



The Effects of the Syrian Crisis on German Politics

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Abstract

Although migration has been an issue throughout human history, migration in the modern world was and is handled and discussed in a different way. It affects social structures causing bitter disputes within politics since – in an era dominated by nation-states based on a single identity- migration is considered a threat challenging local identities. It also bears challenges for politics especially for societies protected with high walls. Even countries like the USA, which normally adopt open migration policies, manage migration policies with strict criteria today. However, it is obvious that migration will continue due to various political and economic reasons and that this will be mainly to wealthy regions such as Europe; therefore, countries affected by the fact need to develop policies in order to cope with the problem. Particularly the recent Syrian crisis and migration led to discussions in politics, economics and social life both in the region and in Europe which can even be seen in the agenda of the EU. One of the countries directly affected by the crisis is without doubt Turkey, and it even led to reopening negotiations to access the EU; thus it brought Turkey and EU together despite disagreements. At the same time, there are heavy disputes within the EU related to the migration crisis; here, the position of Germany is significant since it both takes a leading role in shaping EU policies and advocates that the migration crisis needs to be solved within EU politics. Yet, Germany also dealt with the problem in its domestic policies with the Merkel government –though selective- in favour of an open migration policy. Mixed with the generous welfare system of Germany, the country certainly attracts migrants from all over the world –whether they are economic migrants or others. Concepts like “solidarity, responsibility, Willkommenskultur” can be seen and heard in daily life when discussed how to handle the matter.** This paper aims to analyse how Germany positions itself within the negotiations in the EU concerning the migration crisis and how it handles migration in its domestic policies. In this context, priority will be given to the attitudes and publications of institutions supporting the position of the Merkel government, and subjects on which the matter is merely discussed.

Keywords: Syrian Refugees, Germany, Migration Policy, Labour Market, Integration.

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** Seth M. Holmes & Heide Castaneda, “Representing the ‘European refugee crisis’ in Germany and beyond: Deservingness and difference, life and death”, *American Ethnologist*, 43(1), 2016, p.19.



Suriye Krizinin Alman Siyaseti Üzerindeki Etkileri

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Öz

Göç, insanlık tarihi boyunca önemli bir mesele olagelmışse de modern dönemde çok daha farklı biçimde ele alınmakta ve tartışılmaktadır. Toplumsal yapıları etkilemekte ve bu bağlamda siyaset içinde sert tartışmalara neden olmaktadır, zira tek bir kimliğe dayalı ulus devletlerin hâkim olduğu bir dönemde göç, yerel kimliklere meydan okuyan bir tehdit olarak algılanmaktadır. Bu gelişme, özellikle yüksek duvarlarla korunan ülkelerdeki siyaset için de sonuçlar doğurmaktadır. Açık göç politikaları yürüten ABD gibi ülkeler dahi günümüzde katı göç politikaları uygulamaktadır. Ancak çeşitli siyasi ve ekonomik nedenlerle göçün devam edeceği açıktır ve bu göçler büyük ölçüde Avrupa gibi daha müreffeh bölgelere yönelik olacaktır; dolayısıyla, bu durumdan etkilenen ülkeler mevcut sorunlarla başa çıkmak için siyaset üretmek zorundadırlar. Özellikle yaşanan Suriye krizi ve göçü hem bölgede hem de Avrupa’da siyasette, ekonomide ve toplumsal hayatta tartışmalara neden olmuştur; ki bu da AB’nin gündemine de yansımaktadır. Krizden doğrudan etkilenen ülkelere birisi şüphesiz Türkiye’dir ve bu durum AB müzakerelerinin yeniden görüşülmesine neden olmuş ve bütün anlaşmazlıklara rağmen AB ile Türkiye’yi bir araya getirmiştir. Aynı zamanda, göç krizi ile ilgili tartışmalar AB içinde de yoğunlaşmış ve Almanya’nın bu bağlamdaki konumu önem kazanmıştır çünkü bir yandan AB içinde öncü bir rol oynarken öte yandan göç krizinin AB siyaseti bağlamı içinde çözülmesi gerektiğini savunmuştur. Ayrıca Almanya, bu meseleyi kendi içi işlerinde de ele almış ve Merkel hükümeti seçici de olsa açık bir göç politikasını desteklemiştir. Refah devleti olması nedeniyle dünyanın çeşitli yerlerinden göçmen çeken bir ülke olduğu açıktır. Bu konu tartışıldığında “Dayanışma, sorumluluk ve Willkommenskultur” gibi kavramlar günlük yaşamda duyulmakta ve görülmektedir. Bu makale, göç krizinde Almanya’nın kendini nasıl konumlandığını ve iç politikalarında göçü ne şekilde ele aldığına incelemeyi amaçlamaktadır**. Bu bağlamda Merkel hükümetini destekleyen kurumlar ve yayınlara ve de konunun hangi çerçevede etrafında tartışıldığına öncelik verilecektir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Suriyeli Sığınmacılar, Almanya, Göç Politikası, İş Piyasası, Entegrasyon.

