

Illegal immigration: European Security Concern in the Mediterranean



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Abstract:

This article debates the issue of illegal immigration as a phenomenon that expands across borders and over regions and a social challenge, its risks have increased in the Maghreb region and the poor Sahel countries in particular, according to its threats to security both in the Mediterranean and within the European continent. The paper aims to investigate the problems caused by this phenomenon in the Mediterranean region, and to prove its importance as a security obsession within the European political agendas and a major determinant in the equation of European security. It provides the following central problem: How does the European approach deal with illegal immigration in the Mediterranean region?

Keywords: *Mediterranean; Illegal immigration; Maghreb and Sahel region; Social challenge; European security.*

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Introduction:

The major structural transformations in global politics have produced a new pattern of perceptions and realizations of "security" and "threat" as a concept, source, and nature. The communist threat was primarily "military". In contrast, the new threat has become comprehensive and complex. Therefore, the new approach to the European security issues is based on the necessity to specify the nature of the threat that emerges from the South. Accordingly, the European perception of threats has transformed from its southern border, through a combination of social practices as well as European security discourses, the southern Mediterranean has become the new/alternative enemy after the traditional enemy has disappeared, and the threats of the south have become a reality.

The 2003 European Security Strategy document considered that illegal immigration is among the main threats facing Europe. Consequently, the immigration phenomenon has become a crucial political issue during the 21st century. The Immigration Management and border management of the European space were considered a security issue that requires cooperation and coordination at the highest levels with the different actors, and formed the most important agenda for dialogue with the Southern Mediterranean countries.

1. The Countries of the Southern Mediterranean: "As a new enemy and as a source of new security threats"

The existence of the communist threat served as the compass that helped the Western world adjusting its paths and ensuring its coherence towards the other. However, the end of the Cold War and the success of the West in applying its normative model contribute to the creation of a new enemy or the other which is the countries of the South was among the new concern in the West. The political instability and the emergence of the Islamic movement, political instability, economic deterioration, ethnic and sectarian conflicts in the Southern shore of the Mediterranean Sea encouraged the illegal immigration that Europe started to consider as a real challenge.

This concept of the new enemy has been shared by both sides of the Atlantic and was supported by a considerable number of Western studies and researches that worked to amplify this new conflict direction. The thesis of "End of history" advanced by Francis Fukuyama" and "Clash of Civilizations" introduced by Samuel Huntington was among the first researches that tried to confirm this institutional hypothesis. In his work, Fukuyama argued that democracy and liberty as a Western social organization cannot be overcome after its victory over communism. In his theory, Huntington introduced the ideational factors in the new forms of clashes and argued the ideas, cultures, and identity would be the hallmark of post-Cold War conflicts (Mahdavi & Knight.2020).

Generally speaking, Huntington's diagnosis belongs to a pessimistic camp that focuses on the gap between zones of "peace and war" and the emerging clashes between major powers in a multipolar era, he is characterized by its focus on civilizations as the fundamental unit of analysis (Griffiths & O'Callaghan, 2008, p.34). As Huntington believes that the coming conflicts that will dominate the world during the coming years will be cultural nature. He goes so far as to say: "The contradictions between the West and many Islamic and Confucian states will be the main source of conflicts in the immediate future", he said (Huntington, 1993, p.32), meaning that Western civilization will be threatened in the coming years by Eastern and Far Eastern civilizations. In this way, he is seeking Securitization of Islam and East Asia by considering them as competitors (Buzan, 2006, p.6).

Accordingly, a new trend has emerged to replace the threat of communism with the threat of Islam through employing the question of identity/civilization and emphasizing that the future danger will be represented in the cultural estrangement between the North and the South, the East, and the West, as well as between Christianity and Islam. As indicated by the philosopher (F. Braudel) in this regard; as he introduced the term "civilization" as a guideline for understanding the Mediterranean and even international reality. He believes that the Mediterranean region has three civilizational cultural groups that jostle among each other throughout the history and even transcend borders of the countries, namely: The West, Islam, and the Greek world, and this trilogy or these three groups, according to him, constitute integral enemies (Grange, 1996, pp. 247-248).

The matter that caused the increasing sense of hostility and Vulnerability (Shadid & Van Koningsveld,2020) towards the southern Mediterranean countries, fueled by the consequences of the Second Gulf War, the growing Islamic trend, and the Islamic regimes, which has established in the Middle East countries, in giving more credibility to the thesis of the "Clash of Civilizations".

The differences between the two shores of the Mediterranean Sea made it the best place to apply Huntington's theory, as the countries of the South that belong to the Islamic world find themselves confronted on the Christian West, which profounds the manifestations of estrangement and deepening the gap between the countries and the peoples of the two sides of the Mediterranean. Consequently, it would hinder and complicated ways to achieve co-operation and confidence-building frameworks.

