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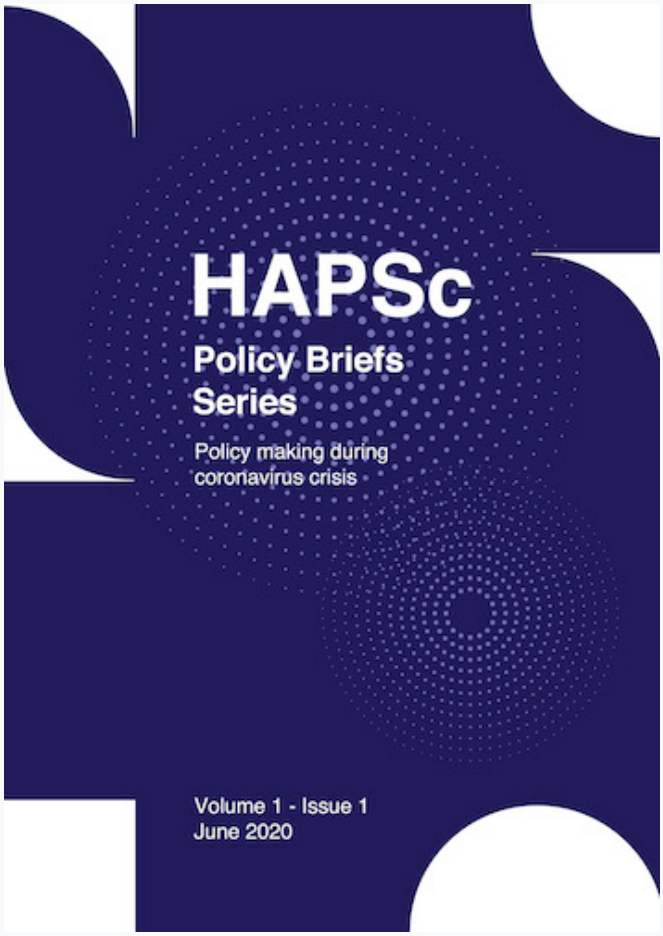

Immigration in the Covid-19 Era: The role of Greece and Turkey, the necessity for a common European immigration and foreign policy

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Immigration in the Covid-19 Era: The role of Greece and Turkey, the necessity for a common European immigration and foreign policy[1]

Konstantinos Papadakis[2] & Konstantinos Zafeiris[3]

Abstract

Immigration and refugee flows in the Eastern Mediterranean migration path have been increased the last two decades, a fact that created the need for coordinated political reaction from the EU, which now faces new challenges because of the Covid-19 pandemic. This article analyses the new challenges Covid-19 creates by focusing on the "lesson learned" of previous pandemics and their effect on mankind and also on the necessity of a common European policy both in the fields of immigration policy and foreign policy towards the stabilization in the Eastern Mediterranean, mainly by focusing on the role of Greece and Turkey.

Introduction

Threats to security: "…any action or succession of events that threaten drastically and for a relatively limited time to reduce the quality of life of the people of a country or that threaten to significantly reduce the range of available policy choices of a country's government or not government entities within it." (Ullman, 1983: 133). The history of epidemics - pandemics is very fascinating and must teach us. The earliest reference to a possible plague epidemic is found in the Bible. The plague is described as a plague that struck the Philistines because they had stolen the Ark of the Covenant from the people of Israel. Thus, the Philistines were punished for their a-witness. These events date to about the second half of the 11th century BC.

The most well-known case of a pandemic is Black Death. It was one of the most devastating pandemics in human history and was instantly transmitted and aided by poor hygiene, lack of medical knowledge and subsequent superstitious prejudices. By early 1348 it had already spread from Italy to central France, until the winter of the same year in the south of England and then in the Netherlands. The result of the pandemic was the loss of almost a third of Europe's population. The first official records of the pandemic began in October 1347, when Genoese merchant ships from the Black Sea

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port of Kafa, approaching the port of Messina in Sicily full of the dead and dead, transported the disease to Europe. The world's population returned to pre-1347 levels in the 17th century.

Epidemics of the past and lessons learned

An epidemic that many researchers have dealt with for a very long time is the plague of Athens (430-428 BC), which is described in great detail by Thucydides. He mentions the symptoms and the development of the disease that resulted in the death of 1,050 of the 4,000 soldiers in a campaign. A plague so great (like this one) and with such devastating consequences that it had no equal in human history. This is how Thucydides - in the history of the Peloponnesian War - described the epidemic that broke out in Athens and changed the military balances in the long-running Athens-Sparta war. Thucydides identified the roots of the plague in Ethiopia and estimated that the epidemic had wiped out about 1/3 of Athens' population, with the city's troops receiving an irreparable blow.

