

THE MYTH OF TOLERANT EUROPE IS WRITTEN ON A BLANK PAGE

*By Genevefa Etienne and Claude Moniquet,
ESISC CEOs*

During the last *Munich Security Conference*, held in the Bavarian capital on February 17-19, 2017, Angela Merkel delivered a long statement on the European challenges and priorities. **Among the several vectors of domestic and foreign policy that were announced, the Chancellor reiterated the policy of welcoming immigrants within German and EU borders.** Although the intent to foster the European Union's allegedly inner desire to become the unwavering supporter of tolerance, compassion and freedom worldwide is noble, some facts contradict the narrative telling citizens that the hospitality of the immigrants is happening peacefully. **And more than ever, the migrant issue is a "hot topic" feeding the rise of populism in Europe.** Thus, it must be "handled with care"....

The last episode in a long series of disorders involving migrants has taken place last Monday (February 20) in **Stockholm**, which was shaken by a riot of 30 to 50 "teenagers", who took over the streets of **Rinkeby**, in the suburbs of the Swedish capital to set cars on fire, loot stores and throw stones at the police and passers-by. Rinkeby is a suburb located north of central Stockholm, which population is composed of 75% of immigrants. The riots went so far that the police were forced to shoot at the rioters to prevent further damage, luckily without any casualties. One among the most striking aspects of the event is the media coverage that has been granted to it: the mainstream media have indeed omitted to declare that the immigrants constitute the majority of the inhabitants of the neighbourhood, if they reported the news at all.

This is only the last case of incomplete coverage of the news coming from the Scandinavian country, which would bewilder the image of "tolerant and democratic country" pursuing an open-door policy without any cracks.

Without creating an artificial link between migration and criminality or extremism, it must be acknowledged that, for a part of the non-European population living in the E.U., the "integration process" has dramatically failed. This issue, of course must be addressed by the authorities. But the foggy media approach to migration issues displays how the political authorities are trying to shape the public perception by spreading a myth of EU tolerance that is written on a blank page. And this is not the first time we notice this problem: **remember the incredible story of the new-year sexual attacks, in Cologne, in 2015....**

This blind-eye media coverage is a problem by itself and encourages people to turn to the populist parties which have an increasing influence in most European countries.

The **initiatives promoted by the EU Institutions to counter immigration at the international level betray indeed a fundamental inconsistency with the values of welcoming the refugees** that both the media and the institutions tirelessly profess in front of the public.

The EU has indeed sought the support of its Eastern and Southern neighbours with all available means to stop the flow of refugees. On one hand, the EU is advocating for Russian engagement to smoothen the situation in the Middle East and to fight ISIS, with the goal of lowering the migration fluxes. However, to what extent can the collaboration with the Russian neighbour help sedating the domestic riots? It does not appear indeed that President Putin is willing to become the policeman inside European borders.

On the other hand, the EU countries sponsored an agreement with Turkey to keep the refugees inside its borders and ease the flow of immigrants on the routes to the EU.

The negotiations between the two counterparts began already in November 2015, when EU and Turkish leaders announced the commencement of a joint action plan, offering commitments to advance negotiations for Turkish visa-free travel in the Schengen area. This led the EU to pledge to devote an initial aid envelope for Turkish assistance to the refugees amounting at 3 billion euros.

The deal has been enhanced in February 2016, when Angela Merkel paid a visit to Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan and Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoglu to attempt securing Ankara's support in the establishment of a buffer zone in the region. **In that occasion, the German Chancellor revamped the financial offer by stating that the EU could provide up to 7 billion euro funds as a compensation for leaving Turkey alone in facing migration, and moreover offered some benefits on the political level.** First of all, it was declared that Germany could use its influence to accelerate the process of granting visa-free travel for Turkish citizens willing to move without visa restrictions in the Schengen area, a long-awaited goal for the Turkish authorities. Secondly, the commitment to advocate for an acceleration of Ankara's EU membership talks was reiterated. And last but not least, Germany ventilated the possibility to grant Turkey a "safe country status" as a reward for the country's cooperation on the refugees' issue.

However, recognizing Turkey as a "safe country" would have entailed blocking any asylum application from Turks or Kurds living in a country where Human Rights were already under attack. Hence, only one year ago **the European Union was not only reneging its own values** by negotiating a deal to prevent new tides of war refugees to Europe, but also **it was ready to sacrifice the freedom of the Turkish citizens.** As a consequence, **Germany had put itself in a delicate position of compromise with the Turkish president Erdogan, who is not widely recognised as a staunch defender of Democracy.**

The course reversed after the attempted coup perpetrated against President Erdogan on July 15, after which the purges operated by the Turkish state, which allegedly hit at least 125 000 members of Turkish army, intelligentsia and civil society, were disapproved by the European leaders. **In November 2016, the European Parliament passed a non-binding resolution to temporarily halt membership talks with Turkey because of "disproportionate" measures**

impacting Human Rights with a clear majority of 479 votes to 37. The dire consequences of this situation is that Turkey might not want to abide to the agreement to retain migration flows inside European borders and therefore Europe might be flooded by refugees anew.

The inconsistent fluctuation between outstretched hand and clenched fist pursued by the German establishment has driven the European Union in a perilous game, where it risks of finding itself at the mercy of migration waves, while the uncontrolled breeding of unrest, and international terrorism on European soil comes to be a bitter reality. Therefore, the EU leaders should ponder whether it would be more convenient to reshape its path towards a safer future for their citizens, although this entails the sacrifice of the celebrated European idealism.

END.

Copyright© ESISC 2017