2. The Relationship of Illegal Immigration to the New Security Implications: "Securitization of Immigration in the European Security Discourse"

The European security discourse on the Mediterranean reflects the transformation of the new security concerns of the European Union and its adoption of a broad approach that goes beyond the traditional view of the concept of security; On the one hand, the threats, which are a "mental construction" and a synthesis of political and social discourses, are intended to respond to the new

European security needs after the communist threat ceased to exist. It also aims to guarantee the continuity of security institutions and to justify Securitization policies in the Mediterranean region. The issue of the linkage between security and immigration leads by its turn to the relationship between immigration, the clash of civilization, and security. Nevertheless, after Huntington's thesis on the Clash of Civilization. Whereas, the relationship between the West that represents the center, and the South that represents the periphery, is in close contact with the issues of "Immigration and the clash between competing cultural identities" (Benantar, 2006, p.168). Immigration that comes from the periphery is one of the most important threats to the social security of the Center. This is because it threatens the civilization identity and the culture of Western societies (Buzan, 1991, pp.447-448), which suggests that it is only for the security of the West as if it is the only party under threat. As for the security of the South is not threatened. That reflects the difference in perceptions of threat between the North and the South, on the other hand.

So, the South-North immigration (Maghrebs or Africans) is one of the deepest security concerns that Europeans fear to make them lose their cultural identity due to the difficulty of integrating immigrants (Aléman, 1998-2000, pp.26-27) (Muslims in particular). In addition to the European fears of not implementing serious policies at the level of the South Countries to reduce this phenomenon, that means immigration movements continue to be pressure on their communities (Collyer, 2008, p.162), so immigration becomes a major determinant in the European security equation (Benantar,2006, p.168).

According to the European understanding, the phenomenon of illegal immigration is a key vector of the economic, demographic, political and cultural problems that are common within the societies of the southern Mediterranean, which they consider a threat to their values and civilization as well as to their social stability. It went so far as to consider the interactions with migrants a major factor of growing habits of fear and hostility towards foreigners (Aléman,1998-200, p.25). It also leads to the adoption of some policies (such as banning the construction of minarets and forbid women from wearing hijab) (Shadid & Van Koningsveld, 2000) to consider them as threatening images of alien to the European civilization model.

The "securitization of immigration" took place, considering it a security betting during the 1980s by social and political discourse. The immigrants were perceived as a threat to a culturally defined national identity, although in the past they were subject to economic treatment, and immigrants were viewed as "expatriate workers" (Battistella, 2003, p.453). According to "Didier Bigot", the power of the content of the speech formula changes the social meaning of the concept of immigration, and it was clear in his sayings: "Immigration is a major security problem for Europe", which the latter transforms, thanks to the power of speech, into a security issue that should be solved by private means. Consequently, the concept of security becomes a reflection of threatening reality in itself rather than an objective concept (Bigot, 1998, p.33). The same tendency is found in the

new security studies, such as the pioneers of the Copenhagen school, (B. Buzan & O. Waever). Except for the military threat, objective threats are rare. Waever further says that the regime can use the security problem for specific purposes, where an issue is made up as a security problem as considered by the elites (Gromes & Bonaker, 2007, p.2). Yet, the expediency of the security problem serves specific personal and political interests (Balzacq, 2011, p.57). These Securitization Policies coincided with the spread of the concept of community security, as well as considering identity as one of the security issues that must be protected (especially from immigration). As time passes, the social and economic features of immigration almost disappear, due to the despotism of the security dimension and the linkage (at the level of discourse than of practices) between immigration on the one hand and crime and terrorism on the other.

Illegal immigration has created another security concern, "cultural security" or "identity security", in the countries that receive immigrants. That also has contributed to the politicization of the debate on immigration policy in European countries, which caused the latter to adopt a broad public information strategy.

3. Security Implications of Illegal Immigration: "The Course of the Sahel towards the North of Africa and Europe"

The security challenges in the gray area between North and West Africa have been further exacerbated in recent years as they move into the Mediterranean basin. Especially after the Trans-Saharan waves of clandestine immigration towards North Africa and Europe have increased incredibly. This recalled the Rome Club's warnings in the early 1990s concerning millions of people marched towards Europe, or what former French president Jacques Chirac had said at the time, that Africans would invade the world. It could be a sort of speculations that have been proved by the unbelievable numbers of increasing immigrants that cross the Mediterranean hoping to get salvation, according to their perceptions, of the complex problems that exist in their countries in Africa (De Haas, 2007, p.5).

