Research Report

Leiden Model United Nations 2017
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Forum: *General Assembly Third Committee*
Issue: *Rise of xenophobia and ultranationalist movements*

Position: *Chair*

Introduction

In some countries the refugee crisis sparked an outpouring of solidarity and many local volunteers together with central authorities were committed to making the newcomers arriving in their towns feel welcome. In other countries, however, the opposite happened and restrictive border policies combined with a toxic rhetoric have created an openly hostile environment for refugees and migrants.

Definition of Key Terms

Xenophobia
Xenophobia is the dislike of or prejudice against people from other countries. The fear of certain groups of people that are different from the group perceived as "us". This fear mainly relates to economic, cultural, and security threats that could be abstract or realistic in their nature.

Ultranationalism
Ultra-nationalism is extreme nationalism that promotes the interest of one state or people above all others.

General Overview

The refugee and migrant crisis is one of the most serious challenges that the European Union has faced in its history. Since the start of the crisis, xenophobic sentiment has increased across the continent, far-right and populist parties have gained ground, and member states have replaced solidarity with calls for national solutions. Xenophobia has increased all over Europe due to the current refugee and migrant crisis. Fascism and ultra-nationalism have also been on the rise. Although Central European countries lack significant foreign-born populations and have mainly been unaffected by the crisis, xenophobic sentiment is widespread in the region. This shows that anti-immigrant attitudes are unrelated to the actual presence of immigrants—rather, attitudes often present themselves as symbolic fears of the unknown, fostered by political forces for domestic purposes. The rise in right wing nationalist politics in Europe means that many Europeans are now interested in preserving their culture. Some of them fear that the Muslim refugees will impose sharia law in their countries, which goes against Europe's liberal democracies.

During The Rise of Xenophobia and Islamophobia in Europe conference in London, Dr. Alekandra Lewicki, from the Free University of Berlin, provided analysis of parallels from Germany with trends across Western Europe: "Racism in Germany has been prevalent for some time but now it has been diverted into a mainstream political movement by the likes of the right-wing Alternative For Germany populist party. There has been a significant rise in racism and xenophobic attacks on mosques over the last few years in particular, and the public perception — that it has all been triggered by the refugee crisis — is not very accurate. In my opinion, inhibition has been lost and holding right-wing, hateful views has been legitimized by populist politics," Lewicki said. From his examination, it is seeable that the growing problem that is expanding in every European country and these countries kind of go through the same process. Right wing extremism seems to be at its peak in Europe, especially in countries such as Germany, because of the large arrival of refugees into the country. Also in Germany, there is an anti-Islam organisation called PEGIDA (Patriotic Europeans Against the Islamisation of the West) which is spreading throughout Europe; they argue that Europeans need to wake up to the threat of Islam. Many European's fear that by accepting refugees it will lead to the Islamisation of the west.

Some examples of right-wing nationalism in Europe:
Denmark's government relies on the support of the nationalist Danish People's Party and has the toughest immigration rules in Europe.

In France, the far-right National Front won 6.8 million votes in regional elections in 2015 - its largest ever score.

The far-right Jobbik party - polling third in Hungary - organizes patrols by an unarmed but uniformed "Hungarian Guard" in Roma (Gypsy) neighborhoods.

In Austria, for the first time since World War Two neither of Austria's two main centrist parties made it to the presidential run-off.

The Alternative party for Germany (AfD) has gained momentum, and has won elections in several states based on the beliefs that they are anti-migration and anti-refugees.

This shows that the number of people in Europe who are not agreeing with the large influx of refugees coming into their countries is increasing. The terror attacks in Paris in November 2015 and Brussels in March 2016 made it possible to link the topic of migration to terrorism.
Misconceptions about Islam also feed xenophobia and ultranationalist movements.

People fear that the refugees will come to Europe and impose their religion on Europeans. For them, Islam is a violent religion that cares little for our concepts of freedom and human rights. Islam is only as violent as the individual following it, and the same goes for Christianity, Judaism, Hinduism, etc. Such claims are as unfounded as those stating that Islam is not a European religion. Religions are not the property of a particular geography, and are certainly not limited to national borders.

However, prejudices against and aversion to foreigners are merely based on theoretical and symbolic fears of the unknown. "Virtual" foreigners are apparently capable of generating more fear and aversion than tangible ones. Scapegoating nonexistent groups and presenting them as enemies seems to pay off for political forces because the vast majority of the population cannot verify the accusations, and parties using xenophobic rhetoric will not be punished by voters belonging to the group presented as an enemy. Mainstream political forces have framed migration as a phenomenon causing existential problems and requiring extraordinary measures.

Regardless of the long-term success of the securitisation approach, it is clear that political forces already had a basis on which xenophobic messages and fear-mongering could flourish. General dissatisfaction, a weakening culture of joint respect in the public sphere, and fear of decreasing social status are the key factors behind the success of populist forces. Hence, measures aiming to tackle the rise of xenophobia in the region will have to address the complex and deeply rooted causes behind it.
We can, and must, learn from the past, stay true to our humanist traditions and construct a better future together.

Appendix/Appendices

https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/xenophobia

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