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# DAHRENDORF ANALYSIS

## Forget Fortress Europe:
Why European migration policy needs a drastic change of perspective

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Although border fences have continued to grow, they are still far from watertight, and one must hope this "Fortress Europe" will never be finalised. Fences - be they material or constructed through law - are highly anachronistic in a world where wealth, markets, capital flows, labour and communication are all increasingly viewed in global terms. Family ties can be as transnational as personal identities, through dual-nationality or by the simple fact that individuals, either voluntarily or involuntarily, often live and work in different countries. The humanitarian refugee crisis is deeply interconnected with these trends, therefore it is highly unlikely that any border-fence will stop people from migrating from the global south to the global north. However, this does not mean that the world should be overwhelmed or paralyzed by the current crisis. On the contrary, we face a historical challenge that demands joint efforts at the international, regional, national, and local levels. It is time to engage a multitude of actors, not just governments and institutions, but also civil society, including the migrants themselves. In the absence of precedents and growing uncertainty about the future, the world needs innovative ideas, courage, and especially a drastic change of perspective.

### OVERCOMING STATE-CENTRISM & EURO-CENTRISM

Borders are not only contested by migrants trying to cross them, but also by academics in the fields of Political Science and International Relations, who question their significance in line with a general critique of state-centrism. State-centric perspectives confine our cognitive horizon, because they neglect the agency of non-governmental actors and the complex structures that determine their logic of action. To fully understand the dynamics of migration it is therefore of utmost importance to adopt a much wider analytical perspective. Euro-centrism, specifically, distracts attention from migrant's agency. Therefore, instead of starting in the crowded refugee camps or jam-packed train stations of Europe that are

portrayed in the media, a thorough analysis should start with the root causes of migration in the MENA and beyond. What transnational dynamics do we observe in the Euro-Med and within the MENA region? Geographically, the analysis starts in the south, but analytically it has to include the manifold transnational linkages driving people out of their countries. Many of the factors that determine an individual's decision to migrate transcend national borders. In migration studies, it is common to talk about push-and-pull factors as migration triggers. But that concept is overly simplistic, as it suggests that the sending countries are responsible for push factors and the receiving countries for the pull factors. In reality, the factors determining migration are highly interwoven. Very often, the 'receiving' country is

part of the problem of the 'sending' country, due to political and economic interdependence. The highly asymmetric Euro-Mediterranean trade regimes are a case in point: EU protectionism for agricultural and other sensitive goods, such as textiles, puts Mediterranean Partner countries at a disadvantage, as they are not allowed to protect their markets in the same way. The EU also contributes to economic distress in MENA countries through fishing rights that allow European fish trawlers to empty the coastal waters of North African countries. Transnational security regimes are no less problematic, especially those framed in terms of a war on terror. The genesis of the so-called Islamic State (IS) is quite a drastic example that goes back to the Iraq war in 2003. After the war, large segments of the Iraqi security sector lost their positions and started new careers as IS fighters. It is interesting to note that the European members of the former 'coalition of the willing' are especially reluctant to integrate refugees, many of whom are victims of IS terrorism.

## MIGRANT AGENCY

Overcoming a state-centric perspective means putting the migrants themselves at the center of analysis, especially the political, socio-economic and ideational factors that influence their choices. By identifying individual logics of action, agency is given back to people who are all too often not represented as individuals, but rather as 'masses' being channeled, on the one hand, by human traffickers, and on the other by governmental migration regimes. To converge to a migrant's perspective makes sense for academic, as well as normative reasons, but also with regard to policy relevance. Neglecting the agency of migrants is one of the main reasons why so many government measures to control migration fail. People who are forced to leave their country do not refrain from doing so only because new laws have been implemented in Germany or elsewhere. Whenever a receiving country introduces new immigration restrictions, migrants will

adapt to the situation and look for new ways to accomplish their goal, most likely generating support for the human trafficking industry.

Selective categories such as political, economic, or civil-war refugees are core elements of EU and national migration policies. But if we adopt the perspective of the migrant, we discover that the distinction between 'the political' and 'the economic' refugee is highly artificial. The reasons why a person migrates are always mixed: the dissident prosecuted for political reasons has very often already lost his job; discriminated minorities usually suffer from economic marginalisation; and civil war has severe political, economic and social consequences for civilians, which together motivate them to flee their country. Although these labels all too often have little to do with the reality of the migrant, they have an enormous impact on his or her life, because they can easily turn a person into a 'legal' or an 'illegal' migrant. When being looked upon and treated as an illegal person, migrants are not only deprived of fundamental rights, but also forced to assume a new identity.

## SECURITIZING MIGRATION

EU-migration policies are highly securitised, but not very efficient. Furthermore, they produce dreadful side effects. Today, member states perform a race to the bottom with regard to human and legal standards. It is well known that the EU externalises migration control through, among other methods, re-admission agreements concluded with Mediterranean partner countries that can hardly be labelled as 'safe' due to their low human-rights standards. According to these agreements, southern countries have to re-admit irregular migrants from Europe, including those who have come from third countries. The EU has no idea what happens to the re-admitted migrants once they leave European soil. Neither the EU nor its member states take any responsibility for their fate, which is left in the hands of dubious partners. Why do southern governments agree to such deals?

Re-admission agreements are linked to incentives such as better access to the EU market or visa facilitation for some elites. This worked well for Europe in the days when asymmetric interdependencies favoured the EU, but times have changed, empowering southern governments to follow their own goals with regard to migration policies, as demonstrated by the current negotiations with Turkey.

Last but not least, the situation in the receiving country needs to be studied. To understand the defects of European migration policies and to identify the stumbling-blocks hampering the integration of migrants, we have to question how migrants are treated in Europe, in discourse and in practice. How does the EU, as a supra-national entity, address refugees? What does discourse and practice in migration policy reveal about Germany, Sweden, Poland or Hungary? What are the mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion? What concepts of 'society', 'nation' or 'citizenship' dominate the discourse? What role does Islamophobia have in this context? Answers to these questions are extremely important for identifying the vast complexity of integration processes. The integration of huge numbers of new immigrants is, arguably, one of the biggest challenges for European societies since the end of World War II. Again, empathy with migrants and their diverse fates may be a decisive key to successfuly meeting this challenge.

## CONCLUSION

Fortress Europe is missing a long-term strategy. To erect a fence in order to protect Europe's unity of shared values and ideals is contradictory, because by locking out people in need, we give up exactly those values and ideals that we claim to protect. Indeed human traffickers are the only actors who profit from Fortress Europe. So what could be done instead? Decision makers should first of all accept and communicate the fact that we do not face a temporary refugee crisis, but a process that will most likely continue for many decades to come. To develop an adequate strategy, state-centrism and Euro-centrism need to be replaced by wider analytical perspectives that emphasize migrant agency. Identifying the political, economic and social factors that determine migrants' choices will help us to better understand migration as a political phenomenon.

The empathic ability to put oneself in the place of a potential migrant appears to be as a decisive prerequisite for developing effective solutions. Addressing the root causes of migration should have first priority and implies that the EU and its member states critically review transnational regimes in trade, security, and migration. Only substantial changes in Europe's political and socio-economic relations with the MENA region and beyond can have an impact on the root causes of migration. Furthermore, legal and safe migration routes need to be established through new and innovative formats of transnational mobility. Those migrants already in Europe, as well as those still to come, need to be integrated into society, preferably by giving them quick access to education and work. It is time for decision-makers and societies alike to accept that our idea of 'normal' is soon likely to change.

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