Human insecurity resulting from internal crises, wars and armed conflicts, famines, epidemics, natural disasters (desertification, drought, locusts), poverty (450 million of poor people in Africa, 45% of the continent's population and 30% of the poor all over the world)* as well as the Fatal diseases and lack of care in the Sahel and sub-Saharan Africa. In addition to the repressive political practices and successive economic crises that have led to massive movements of thousands of civilians escaping from all these phenomena and getting away of trouble spots. These movements take two forms: Indoor and outdoor. The first movement is from the Bedouin areas (farmers and breeders) towards the cities, while the second

* According to a study of Oxford University in July 2010.

movement is from African countries in general towards the north of the continent, either to settle there or to cross borders towards Europe.

Immigration of the latter type which was carried out clandestinely and illegally is one of the most important threats coming from the African side, as the secrecy of these movements makes it very difficult to control them and limits the sovereignty of the Maghreb countries to overcome them due to their transnational nature. The most fueling factor to the illegal immigration from Africa is the inability to produce an internal African environment that is capable of responding to the aspirations of the population", such as natural aspirations (security and survival), psychological ones (human dignity and identity) and above all the material needs (employment, earning their living and individual's better income)"(Marchesin 2001, pp.108-109). The matter that leads the young people, in particular, to look for living in better conditions, so they try to find any way to immigrate to Europe (the continent of the last dream) to "search for life" even if it cost them their lives (Escoffier 2004, p.140).

As a result, clandestine immigration to North Africa and Europe increased during the 1990s, spreading the nationalities of African immigrants to 40 different nationalities (2005). For example, Algeria managed to stop some 6,000 clandestine immigrants between 2002 and 2006, compared to only 150 immigrants between 1990 and 2002. The UN refugee agency estimated that in 2004, 120,000 clandestine immigrants attempted to cross the Mediterranean, including 35,000 from Sub-Saharan Africa. This is apart from the illegal immigrants across the Canary Islands who are estimated at 100,000 people annually. The United Nations estimates the annual average number of clandestine immigrants aspiring to reach the European Bank from Africa by 300,000 persons. Nevertheless, about 200,000 persons succeed and the other 100,000 fail to reach their destination (Khaled.2007).

4. European Security Strategy Concerning the Illegal Immigration: "Tightening Restrictions and Cracking Down the Phenomenon on Legal, Institutional and Security Scales"

The policies of the European countries towards the newcomers witnessed some restrictions regarding the rules and policies, as they come to an agreement to have good control over the expatriates, and tightening the noose for their presence by legal and institutional frameworks in light of some complex procedures aiming to preserve the identity and the nation-state as well as to overcome the fears of terrorism. There was divergence and contradicting attitudes within the European continent, the latter found itself in a real test of the triad of security, identity and human values.

As security concerns of the European Union were deepened after the September 11, 2001 attacks, the EU approach has tended to tighter restrictions on immigration flows and newcomers (Pinyol-Jiménez.2020). This approach had begun

originally with the Amsterdam Treaty in May 1999, where the EU Commission was empowered to enact legislation on immigration and asylum for the first time. The measures that have been taken since January 2005, when all EU countries had to deal with immigration and asylum according to one unified law, and its legislations would come into force upon being voted for by the qualified majority (Jaulin. 2010).

The Security Strategy adopted by the European Countries has developed a range of security tools to combat and reduce clandestine immigration (such as attempting to intercept boats and force them to return to where they come from); As huge sums of money are invested in electronic surveillance systems to protect borders as well as in establishing new institutions whose mission is to control and protect borders, the most important of which is "FRONTEX" (Berramdane & Rossetto, 2009, p.19) Agency in 2004, with its headquarter in Warsaw. In addition to above mentioned, launching operational missions to monitor and protect European beaches in case of emergency, including operationalization of a new mechanism called "Rabit" (Rapid Border Intervention Teams), that has deployed for the first time in Greece in 2010; "Hera" Mission (Canary Islands and West Sahel of Africa), "Hermes" Mission (Western Mediterranean), As well as national missions such as the one launched by Italy "Mare Nostrum"* in 2012, which saved thousands of clandestine immigrants from drowning (Wihtole de wenden.2020).

The European strategy also created what could be called "buffer zones" (Resmann.2020) between the EU's geo-institutional borders and security borders, by marking the latter away from the first, via "security handling" of the southern Mediterranean countries for the benefit of Europe (the Union and the Member States) aiming at transferring the fight against immigration from the borders of the EU to the territory of the southern Mediterranean countries, namely to its southern (Desert-Sahel) borders, by turning it into surveillance and remote inspection points away from the EU countries. One of the most prominent expressions of this security handling when Maghreb countries have provided shelters for African immigrants on their territory with their funds, and sometimes with European funding.