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1. Introduction

The debate over the refugee crisis has been going on for many years now, but reached a peak in 2015 when people suddenly arrived in thousands in the EU every day. Each day we saw pictures and videos of refugees fleeing through the Mediterranean in tiny boats; thus, risking their lives in order to reach any of the Greek islands. Though they aimed for Greece, their final destination had to be other wealthier countries; such as France, the UK and especially Germany. The reason why Germany was usually the final destination for refugees was that it carried out an open door policy and had a generous welfare system, which led to the arrival of more than one million newcomers last year. This new situation forced the German government to find solutions to handle the matter along with a public debate and opposition against the Merkel government. Germany was divided: news in the media either criticised the policies or presented positive examples, thus supporting the open door policy of Merkel. Merkel herself not only was confronted with opposition from other parties but also from her coalition partners and even her own party. Despite all the opposition it is quite interesting to see how Merkel managed the situation and moreover received support from various groups in society. Mainstream media, though sometimes somewhat critical, tried to pave Merkel's way by producing articles supportive of the policies, and by highlighting opportunities and positive examples in the refugee issue. As can be seen, although the refugee crisis was a challenge for Germany, it tried to manage the problem instead of closing down its borders. This article aims to understand and present the attitude of Germany, and tries to draw conclusions on why the German government is willing to take a leading role in the solution of the issue. Therefore, the article presents a description of the situation and continues with reactions to the issue and implementations to deal with it, and interprets the current situation.

2. The Refugee Issue in the German Political Agenda

The refugee crisis affected not only the region but was also felt in remote areas, such as many parts of Europe. However, the reaction of these countries to the problem varied with some being completely ignorant. Germany was one of the countries considering the matter as a chance and

trying to find solutions, but it was also very well aware that it needed the support from other EU member states and had to look for coordination. Therefore, German politicians and especially Merkel called for support in the refugee issue but did not find much resonance since some countries either completely rejected taking refugees or did not feel responsible in solving the problem. Thus, the level of burden shared among industrialized countries was not the same, with countries like Germany or Sweden providing high levels of protection for refugees.¹ It is true that most of the EU countries took refugees, but their distribution among member states is not even; with Germany, Sweden, Austria and Hungary taking more than the average (it should be mentioned that the latter two later changed their policies and avoided more refugees coming into their countries). Member states like France or the UK and most of the South and East European countries remained under the average.² It should also be mentioned that Germany was and is much more affected than the others especially due to its geographic proximity when compared to Sweden or the UK, leaving it merely on its own. Therefore, it is no surprise that it called for more cooperation within the EU and looked for flexible refugee allocation, and that it wanted to include the Visegrad states.³ For the EU on the other hand, the year 2016 brought many other problems to cope with; it was, e.g., preoccupied with Brexit and its potential outcomes during the first half of the year. The refugee problem seemed to be in their agenda but no real or long-lasting solutions were suggested or implemented.

One of the attempts to settle the matter on the EU level and the domestic level was the demand to revise the Dublin Regulation. The Dublin Regulation sets rules related to the organization of asylum applications

¹ Nicole Ostrand, "The Syrian refugee crisis: a comparison of responses by Germany, Sweden, the United Kingdom, and the United States", *Journal on Migration and Human Security*, 3(3), 2015, p.273.

² Karl Brenke, "Flüchtlinge sind sehr ungleich auf die EU-Länder verteilt - auch bezogen auf die Wirtschaftskraft und Einwohnerzahl", [Refugees are distributed inequally in the EU-countries – also related to the economic power and population] *DIW-Wochenbericht*, 82(39), 2015, p.869.

³ EU-Parlamentspräsident Schulz für flexible Flüchtlingsverteilung, [President of the EU-parliament Schulz in favour of a flexible refugee distribution], Thomas Gutschker, *FAZ*, (2016, Sep 24). retrieved October 4, 2016, from <http://www.faz.net/aktuell/politik/fluechtlingskrise/f-a-s-exklusiv-eu-parlamentspraesident-schulz-fuer-flexible-fluechtlingsverteilung-14451064.html>.

on the European level; thereby, member states, in which the application was made, are responsible for the asylum seeker, by which multiple asylum claims can be avoided. The first Dublin regulation went in effect in 1997 due to potential problems with the Schengen agreement and to determine a common policy in terms of asylum and refugee issues. The latest agreement, Dublin III, came into effect in 2013 and set rules on the application and the responsibilities of member states.⁴ However, with the latest Syrian refugee crisis, Germany did not apply the rule.⁵ Here it should be mentioned that the discussion of the Regulation caused controversies within Germany and also the coalition partners – that is the CDU and CSU.⁶ Related to the matter, the European Commission started a Communication for the reform of the Common European Asylum System to present options for the solution of the current crisis. One option is to change the system, thus making the deportation of asylum seekers to the country of first entry impossible; the other is to maintain the present system but add an emergency clause.⁷ It is yet not possible to say what policies will be adopted since there seems to be no ideal solution and no consensus, and the interests of each country differ in the asylum and refugee system. Supporters of the second option, e.g., claim that statistics prove that border countries of the EU did not necessarily take more refugees than the others as it was the case with Spain⁸ thus a change of the Dublin system is not

⁴ Wido Geis, & Anja Katrin Orth, “Flüchtlinge: Herausforderung und Chance für Deutschland, [Refugees: challenge and chance for Germany], *IW policy paper*, 26/2015, p.12.

⁵ *Germany suspends Dublin Agreement for Syrian refugees*, A. Dernbach, (2015 retrieved March 15, 2016, from <https://www.euractiv.com/section/migrations/news/germany-suspends-dublin-agreement-for-syrian-refugees/>).

