

In the Name of God, the Most Merciful, the Most Kind



June 20, 2018

The Rights of Refugees Must be Protected

Today, i.e. June 20 is celebrated as the World Refugee Day around the world. The Day was adopted in December 2000, when United Nations (UN) General Assembly passed resolution 55/76, wherein it was emphasized that the rights of the Refugees must be protected. In 2016, UN Refugee Agency launched its #With Refugees petition that was delivered to UN headquarters in New York ahead of the UN High Level Meeting on Refugees and Migrants. The petition asked governments to: 1. Ensure every refugee child gets an education; 2. Ensure every refugee family has somewhere safe to live; and 3. Ensure every refugee can work or learn new skills to make a positive contribution to their community. It is essential that the basic objectives highlighted here must be followed by all the states where there are refugees. It is important to note that a considerable number of refugees belongs to Afghanistan. Migration has always been an issue for Afghanistan. Different eras of instability have forced millions of people to leave their homeland and move to the neighboring countries and other countries, mostly Europe, USA, Canada and Australia. After the downfall of Taliban and installation of a so-called democratic government, there were some opportunities that the situation could improve and the conditions in the country could get better and people would ultimately return to their country. Regrettably, with an intensification in insecurity people do not appear to be very much confident about the future and many people who have already migrated waver to come back and many of those who are in the country are planning to leave for better future.

Those who decide to migrate are caught in different sorts of problems; nevertheless, they are ready to take the risks and leave their homes. They have to undergo different problems on the way to their destinations as most of the times they have to follow illegal means. They have to face human smugglers, cross borders illegally, face different weather conditions and travel across mountains, rivers and even sea. There have been different incidents when the migrants have lost their lives on these routes. On many occasions, Afghan migrants lost their lives in the waters of Greece on their route to Europe or in Indonesian and Australian waters.

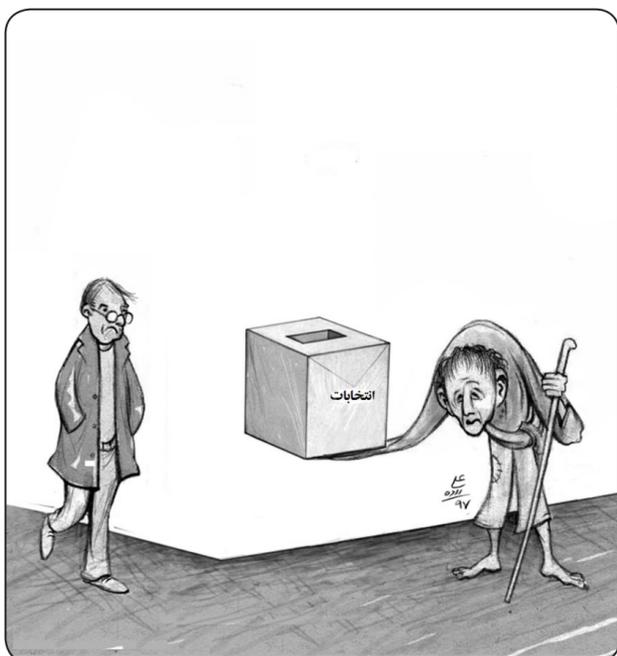
This clearly depicts that people do not take decisions to migrate because of economic conditions, alone; rather, they do so mostly because of the security conditions. Lately, the migrants include many individuals from media and different offices, who having observed the situation in the country closely have opted to flee. Therefore, it is no more the issue of ignorance or tough economic conditions as the decisions are taken by well-educated individuals who are educated and even have jobs.

Unfortunately, the ones who reach other countries after myriads of problems are not guaranteed secure future. As the issue of refugees has become very serious many countries are not sure about allowing refugees in their countries. Particularly, European countries, after facing a flux of refugees are planning to deport many Afghan refugees. Germany that initially welcomed refugees is now under pressure from other countries and even its own people regarding the situation. Same is the case with other European countries.

The Afghan government on the other hand seems worried about the deportation of the Afghan refugees. The Afghan Ministry of Refugees and Repatriation have always given the indication that the country is facing serious problems as far as compensation of the refugees is concerned.

Moreover, the policies and procedures regarding the cases of different refugee in European countries have also changed to a great extent. There are many Afghan refugees in European countries who have been waiting for the final decision about their cases and in the meanwhile are not in a condition to move freely, earn livelihood and travel to different places and or meet their family members.

