <http://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/meetings/jha/2015/12/03-04/>
- ⁷⁵ Commission's press release, available from http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_MEMO-15-6332_en.htm; and also,
- ⁷⁶ Kuhnhardt, L. (2009). *Crises in European integration: Challenge and response, 1945-2005*. New York: Berghahn Books pp. 49-60