⁶ Wenn aus einer Obergrenze ein Kontingent wird, [When an upper limit becomes a quota], Albert Schaffer, (2016, Sep 16). *FAZ*, retrieved September 17, 2016, from <http://www.faz.net/aktuell/politik/fluechtlingskrise/csu-und-cdu-finden-weiterhin-nicht-zueinander-14438581.html> Rhetorik Ohne Obergrenze, [Rhetoric with no upper limit], Tobias Rüther, (2016, Sep 25). *FAZ*, retrieved September 30 2016, from <http://www.faz.net/aktuell/feuilleton/fluechtlingsdebatte-rhetorik-ohne-obergrenze-14451012.html>.

⁷ EU unveils plans to overhaul asylum system in an attempt to address chaotic influx of refugees, Leo Cendrowicz, & Oliver Wright, (2016, Apr 6) *The Independent*, retrieved April 7, 2016, from <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/refugee-crisis-eu-unveils-plans-to-overhaul-asylum-system-in-an-attempt-to-address-chaotic-influx-of-a6971751.html>.

⁸ Wido Geis, & Anja Katrin Orth, “Flüchtlinge: Herausforderung und Chance für Deutschland, [Refugees: challenge and chance for Germany]”, *IW policy paper*, 26/2015, p.13.

an answer to the current crisis. Supporters of the first option claim that changes need to be made on the European level; e.g. the Dublin regulation needs to be revised, or countries like Italy or Greece have to take a heavy burden when compared to other countries. Such demands - that is to solve the issue on the European level by jointly assuming responsibility - often came from the German side because it is the EU member state dealing with the issue without just restricting the flow of migrants. Countries like Denmark, Netherlands, Poland do not want to take any refugees, Austria is not willing to take more, and countries in the North remain silent in the matter.⁹ Nevertheless, authorities within Germany offer solutions; such an example is the report of the “Sachverständigenrat für Integration und Migration” in Germany, which suggests to set certain quotas and directly accept the refugees since the migration flow will not stop and lead to illegal and dangerous travel routes. This is partly implemented at the moment, but some criteria applied in the process needed to be changed.¹⁰ As a further strategy to manage the crisis, Germany also took steps outside the EU, one of which is the agreement between Turkey and the EU. Despite all the controversies and tense relations between Turkey and the EU, and Germany and Turkey, they decided to continue its relations.¹¹ In March 2016, the two parties signed a deal in order to damp the refugee numbers coming to Europe, which immediately had results in the following months. The tense relations, however, have worsened over the past months after the coup attempt in Turkey in July and the resignation of the Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu, who had conducted the negotiations with the EU and Germany.

The refugee crisis has certainly had its effects on many fields in the public and political life of Germany, which can be observed both in public

⁹ Karl Brenke,, “Flüchtlinge sind sehr ungleich auf die EU-Länder verteilt - auch bezogen auf die Wirtschaftskraft und Einwohnerzahl, [Refugees are distributed inequally in the EU-countries – also related to the economic power and population] *DIW-Wochenbericht*, 82(39), 2015, p. 879.

¹⁰ *Flüchtlinge: Kontingente statt Chaos*, [Refugees: quotas instead of chaos], Kay-Alexander Scholz, (2015, Oct 20). retrieved January 26, 2016, from <http://www.dw.com/de/fl%C3%BChtlinge-kontingente-statt-chaos/a-18792975>.

¹¹ Das Flüchtlingsabkommen liegt in unserem Interesse, [The refugee agreement is in our interest], Klaus-Dieter Frankenberger, (2016, Aug 8) FAZ, retrieved August 9, 2016 from <http://www.faz.net/aktuell/politik/ausland/europa/tuerkei/mit-einer-kuendigung-des-fluechtlingsabkommens-waere-nichts-gewonnen-14376618.html>.

debates and in the agenda of policymakers. Such an example is a visit of the German Minister of the Interior to the Maghreb countries in order to declare them as countries of safe origin.¹² What is the reason behind the declaration of various countries as safe origins, when asylum seekers from these countries were accepted for many years? It is obvious that most of these countries have not changed that much over the past years so that they can all of a sudden be classified as safe countries. Furthermore, these countries still are torn with the consequences of the Arab spring. Such a move by the German government seems to be a strategy to manage the present problem since it gives Germany an elbow room to manage the Syrian crisis and be more selective in taking migrants which provide more benefit for it.

3. The Attitude of Germany in the Refugee Issue

As stated before Germany handled the refugee crisis not like the other European states and tried to take a leading role in finding solutions within the EU. There are certainly many reasons for Germany to make an effort in the refugee problem; the most important probably the effect of migration on economic growth. Industrialized countries need the workforce to maintain their production capabilities and therefore take migrants from various parts of the world. Although refugees are not allowed to take part in the labour market, they will do so in the long run; thus qualified refugees or migrants are usually welcome. A further effect of migration on economies that it triggers growth since spending will increase. Such an argument is supported by statistics; hereby, economic growth was positively affected by public spending made for the needs of the refugees.¹³ Reports on the refugee crisis also try to clarify Germany's position, and its challenges and chances for the country. Such an article is written by Fischer, which tries to

¹² Warum die MaghrebLänder jetzt als sicher gelten, [Why Maghreb countries considered safe now], Christoph Sydow & Philipp Wittrock, (2016, Jan 29) *Der Spiegel*, retrieved March 14, 2016, from <http://www.spiegel.de/politik/deutschland/marokko-algerien-tunesien-sollen-sichere-herkunftsstaaten-werden-a-1074634.html>.