Even in the neighboring countries, Afghan refugees have not always been welcomed with warm hugs; every now and then they have been the victims of discrimination and ill-treatment. Most of the Afghan refugees in the neighboring countries, especially in Iran and Pakistan have suffered the consequences of fluctuations in the way they are treated. Definitely, it has been generous of both the countries to compensate the Afghan refugees, who because of wars and instability left their dear homeland, but on certain occasions they have also displayed the attitude that have violated the rights of the refugees to a great extent. Definitely, these countries have their own problems; they are developing countries and they have their own economic issues to face; however, they have been supported by international community and United Nations to assist the refugees and guarantee their rights under international law. Both the European and neighboring countries at this crucial juncture must make sure that they design a clear strategy regarding the fate of Afghan refugees. Definitely, there are political and diplomatic concerns for all the governments of the world to consider, but the issue of refugees is more important than such concerns, as it involves the precious human lives and the lives of human beings stand more sacred than any other concern.



Europe's Left Turns Right on Immigration

By Michael Bröning

Europe's established left is facing the threat of extinction. In less than two years, the continent's social-democratic parties have suffered historic losses in France, the Netherlands, Germany, and Italy. On a continent long defined by democratic competition between center-right and center-left parties, the collapse of the left could have far-reaching consequences, beyond particular party interests.

Many factors underlie the left's decline, including the dissolution of the traditional working class. But one of the most important reasons is as grim as it is simple: European voters are increasingly opposed to immigration, and do not trust the left to limit it.

Faced with a sustained influx of refugees and migrants, primarily from the Middle East and Africa, European voters have transformed a series of recent elections into popular referenda on immigration. Right-wing populist movements have skillfully played on blue-collar voters' fears by convincing them that traditional labor parties will allow immigrants to flow in virtually unchecked.

In April, Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán won a landslide election victory after running a campaign that focused on the "threat" to "Christian values" supposedly posed by Muslim immigrants. Italy's new anti-establishment coalition government was propelled to power by the popularity of the staunchly anti-immigrant League party, led by Matteo Salvini, who is now interior minister and deputy prime minister.

In Slovenia, former Prime Minister Janez Janša's right-wing opposition party secured just under 25% of the vote in this month's parliamentary election, meaning that Janša will form the country's next government. Echoing US President Donald Trump, Janša campaigned on an anti-immigrant "Slovenia first" platform.

When right-wing populists first started gaining political traction, Europe's center-left parties hoped that their traditional strengths would enable them to weather the challenge. To avoid unwittingly strengthening right-wing narratives, center-left campaigners attempted to shift public debate toward their ideological comfort zone: unemployment, inequality, and social justice. Germany's Social Democratic Party (SPD) based its entire 2017 election campaign on the slogan, "It's time for more justice."

Yet defeat after painful defeat has driven center-left parties to a stark realization: voters who are concerned primarily with immigration are not going to be won over with calls - however justified - for equality. As a result, center-left parties across Europe have begun to change course, with social democrats in several key countries changing long-held positions on migration.

In Germany, the coalition government (comprising the SPD, the Christian Democratic Union, and the CDU's Bavarian sister party, the Christian Social Union) is embroiled in a bitter fight over immigration that threatens the survival of the coalition. While the SPD aims for a European solution and rejects sealing Germany's borders, party leader Andrea Nahles called for accelerated asylum procedures that would enable authorities to conclude asylum applications from safe third countries within one week. Last month, Nahles launched the debate within the SPD when, seemingly echoing right-wing rhetoric, she de-

clared that Germany "cannot accept all."

Some in the SPD's leadership and its youth wing were up in arms. Yet Nahles has doubled down on her stance, publicly endorsing a critical analysis, compiled by a board of independent observers, of last year's election defeat. That report identified "the lack of a consistent social-democratic position" on migration issues as one of the party's structural weaknesses.

Austria's Social Democratic Party has taken its shift on immigration further. The party leadership has presented a new platform, to be officially endorsed later this year, that formally redefines the party's position as "pro-integration," as opposed to pro-migration. While the platform does refer to the country's "humanitarian responsibilities," it also demands "functioning protection" of the EU's external borders.

Denmark's social democrats are a step ahead of their Austrian counterparts: in preparation for next year's elections, they have adopted a new position paper on immigration titled "Just and Realistic." By establishing "reception centers" outside Europe to decide on asylum claims, the paper asserts, the flow of migrants into Denmark can be reduced. The paper also calls for stronger cooperation with the United Nations and a "Marshall Plan" for Africa that would presumably convince more migrants to stay home.

This stance is largely mirrored by Sweden's social democrats, as they attempt to cope with strong public support for the far-right, anti-immigrant Sweden Democrats. Prime Minister Stefan Löfven, who is campaigning for reelection in September, recently called his country's traditionally open immigration policy "not sustainable." His proposed policy, entitled "A Safe Migration Policy for a New Time," would halve the number of refugees allowed into Sweden and prevent rejected asylum seekers from receiving social support - a position that pro-migration groups harshly criticize.