Another historical example of a pandemic was the so-called "Justinian plague." At a time when the armies of the almighty Byzantine emperor were reliving the old glory of the Roman Empire by recapturing lost lands, an internal enemy was showing its frightening teeth: around 540 AD. An unknown disease caused by Egyptian rodents was transported by ship to Istanbul. It is estimated that the plague killed 5,000 people a day, destroying about half of the city's population. However, the pandemic was not confined within the walls of Constantinople, but spread to Europe and Asia and was the deadliest epidemic of antiquity.

We can also mention the first cholera pandemic in 1817, the poliomyelitis of 1916, the yellow fever of Memphis in 1878, the influenza pandemic or "Spanish flu" of 1918-1919, the chicken pox epidemic in India in 1970 and finally the well-known SARS from Asia in 2003, which show that the common denominator of their common health conditions is the cause of their creation but also the movement of the population as the cause of their spread.

Insisting on the latter, it is generally accepted that immigration is a "global phenomenon." However, globally, most writers and analysts' mean that, especially since the mid-1970s, many countries have been affected by immigration, that there has been a growing variety of migrant backgrounds and that immigrants belong to a wider socio-economic scale than ever before. The greatest period of recorded migration, for most analysts, was the 19th century, after 1815. In total, around 25.8 million foreigners entered the United States between 1881 and 1924, as opposed to the 1930s which was just 0.5 million people entering the United States (Borjas, 1994). From the beginning of the 19th century until 1913, it is estimated that about 50 million Europeans had emigrated, of which 46 million to the so-called "new world" (Taylor & Williamson, 1994). After the war, and especially in the 1980s, the number of

immigrants has actually increased, but the percentage of foreigners in the indigenous population is only in the ½ of the corresponding percentage at the end of the 19th century. The 20th century has been described as "the century of immigration" (Lazaridis & Amitsis, 2001: 258), because the most important population movements and changes in the composition of the population (violent or peaceful) took place. A large percentage of these people who move from country to country are economic migrants, who are looking for a better future for themselves and their families. These movements are so common today that they are so large that they provoke reactions inside countries that welcome immigrants.

However, there are qualitative differences from the past. Qualitative research has shown that migrants' responses to relevant issues often revolve around issues such as how their life was "there", how they would like it and what is important to remember and what to change. The idea of ethnic origin is simply a radical concept that is thought to inextricably link individuals in a space and place (Vermeulen, 1997: 21). Their descriptions of living conditions in the two social environments, "there" and "here", show how their perceptions of identity, and therefore also of otherness, are (re) created within the modern dynamics of social relations[4].

Immigration in the Covid-19 Era: The role of Greece and Turkey

It was well-known among the member states of the EU but now it has become a common sense (especially after the statements of the Turkish President) that Turkey is promoting the illegal immigration towards Europe. The provocative and blackmailing statements of the Turkish president towards Greece and the European Union have become a daily occurrence. In short terms if someone wants to briefly describe the refugee / immigration problem in the Eastern Mediterranean, would say that Turkey is using the human pain of the immigrants and the refugees as a weapon of an asymmetric war against Greece and as a mean of blackmailing towards the European Union in order to get more money. Unfortunately this behavior is leading to the deaths of hundreds of people, among them many children. Greece wants to preserve human lives and so systematically and with the help of the Frontex, guards her sea and land borders, as any modern European state should do, with determination and disposal of great numbers of personnel and resources. It would be crucial for Greece to establish a

[4] Ethnic identity is used as an analytical term and refers to a dynamic and at the same time invisible phenomenon: dynamic in the sense that it is in constant adaptation and invisible because it is rather impossible to identify objectively (see: Veikou M. & Triandafyllidou A. (2002). The Hierarchy of Greekness. Ethnic and National Identity Considerations in Greek Immi-gration Policy. *Ethnicities,* 2 (2): 189-208 - Veikou M. (2003). Ambiguous Insiders and the Description of "Homeland": Belonging in Immigrants' Ethnic Identity Narratives. In: .Robin, R. & Strath, B. (Eds), *Homelands. Poetic Power and the Politics of Space.* Brussels: P.I.E./Peter Lang, 223-246). More than anything else, ethnic identity is based on the perception of belonging to a com-munity. People who share the same ethnicity do not necessarily share something above that feeling or the idea that they all somehow belong to the same group (although quite often such feelings are expressed with specific symbols such as common language, common religion, etc.).