¹³ Staatsausgaben für Flüchtlinge stützen Wachstum (2016, Jan 12). [Public spending for refugees support growth], FAZ, retrieved February 12, 2016, from <http://www.faz.net/aktuell/wirtschaft/konjunktur/bruttoinlandsprodukt-steigt-im-vierten-quartal-um-0-3-prozent-14066098.html>.

understand the situation and claims that the policy followed by the German chancellor is right. According to the text, there are various factors on why the refugee policy of Merkel should be welcome; e.g., due to demographic factors, that is, in an aging Germany, migrants will provide a balance since most of them are under the age of 35. That, at the same time, means a positive effect on the labour market, not just because they are young but also quite well educated (here the stress is especially on Syrian refugees). Thus, public spending for the newcomers can be considered as an investment to the future, though in the short term it means a burden on the public budget. It is often stressed that Syrian refugees are well educated and highlighted that most Syrian refugees reaching Europe are from the middle class since they were able to pay the money for human traffickers.¹⁴ Unemployment is an issue in Germany as it is in many other countries, so the fear that it will rise with all the new migrants is often discussed within the public; also, the number of those against economic migration is quite high. However, there are also arguments supporting the integration in the labour market despite fears of higher unemployment, which is based on the idea that migrants are more likely to found new firms because of the hardship they would probably face in finding jobs. This usually results in new job creation and an increase in the labour market.¹⁵ Thus, the effort of the EU member states to make a distinction between refugees and economic-led migration is not an easy and meaningful task because it also keeps the qualified migrants away.¹⁶

Many publications such as reports or academic articles suggest solutions or provide ideas for future developments both for their own countries and for the region. Fischer, e.g., draws conclusions on what kind of policies Germany should adopt in order to provide a smooth integration of refugees. For a better integration there are various suggestions, such as the transmission

¹⁴ And Angela Merkel is right: the refugees as opportunity for renewing German society, J. A.V Fischer, (2015). MPRA Paper, No. 67315, retrieved February 12, 2016 from <https://mpra.ub.uni-muenchen.de/67315/>.

¹⁵ Holger Hinte, Ulf Rinne & Klaus F. Zimmermann, "Flüchtlinge in Deutschland: Realismus statt Illusionen, [Refugees in Germany: realism instead of illusions], IZA Standpunkte, 83, 2015, p.9.

¹⁶ Ulf Rinne,., & Klaus F. Zimmermann, "Zutritt zur Festung Europa? Anforderungen an eine moderne Asyl- und Flüchtlingspolitik, Analysen und Berichte Migration, [Access to the fortress Europe? Requirements for a modern asylum and refugee policy, analyses and reports on migration]," Wirtschaftsdienst, 95(2), 2015. p.116.

of values in educational institutions. This aspect is especially pronounced when it comes to radicalisation. However, the counter argument is that the fear of radicalisation is not a realistic one for the newcomers since events prove that it is merely caused by discrimination and seen usually in future generations. However, to avoid radicalisation they need to be welcome and addressed positively; here the involvement of grass-root movements will be of great help. It is also argued that the transmission of Western values should be adopted on the European level, so it will not be sufficient to handle the matter only in the domestic field. Europe should be involved in the region to provide and assist the development especially in democratic values.¹⁷ In this context, education should not just be within the context of the labour market but also in general terms since many of the migrants are quite young. Therefore, the funding of education needs to be revised and included in the budget; the cost for education in Germany only is expected to be about 13 billion Euro.¹⁸

4. The Challenges Germany Faces

Despite all the optimistic views related to the refugee problem, one thing that is certain is that the government has to struggle with many aspects, one of which is the fear of the public from the newcomers and their “strange” culture. A large number of the population is not only not supporting the policies of the government, there also protests against these policies. This can be especially observed in the developments of political movements such as Pegida or the AfD. Concerns that a Neo-Nazi movement will scale up are not without reason since latest elections in various states in Germany prove a rise in far-right parties.¹⁹ The AfD was able to gain seats in local elections; the Pegida movement, on the other hand, attracts more and more supporters by mainly protesting against “the Islamization of the West”.²⁰

¹⁷ And Angela Merkel is right: the refugees as opportunity for renewing German society, Justina A.V. Fischer, MPRA Paper, No. 67315, 2015, retrieved February 12, 2016 from <https://mpra.ub.uni-muenchen.de/67315/>.

¹⁸ Dieter Dohmen, “Ein Refugee Impact Fund zur Finanzierung von Bildung und Qualifizierung für Flüchtlinge, [A refugee impact fund for the financing of training of refugees]”, *FiBS-Forum* 57. 2015.

¹⁹ Adnan R. Khan, “Germany is full”, *Maclean’s*, 128(40), 2015, p.32.

²⁰ Rand Richards Cooper, “Germany, Eurabia & the end of Europe: the rise of the identitarian right”, *Commonweal*, 2016, May 6 143(8), p.12.