On the other hand, Europe is pushing the Mediterranean partners, especially the Maghreb countries, to conclude agreements on the deportation of immigrants aiming at holding the Southern Mediterranean countries accountable for the burden of African clandestine immigration instead of Europe (Andersson.2020). Consequently, the Maghreb countries had to change their national legislation to comply with European legislation in this respect, i.e. exporting the European model of immigration securitization and criminalization. The Maghreb countries (Morocco in 2003, Tunisia and Libya in 2004, Algeria in 2008 and 2009) have amended their legislation following the wishes of Europe as well as to meet some of the local political needs (the clandestine immigration has

* Meaning, "our sea", the Latin name given to the Romans by the Mediterranean.

become a Moroccan concern, besides the immigration securitization and criminalization of immigration are compatible with the authoritarianism system in these countries), as it criminalized immigration for those entering or leaving the country.

Concerning the issue of illegal immigration, the European immigration policies have been of a security nature most of time, i.e. focusing on the security dimension in dealing with this issue (Jaulin.2010). As they adopt several policies through which the European countries concentrate on cooperation with the countries of the southern Mediterranean, that are considered the origin countries and the transit countries for immigrants, to get them tighten border controls and prevent flows of illegal immigration heading towards the EU, as well as to track smuggling networks and receive immigrants and send them back to detention centers, where they are subjected to multiple forms of torture, ill-treatment and living in inhumane conditions.

However, The European countries' handling of the issue of immigration makes them prefer "authoritarian stability" to democratic stability, this means dealing with authoritarian regimes and even protecting them as long as they handle security for the European Union and fights immigration on their territories, to prevent Maghreb immigrants, especially Africans, from crossing the Mediterranean. Here lies the contradiction, as on the one side, Europe advocates democracy and human rights, but it deals with regimes that do not recognize these principles on the other side. It also "desires" to change some regimes (through democratization), those who needs it to maintain its security (confronting immigration). And the result is that Europe ultimately favors authoritarian regimes for its best interest, even if these regimes contradict ethical standards.

Conclusion:

The issue of immigration, which throughout decades was treated within Europe as a socio-economic issue, gradually began to become a security issue by all accounts at the beginning of the last century. As securitization of immigration became one of the fundamental aspects of the European security doctrine. Europe has been able to export the idea of criminalizing and securitizing immigration to the region. Yet, it is democratic and the security treatment is necessary at the expense of individual freedoms and humanitarian dimensions. Therefore, authoritarian regimes have tightened their immigration legislation by criminalizing immigration for those entering or leaving the country. They have opened housing shelters for clandestine immigrants on their territory, yielding to the will of EU countries according to a sort of security handling for the sake of the latter. Accordingly, such regimes are moving to fight immigration in a way that fulfills the interests of others and not on the basis of the interests of their countries.

Europeans have come to view immigration as a threat that would be exacerbated unless it is restrained. This is due to its link to another phenomenon, the spread of Islam in Europe, which is one of the biggest obsessions of the West and the European world. Therefore, Europe tends towards direct deterrent and security solutions; this was evidenced in, for example, supporting the European Border Control System (EUROSUR) that are national focal points in each EU Member Country aiming at exchanging information on illegal immigration with other countries. In addition, they focus on expulsion and repatriation procedures to send immigrants back to their countries of origin as methods to deal with the immigration issue.

On the other hand, Europe does not address the problem of immigration at its roots as much as turning neighboring countries into centers of arrest and pre-stop the flow coming from Africa in particular, which represents a challenge for the countries of the South that necessitates that they develop counter alternatives rather solutions to what was already on the table, beside seeking to ensure the European Countries adoption to these alternatives.

In conclusion, it may be more beneficial for EU countries to adopt a more comprehensive scheme to deal with the phenomenon of illegal immigration, for the real solution lies in economic and political development because when the individual's dignity is preserved in his country that provides him the decent living conditions, the individual does not tend to emigrate. Consequently, addressing the problem of immigration will not be effective unless it tackles the real reasons that lead people to take such risks. Accordingly, the solution is that to help the countries of origin and the countries of transit of illegal immigration to have political and security stability and get out of the extreme poverty, besides helping them to achieve economic and social development, as well as to provide job opportunities and other elements of the decent conditions of living. There is no legal and illegal immigration, because movement from one country to another to escape poverty is legal itself. But this can only be achieved by exerting tremendous efforts and it takes a long time. Nevertheless, investments and aids should be provided as well as to put an end to corruption and governments. Europe that is currently facing economic crisis prefers the military and security solutions perceiving them as cheaper in cost and faster in "productivity" as well as being more responsive to public opinion in these countries, especially in the light of the growing phenomena of xenophobia and Islamophobia.

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