Contiguous Zone within which it could deal with illegal (and Turkish-led) immigration. Greece, once the ship with the illegal immigrants enters the coastal zone, and after conducting a boarding, if she finds out that there are immigrants on the ship, is obliged to examine whether their repatriation entails its responsibility otherwise it would be a violation of Article 3 of the European Convention on Human Rights. In the face of such a possibility, Greece is usually led to the decision to finally accept them and lead them at an Aegean island, which are now overcrowded with immigrants and refugees. The adoption of the Contiguous Zone offers Greece the opportunity to control the illegal (and Turkish-led) immigration, as well as the opportunity to consider its alternatives, without being under the pressure that would be caused by the fact that illegal immigrants are in the coastal zone.

Reasons that the Turkey lead to illegal immigration

The main reason that Turkey promotes the illegal Immigration towards Greece is because of the long going Aegean Dispute between the two countries. The Turkish Coast Guard (TCG) published, alleged official maps and documents claiming that half of the Aegean Sea belong to Turkey. In this sense, Ankara claims to won dozens of Greek islands, the entire eastern Aegean from the island of Samothraki in the North to Kastellorizo island in the South. The maps and claims have been uploaded on the website of the Turkish Coast Guard Sahil Güvenlik Komutanlığı in the context of a 60-page report about the activities of the TCG in 2016. On page 7 and 13 of the report, the maps allegedly show Turkey's Search And Rescue responsibility area. The maps show half of the Aegean Sea and also a very big part of the Black Sea, where Turkey's SAR area coincides with the Turkish Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ). It should be noted that Turkey has not signed the International Convention for the Law of the Sea of 1982, which delimits the boundaries of the EEZs. However, Turkey claims an EEZ of more than 200 nautical miles.[7]

Figure 1: Turkish Claim in the Aegean

Source: Turkish coast guard. Available at: www.sahilguvenlik.gov.tr

Turkey is taking advantage of the fact that Greece hasn't yet a Contiguous Zone in order to control the illegal immigration in its interest, and to perform save and rescue operations in high Seas. So Turkey is using the immigrants and refugees as a way to question Greece's sovereignty over several islands of the Aegean and her EEZ as well as and the right to extend her Territorial Waters width to 12 Nautical Miles (UN, 1982).

The Contiguous Zone of a coastal state, in accordance with Article 33 of the 1982 Law of the Sea, is the zone bordering its territorial sea. The Contiguous Zone cannot extend beyond the 24 nautical miles of the baseline from which the width of the territorial sea is measured. Within the Contiguous Zone, the coastal state may exercise the control necessary to:

I. prevent the violation of customs, fiscal, immigration or health laws and regulations on its territory or in its territorial sea.
II. punishes violations of the above laws and regulations committed on its territory or in its territorial sea (Papadakis, 2018).

Moreover Greece is obligated to prevent the illegal immigration according to the European Union Laws. In particular the Regulation 2016/399 of the European Parliament, in March 9, 2016 states: "Border control is in the interest not only of the Member State at whose external borders it is carried out but of all Member States which have abolished internal border control. Border control should help to combat illegal immigration and trafficking in human beings and to prevent any threat to the Member States' internal security, public policy, public health and international relations." (European Parliament, 2016: 77/2).

Turkey has even used the pandemic crisis of Covid-19 as a weapon which would help her to put more pressure on Greece and EU. According to Greek authorities Turkey concentrated big numbers of Covid-19 infected immigrants with a plan to push them into the Greek islands and at the land border of Evros. It also said that this movement of illegal immigrants (infected with the Coronavirus) was organized and coordinated by the Turkish police, the coastguard and the gendarmerie. The purpose was to cause an epidemic crisis at the immigrant shelters that exist in Greece and afterwards to blame Greece that the essential precautions weren't held as it should be and that Greece isn't a safe country because of the epidemic outbreak (which eventually didn't happen).

Conclusion

In conclusion, no matter how hard Greece tries to deal with illegal immigration, there will be no permanent solution and the problem with Turkey will only be solved if there is a common policy and

a decisive stance by the European Union, which will include both political and mainly economic sanctions against Turkey. It's more than certain that decisive European sanctions will force Turkey both to stop using immigrants as a mean of exercising foreign policy and at the same time, blackmailing the European Union. What's need to become a common sense that mainly Greece along with the other European States of the Mediterranean (Italy, Spain and Malta) are not just protecting their own borders but at the same time they are protecting and the borders of the EU as they are obligated to do according to European Law (Regulation 2016/399 of the European Parliament, March 9, 2016). The European Union needs to strongly support those countries with personnel, resources and of course to provide political support especially in the case of Greece towards Turkey. In the Covid-19 era, and because of the challenges it creates, that need has become an urgent necessity. Strong initiatives need to be taken as soon as possible and, in any case, surely within the year 2020.

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