Thus, one might say that public opinion is much divided when it comes to settling the refugee crisis; but despite all these, surveys show that there is also support in favour of the present policies. According to the survey the majority of the population considers migration as one of the most pressing and urgent problems; they also agree with the idea that foreigners and refugees will bring more risks than opportunities. However, polls also prove that a temporary admittance is found appropriate; which is supported by 69 %.²¹ Such figures certainly do not prove that refugees are welcome with open arms; nevertheless, they show that the majority tolerates the implementations of the present government but for how long they will do is uncertain. One incident displaying how fragile the situation is, was seen on New Year's Eve in Cologne, which led to an outrage in all parts of society; however, such incidents were actually nothing new but were downplayed by authorities. Such an effort can also be seen in the attempt of the government to come to an agreement with Google and Facebook in order to restrict anti-immigration posts.²² The attacks in Cologne reminded the public of their fears and the politician of how critical the situation is and will be in the future.

The situation is not an easy one for the country and its government; Merkel's "Wir schaffen das" (we will succeed/we can do it) is often challenged with many events like terrorist attacks or the detection of potential terrorists especially taking the same route the refugees take. As mentioned, the incident in Cologne on New Year's Eve was heavily discussed in the public; here a number of men mainly from North Africa and the Middle East sexually assaulted women who were out on the streets to celebrate.²³ This led to an outrage in the public since the incident meant also an attack on basic values, which many people already felt to be threatened with the huge number coming into their country. A further challenge for politics was to cope with the attacks on migrants and the shops or houses of migrants. Despite all these things, it is interesting to see positive or at least optimistic

²¹ Jürgen Gerhards, Silke Hans, ., & Jürgen Schupp, "German public opinion on admitting refugees", DIW Economic Bulletin, 21, 2016, p.243.

²² Germany on the Brink, *The New York Times*, Ross Douthat, 2016, Jan 9, retrieved September 9, 2016, from http://mobile.nytimes.com/2016/01/10/opinion/sunday/germany_onthebrink.html?smid=twnytimes&smtyp=cur&_r=1&referer=https://t.c o/W2tLnz329Y.

²³ Simon Shuster, "Fear and Loathing", *Time*, 187(3), 2016, Feb 1. p.42.

opinions regarding the handling of the situation. For instance, it is claimed that Germany has the ability to cope with the problem, since it was confronted with such issues –as in the 1990s and 2000s- and was able to manage it. This argument²⁴ is supported with the fact that previous migrants integrated into the system by both learning the language and later entering into the labour market. This view is supported with many other samples happening today; such an example is presented in one article of “die Zeit”, from which we learn that 50.000 refugees found jobs in Germany.²⁵ The article states that refugees who came in 2015 had better qualifications than expected and showed more respect to women and respected democracy.

5. Effects on the German Policies and Strategies to Cope with the Problem

There is an uncertain future for Germany with xenophobia on one side and “Willkommenskultur” (culture of welcome referring to the open policy towards refugees) on the other.²⁶ Both sides have their own arguments and supporters; one claiming that the problem is there and needs not only to be solved but also handled wisely, and the other fearing its future because of unemployment due to the newcomers and the challenge by the new culture they bring with them. But it is possible to say that there are many positive reflections on the refugee issue to overcome xenophobic sentiments such as in the mainstream media; but what is interesting here is that sometimes the refugees are reflected as the ones deserving to be protected whereas other type of migrants are presented as economic opportunists.²⁷

The Merkel government has, from the beginning on, had an interest in the Syrian refugee issue, when many other EU countries overlooked the matter

²⁴ Philipp Eisnecker, Johannes Giesecke, ., Marcus Kroh, Elisabeth Liebau, Jan Marcus, Zerrin Salikutluk, et al. “Integrating refugees: insights from the past”, DIW Economic Bulletin, 6(34/35), 2016, p.387.

²⁵ Flüchtlinge sind besser ausgebildet als erwartet, (2016, Nov 14), [Refugees are better qualified than expected], *Die Zeit*, retrieved November 16, 2016, from <http://www.zeit.de/gesellschaft/2016-11/bundesamt-fuer-migration-frank-juergen-weise-fluechtlinge-ausbildung>.

²⁶ Seth M. Holmes, & Heide Castaneda, “Representing the ‘European refugee crisis’ in Germany and beyond: Deservingness and difference, life and death”, *American Ethnologist*, 43(1), 2016, p.13.

²⁷ *Ibid*, p.17.

or considered it to be a matter outside the scope of the EU or their domestic interests. There are certainly various reasons behind this, such as economy or having an upper hand in politics, but one reason is certainly the role of Germany wants to play on the global level. Such a role is discussed for instance by Steinmeier in an article²⁸, in which he evaluates the position of Germany as a global player and stresses Germany's will to resolve the crisis along with other EU members. The current refugee policy is certainly also justified by demographic factors. German needs and will need immigration to balance its labour market due to its aging population; statistics show that about 500.000 migrants are needed until 2050.²⁹ This positive attitude is, e.g., reflected in media coverage, where anti-migration movements are usually labelled as right-wing extremists.³⁰

The rapidly increasing number of asylum seekers in 2015 was certainly quite alarming for German authorities, leading Chancellor Merkel not only to find solutions on the political level but also to call on support to volunteers. Local authorities were unable to process and handle the large number of newcomers on its own, so any help from nongovernmental organizations and others was welcome. This resulted in support from various groups and even families taking refugees in their homes.³¹ Cities such as Munich were the first to experience a challenge like this³² and also to provide support to the newcomers.

