

Europe's worsening migrant crisis



Dr Moonis Ahmar

One cannot overlook the religious and cultural aspects of the European migrant crisis.

In her annual summer press conference held in Berlin on July 20, the German Chancellor Angela Merkel called for pursuing a more “civilized approach” in dealing with the critical migrant crisis. Earlier, Hungary had announced its withdrawal from the UN pact on migration. The Global Compact for Migration under the auspices of the UN is an outcome of 18 months of negotiations by UN members to formulate a coherent policy on global migration. Hungary, followed the United States which withdrew from the pact calling it inconsistent with American migration and refugee policies.

Armed conflicts in developing countries and growing economic hardships tend to augment the flow of migrants particularly to the prosperous West. The US President Donald Trump's policy on closing American borders for refugees is a cause of political polarization in the US, but may not jeopardize the survival of the American state. However, the situation in Europe is very different, where the migrant crisis is putting at risk the European Union's status as a bloc based on economic, political and security integration. Merkel's press conference of July 20 is a clear indication of how dangerous the situation is, and not just in Germany. Recently, her coalition government narrowly survived a break up when her ally the Bavarian based Christian Social Union (CSU) led by the Interior Minister Horst Seehofer openly challenged the migrant policy of Angela Merkel's Christian Democratic Party (CDU). Merkel supported the plan for “European Asylum Regime” instead of Seehofer's controversial “migration master plan” aiming at closing German borders to asylum seekers and offering a new “Marshal Plan” for the conflict ridden countries of Africa from where migrants have been sneaking into Germany.

What is the basis of Europe's migrant crisis? Why have European countries become so reluctant to accept migrants and asylum seekers? Will the migrant issue destabilize the European Union? In her press conference, Merkel mentioned

that no European country can claim to be safe from the fallout of migrant crises. That it is a collective issue which needs to be resolved through coherent measures instead of pursuing a zero migration policy which will not only generate economic fallout but also question EU's very basis of observing human rights and fundamental freedom.

If one million White, Christian Europeans from a totally different culture settle in any Muslim country as migrants, will they be acceptable to the local population?

Currently, Europe and the rest of the Western world faces this migrant crisis for two reasons. The first is that the wealth and affluence of the western world attracts those seeking to escape the poverty and violent conflicts plaguing the developing world. Europe is relatively peaceful, with better living standards

Since Europe is relatively peaceful with better living standards and quality of life, it is inundated with refugees trying to enter from Greece, Italy and Spain. Second, after the formation of the European Union and visa free travel to most of the members of EU, it has become easier for migrants to enter and claim refugee status. Entering Greece, Spain and Italy can enable migrants to travel to other EU member states unless they are restrained by such countries. But, the issue is not so simple. Even if national immigration policies are formulated by individual EU member countries the way Hungary, Czech Republic and Poland are trying to do, if these are inconsistent with the migration and asylum policy of EU can certainly create major problems for the bloc. That is the reason why the German Chancellor Angela Merkel is suggesting caution, instead of getting behind an irrational approach.

However, while Europe has only dealt with the influx of a couple of million refugees recently, many more are accommodated by countries like Pakistan, Iran, Turkey, Lebanon and Jordan. The genocide of Rohingya Muslims by Myanmar's military has caused more than one million people to seek refuge in Bangladesh. A couple of decades ago, the armed conflict in Sri Lanka led to the migration of Tamil refugees to India and other parts of the world. Pakistan and Iran have hosted four million Afghan refugees, the majority of whom have not returned to their homeland because the situation there is not normal and peaceful.

One cannot overlook the religious and cultural aspects of the European migrant

crisis either. Since around 90 percent of migrants, who have recently crossed into Europe happen to be Muslims, their adjustment in a totally different cultural environment is a big challenge not only for the migrants but also for the host countries. One needs to understand the concerns of Europeans about the influx of such a large number of culturally alien migrants.

Ghettoisation has been a major problem for migrants from Muslim countries. This is what has given rise to ultra-right wing groups such as Alternative for Deutschland (AfD) which emerged as a political force in the previous elections by securing more than 13 percent of the votes. Likewise, the anti-migrant stance of Hungary, Czech Republic, Poland, Italy and Austria is based on fears about alien culture threatening European Christian civilisation and job opportunities for the local people.

If one million White, Christian Europeans from a totally different culture settle in any Muslim country as migrants, will they be acceptable to the local population? Certainly not. The level of tolerance in the West for Muslims might actually be greater than the tolerance Muslim countries have for Westerners following their own dress code, diet and way of life. And, Europeans and for the matter Americans and Australians rightly complain that instead of tolerating and integrating in the local culture, there are some Muslims who wish to impose their way of life on the local people. They criticise the Western way of life but still seek the benefits of living in Europe. How can this be acceptable to Europeans?

The writer is Meritorious Professor of International Relations at the University of Karachi and is currently Visiting Fellow at SWP, a leading think tank in Berlin Germany. He can be reached at amoonis@hotmail.com

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