The criticism highlights a key challenge. On one level, social democrats' immigration shift is a necessary response to voter demand. Efforts to limit or manage migration are not necessarily based on racism or xenophobia. The key is to ensure that policy responses remain morally acceptable.

At the same time, too drastic a change could be self-defeating for struggling center-left parties. They clearly cannot copy the crude nativist recipes of the radical right, which would not only be economically counterproductive, but would also fly in the face of progressive values, alienating cosmopolitan supporters. Instead, Europe's center-left parties should strike a balance between national and international solidarity with a three-pronged strategy comprising effective limits on immigration, a focus on integration, and humanitarian efforts to ease large-scale human suffering. Such an approach would eschew incendiary rhetoric, and instead offer real, forward-thinking, and morally sustainable solutions that are not populist, but certainly can be popular.

Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau has embraced this approach, as has French President Emmanuel Macron. Struggling center-left parties across Europe should follow suit, recognizing that such a repositioning may well be the key to political survival.

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The Costs of Trade War

By Mukhisa Kituyi

According to an old African proverb, "When elephants fight, it is the grass that suffers." The same is true for full-blown trade wars: when major economies clash, developing countries will be among the hardest hit.

On June 1, the US administration imposed import tariffs of 25% on steel and 10% on aluminum. The levies will affect not just China, but also Canada, Mexico, and the countries of the European Union. As Cecilia Malmström, the EU Commissioner for Trade, observed at a recent event held by the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), "We are not in a trade war, but we could be." It is a situation that should concern everyone.

We know from history that nobody "wins" in a trade war. Tariff hikes by major trading countries represent a reversal of efforts since the end of World War II to eliminate trade barriers and facilitate global commerce. Since the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade took effect in 1947, the average value of tariffs in force around the world has declined by 85%. That is no coincidence; rather, it is the result of multilateral cooperation, and eight rounds of global trade negotiations, first under the GATT, and then under its successor, the World Trade Organization.

Tariff reductions, together with technological advances, drove the extraordinary expansion of global trade that we have witnessed just in our lifetimes. In 1960, trade as share of world GDP stood at 24%; today it is nearly 60%.

The expansion of trade has fueled economic growth, created jobs, and increased household incomes around the world. It is a key factor behind the rise of the global South, where dozens of developing countries have experienced strong economic growth and positive societal change. And it made possible one of the most remarkable achievements in human history: lifting one billion people out of poverty in the space of just two decades.

Yet trade expansion has not benefited everyone equally. And in some cases, it has resulted in environmental degradation and economic displacement, with many people now feeling left behind. These are serious and legitimate issues that must be addressed. But unilateralism is not the way to do it. Global challenges demand global solutions.

Unfortunately, current trade actions augur a situation in which everyone will lose. In a trade war, companies across a wide range of sectors will lose profits, and workers will lose jobs. Governments will lose revenue, and consumers will have fewer product choices available. And, no matter where they are, firms, governments, and households will incur higher costs.

Even worse, a global trade war might jeopardize the multilateral trading system itself. It would no doubt result in tariff increases greater than anything we have seen in recent history. UNCTAD research shows that average tariffs could rise from negligible levels to as high as 30% for US exporters and 35% and 40% for EU and Chinese exporters, respectively. So, even if the "elephants" have sufficient economic weight to withstand a trade war, they would not benefit from one.

And, of course, developing countries that played no role in starting the conflict would be even less able to afford it. On average, tariffs applied on developing countries' exports could rise from 3% to 37%. But whereas average tariffs affecting countries like Nigeria and Zambia probably would not go above 10%, those against Mexico could reach as high as 60%. Likewise, countries like Costa Rica, Ethiopia, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, and Turkey could face average tariffs of 40-50%. Moreover, a trade war would be a severe blow to the world's poorest countries, and to the hope of doubling "least developed countries' share of global exports" by 2020 under the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). It would compromise the fragile economic recovery since the global financial crisis a decade ago, thus undercutting growth and development around the world. And it would limit the extent to which trade could be used to advance global goals.

The harm caused by a full-on trade war would be felt well beyond the realm of international commerce. Today's trade climate reflects a disturbing global trend toward nationalist unilateralism. The countries that helped reshape our world for the better through trade are now abandoning international cooperation, and that shift may have serious implications for other areas such as global efforts to combat climate change and ensure peace and prosperity for all. The easiest way to win a trade war is to avoid it altogether.

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