The influx of refugees undoubtedly caused a public debate in Germany leading to more right-wing movements and support; however, it is also possible to see that the positive sides of the crisis are often discussed in terms of economic effects. One such effect is presented as the stimulation of economy through participation in the work force on the supply side, and on the demand side through refugee-related expenditures.³³ There are

²⁸ Frank Walter Steinmeier, "Germany's New Global Role", *Foreign Affairs*, 95(4), 2016, p.106-113.

²⁹ Sybil Andra Stefan, "Considerations regarding the social and economic impact of migration", *Case Study: Germany Revista Academiei Fortelor Terestre*, 21(1), 2016, p.54.

³⁰ Mark Falcoff, "Germany's open door", *New Criterion*, 34(5), 2016, pp.50-51.

³¹ Naina Bajekal, *The Welcome, Germans open their doors to refugees*, *Time*, 186(15), (2015, Oct 19). p. 86-91.

³² Mark Falcoff, "Germany's open door", *New Criterion*, 34(5), 2016, p.50.

³³ Marcel Fratzscher, & Simon Junker, *Integrating refugees: A long-term, worthwhile investment* *DIW Economic Bulletin*, 5(45/46), 2015, p.614.

many articles or papers which handle the matter in terms of economic developments and the contribution the refugees may make for economic development. One such argument is that economic stagnation could be overcome due to the refugee crisis since public spending for refugees triggered growth.³⁴ Various scenarios are being discussed on how the refugee crisis will continue and affect the region and especially Germany. However, in many cases it is claimed that the refugees will contribute to the economy in the long run and the economy will reach a break-even point by 2021 to one scenario and 2035 to another. Therefore, ideas such as “smart integration” into the labour market are considered as measures to be taken to overcome the crisis. Another suggestion is the sustainability of employment of refugees into the skilled labour market since the German labour market needs skilled workers and the chances to find employment in these areas are higher.³⁵ This optimistic attitude is strengthened with reports in the media or others, which present samples of successful integration in the labour market. These claim that especially younger refugees have a higher chance to enter the market and that refugees are usually loyal to their workplace.³⁶

The issue is also being handled with legal and administrative measures since it is naïve to believe that the integration of refugees into the labour market and the system as a whole would be a smooth one. There is certainly a stress on the need for training since it provides opportunities in the German labour market, which can be strengthened by the change in legislation ensuring asylum seekers legal certainty; thus, it encourages them to commence vocational training.³⁷ However, one of the first things to

³⁴ Staatsausgaben für Flüchtlinge stützen Wachstum (2016, Jan 12). [Public spending for refugees support growth], FAZ, retrieved February 12, 2016, from <http://www.faz.net/aktuell/wirtschaft/konjunktur/bruttoinlandsprodukt-steigt-im-vierten-quartal-um-0-3-prozent-14066098.html>.

³⁵ Volker Brühl, “Die Kosten der Flüchtlingskrise in Deutschland - eine Investition in die Zukunft?“, [The cost of the refugee crisis in Germany – an investment in the future?] *Wirtschaftsdienst*, 96(7), July 2016, p.484.

³⁶ Es dauert lange und kostet viel Geld [It takes long and costs a lot of money], Sven Astheimer, (2016, Sept 21). FAZ, retrieved September 23, 2016, from <http://www.faz.net/aktuell/politik/denk-ich-an-deutschland-1/wie-fluechtlinge-in-deutschland-arbeiten-14436677.html>.

³⁷ Elisabeth Liebau, & Zerrin Salikutluk, “Many refugees have work experience but a smaller share possess formal vocational qualifications”, *DIW Economic Bulletin*, 6(34/35), 2016, p.398.

be done for a successful integration is the acquisition of the language; there is also the demand to get the newcomer acquainted with Western culture in order to avoid tensions between the two different cultures. Turning back to economy, another argument in favour of migration is, e.g., the tendency of migrants to set up businesses in the countries they arrive, thereby supplying employment. Here the number of refugee entrepreneurship is said to be higher than other immigrants and natives.³⁸ It should also be kept in mind that refugees want to find work and do so through informal channels no matter what their educational background is, that is they integrate into the labour market mainly with the help of acquaintances (with a rate of 53 %).³⁹ It is also possible to observe suggestion and measures on the social level – thereby increasing the chances for the integration of newcomers. Next to learning the language, suggestions like using libraries to provide access to internet and resources, and spare-time activities for families are pronounced very often.⁴⁰ This is especially essential since, next to economic matters, challenges in the cultural field and their handling are especially of importance.⁴¹

A further effort both for a better integration and their acceptance in the public can be seen in the way the issue is covered in the media, thus shaping the perception of the population by representing the refugees in a positive way. One may find a positive coverage of Syrian refugees in the media; whereby they are presented as people willing to integrate or participate in the German daily life. Such one example is “the heroes of Leipzig”, praising Syrian refugees who helped the police in detecting an ISIS member.⁴² Another argument is the educational background of the

³⁸ Claire Groden, “Germany Needs Migrants. Do We?”, *Fortune*, 172(5), 2015, Jan 10, p.13.

³⁹ Philipp Eisnecker, & Diana Schacht “Half of the refugees in Germany found their first job through social contacts” *DIW Economic Bulletin*, 6(34/35), 2016, p.416. Elisabeth Liebau,, Jan Marcus, Zerrin Salikutluk,, Diana Schacht, Katharina Spieß, Franz Westermaier, “Integrating refugees: Insights from the past, *DIW Economic Bulletin*, 6(34/35), 2016, p.390.

⁴⁰ Barbara Lison, “Germany’s new culture of welcome—Our Libraries are an Essential part of it”, *Journal of Library Administration*, 56:2, 2016, p.183.

⁴¹ Hans Feichtinger, “Refugees in Germany, First Things” *A Monthly Journal of Religion and Public Life*, 260, 2016, p.22.

⁴² Die Syrischen Helden von Leipzig, [The Syriand heros of Leipzig], Fabian von der Mark, (2016, Oct 11) retrieved October 11, 2016, from <http://m.dw.com/de/die-syrischen-helden-von-leipzig/a-36010499>.

Syrian refugees; despite the lacks they show in test, their education is considered high⁴³ when compared to other migrant groups.

Calls for changing the present legislation in order to cope with and manage the problem are one of the main themes brought into question. Opening up the market to refugees and at the same time granting a residence permit is directly linked to the better integration of refugees; which in turn enhances the ability to support oneself.⁴⁴ For the management of the crisis some legislation in Germany was already changed; thereby, access to professional training was eased and issues such as creation of job opportunities or allocation of residences altered.⁴⁵ Nevertheless, a change in legislation does certainly not mean that the problem is solved; weaknesses and strengths of the administrations need to be determined, the ability of employees evaluated, information on the newcomers collected etc. One such problem to be solved is the settlement of refugees; the places chosen for them are usually small settlements without much experience with foreigners or are temporary settlements due to the tight housing market. The problematic situation is usually intensified with last minute notice to local administration making it even harder to cope with not to mention needs to be covered such as food, health or education.⁴⁶ Therefore, the government needed to employ more personnel both to process the increased number of asylum applications and to take care of their accommodation.⁴⁷ Such settlement can also mean less integration for migrants, since they are isolated from daily life in Germany and are not able to socialize.

⁴³ Die Wahrheit über die Bildung syrischer Flüchtlinge, [The truth about the education Syrian refugees], *Die Welt*, Philipp Vetter, (2016, May 2), retrieved November 1, 2016, from <https://www.welt.de/wirtschaft/article154928441/Die-Wahrheit-ueber-die-Bildung-syrischer-Fluechtlinge.html>.

⁴⁴ Zerrin Salikutluk, Johannes Giesecke & Martin Kroh, "Refugees entered the labor market later than other migrants", *DIW Economic Bulletin*, 6(34/35), 2016. p.413.

⁴⁵ Volker Brühl, Die Kosten der Flüchtlingskrise in Deutschland - eine Investition in die Zukunft?, [The cost of the refugee crisis in Germany – an investment in the future?] *Wirtschaftsdienst*, 96(7), July 2016, p.484.

⁴⁶ Adnan R. Khan, "Germany is full", *Macleans*, 128(40), 2015, pp. 30-31.

⁴⁷ Karl Brenke, Flüchtlinge sind sehr ungleich auf die EU-Länder verteilt - auch bezogen auf die Wirtschaftskraft und Einwohnerzahl, [Refugees are distributed inequally in the EU-countries – also related to the economic power and population] *DIW-Wochenbericht*, 82(39), 2015, p.867.

There are also suggestions related to administrative aspects in solving the problem. One such suggestion is in the collection of data; although refugees and asylum seekers are registered and data is collected at once, these are usually limited to gender, age or origin. However, few are known about the educational or professional background of the newcomers; therefore, it is advised to gain information in the matter. This would help to identify potential asylum grants and help to accelerate their involvement in the labour market; but admission procedures should be followed by language courses.⁴⁸ A change in the labour market is one of the expected outcomes; though not as fast as expected, it will lead to better integration when organized from the very beginning. Thus, the following need to be improved in the integration of asylum seekers: asylum proceedings, identification of qualifications, and assistance in language acquisition. There is a strong emphasis on language acquisition since this is the gateway to integrate into the system; however, it needs to be mentioned that not all refugees or migrants are successful in acquiring the language, younger people or those with a higher educational background learning more quickly.⁴⁹ Coordination with Muslim associations on the national level could also be supportive for a better integration of refugees.⁵⁰ The hindrance of economic migrants due to their incompatibility with the law for migration and their integration in the labour market is sometimes criticised. One reason for this is that these people will come anyway despite refoulement and the second that it is not realistic to classify these. A revision of law in terms of obstacles for economic migrants and their possibilities in the labour market would be a measure to deal with the problem.⁵¹

⁴⁸ Hinte, H., Rinne, U., & Zimmermann, K. F. (2015). *Flüchtlinge in Deutschland: Realismus statt Illusionen*, [Refugees in Germany: realism instead of illusions], IZA Standpunkte, 83 p.3. Wido Geis., & Anja Katrin Orth, "Flüchtlinge: Herausforderung und Chance für Deutschland [Refugees: challenge and chance for Germany]", IW policy paper, 26/2015. p.19.

⁴⁹ Elisabeth Liebau, & Diana Schacht, "Language acquisition: refugees nearly achieve proficiency level of other migrants", DIW Economic Bulletin, 6(34/35), 2016, pp. 402-403.

⁵⁰ Holger Hinte, Ulf Rinne, & Klaus F. Zimmermann, *Flüchtlinge in Deutschland: Realismus statt Illusionen*, [Refugees in Germany: realism instead of illusions] IZA Standpunkte, 83, 2015, pp. 7-8.

⁵¹ Herbert Brücker, *Zur Integration von Flüchtlingen*, [On the integration of refugees] IABStellungnahme, 5/2015 p.9.

The allocation and settlement of refugees in Germany is a further aspect often discussed and called for revision; at the moment, it is done according to the tax income and number of inhabitants of a region. However, the condition of the labour market is not taken into account thus leading to improper settlement and less employment chances of them. One of the steps to be taken is to consider the labour market situation in various regions when settling refugees and asylum seekers. One further suggestion to cope with the situation is to revise present labour market instruments in terms of their suitability and adapt them to the new conditions.⁵²

6. Conclusion

The refugee crisis, starting in 2011 with the Syrian civil war and reaching its peak in 2015 for Europe, has led governments to take positions in order to be able to cope with the problems. However, it is not possible to say that each government took similar measures; they ranged from completely open doors, like in Turkey, to almost closed gates or the selection of “desirable” migrants. Germany was actually one of the few countries which were ready to solve the problem and not look away and thus tried to push other EU states to cooperate. Germany (through the EU) managed to sign a deal with Turkey in order to control the refugee influx; nevertheless, it failed to persuade other member countries to cooperate and faced many challenges within the country. It not only had to cope with the huge numbers when settling, providing food and healthcare for them, it also had to face opposition even within its own coalition.

Why, then, was Germany willing to take the entire burden when it could decide to close its borders and send all the refugees back? It is definitely not sufficient or logical to claim that it did so due to humanitarian concerns though often presented from a humanitarian aspect. Germany saw certain opportunities for itself in the crisis and took a clear position in the issue but it was also well aware that it needed the support of other countries; that is mainly other EU countries and also Turkey. It could close its borders as many other countries did so; however, sending them back is easier said than

⁵² Volker Brühl, *Die Kosten der Flüchtlingskrise in Deutschland - eine Investition in die Zukunft?*, [The cost of the refugee crisis in Germany – an investment in the future?] *Wirtschaftsdienst*, 96(7), July 2016, pp.484-485.

done because all the refugees suddenly arrived after Turkey had decided to open its borders and let them all pass through Turkey in 2015. Before that, Turkey had led an open door policy to Syrian refugees and made an effort to keep most of them in the country. A Germany not willing to take them and provide shelter for them would certainly seem “weak” or “incapable”; certainly not an image Merkel’s government would like to present. When considered that Germany is trying to become one of the global players – which needs more than just to be an industrialized country – the crisis seemed to be an opportunity. This aspect seems to be quite significant since Germany was often criticised due to its past and considered a country not equal to countries such as France or the UK. However, the country has gained much prestige and started to gain the role of regional if not global player over the past decades. This can also be seen in its position within the EU; it had provided money to solve crises, such as the recent economic crisis in Greece. Furthermore, it provides one of the highest contributions to the European budget. The recent refugee influx must have seemed like an opportunity to strengthen its position in the EU and also on the global level.

There are certainly economic reasons behind the attitude of Germany towards the refugee crisis; a country open to migration and with a generous welfare system, especially when compared to the UK, attracted many migrants. The UK, USA or Canada also receive migrants but at the same time are able to draw the more educated and skilled ones. It is very well known that industrialized countries all are confronted with the fact that they have an aging population, thus are in need for a younger generation to support and balance their social security system. This fact must have been one of the major drives for the German government to lead an open door policy. One might certainly ask why taking the burden when there were already receiving migrants from various parts of the world. However, when looking at the discussions in the media, one might come to a conclusion that Germany saw this as an opportunity since some of the refugees had good educational backgrounds. This point is quite significant because Germany has had a systematic migration policy since the 1960s; during these years, Germany received “*Guest workers*” from various countries one of which was Turkey. It can be said that these are in general integrated now, but it took a few generations until it did so. As previously said, Germany usually

attracts migrants with less educational backgrounds or professional skills when compared to the USA, Canada or the UK most probably due to its generous welfare system. The latest refugees must have seemed like an opportunity to overcome such problems. Therefore, it was quite open to refugees from Syria and, at the same time, selective in choosing the ones with a higher chance of integration both in the labour market and German society.

The Syrian refugee crisis seems to be an opportunity for the German government despite all the challenges and problems it bears. It is an opportunity to balance its labour market and to select the ones it considers more “useful”, but it is well aware that this will be possible in the long run and with a proper management and training. It still is optimistic since the belief that Syrian refugees will integrate into the labour market through skilled labour or through founding their own enterprises is high. However, as stated above, Germany has still a long way to go, and shifts in policies and priorities of other countries will certainly affect its policies and positions; thus leaving Germany with uncertainties at least in the refugee issue. The Brexit negotiations consume a huge amount of time and energy, thereby leaving the matter unresolved. Relations with Turkey, which has a key role in the Syrian refugee crisis, remain tense due to the conflict of interests of various countries. Consequently, the refugee crisis will remain an issue that needs to be solved for a very long time both for Germany and other countries in the region.

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