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A CONTINENT IN CHAOS:

The Security Implications of the European Migrant Crisis



"The Day the Wall Came Down: A Monument to Freedom" by Veryl Goodnight

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A Continent in Chaos: The Security Implications of the European Migrant Crisis

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Introduction

By their widely different approaches to the crisis, the two Scandinavian neighbors Denmark and Sweden represent the sharp division among the European countries on the migrant crisis. It is a line between those which, like Sweden, have said “come to our country” – thereby encouraging the flood of newcomers on EU ground - and those skeptical, like Denmark, of the ability of their societies to absorb such a huge influx of asylum seekers from vastly different cultural and religious backgrounds.

No doubt the massive flows of newcomers – some refugees, many others migrants¹ - have had and will have a major impact for years and probably decades to come, with long-lasting consequences for the safety, security, and stability of Europe.²

The terror attacks that tore apart an airport and a metro stop in Brussels right before Easter, 2016 and killed more than 30 and hurt hundreds more – and undertaken by terrorists taking refuge in the avalanche of newcomers - made the magnitude of the challenges that Europe is now confronting painfully clear. Only a few weeks before the Brussels attacks, and four months after the ones in Paris, the U.S Secretary of State, John Kerry had talked at the Munich Conference and said “The United States of America understands the near existential nature of this threat to the politics and fabric of life in Europe – and that is why we are joining now in enforcing a NATO mission to close off a key access route, and that is why we will join with you in other ways to stem this tide (of migrants) because of the potential of its damage to the fabric

of a united Europe.” This, the Secretary noted, poses “unprecedented challenges” to Europe.

This report analyzes the migrant crisis which in 2015 tormented, and in 2016 continues to torment, Europe: what happened and why, and most importantly, the implications of the crisis for Europe and the EU, with a special focus on Sweden and Denmark. In all other ways, these two neighboring Scandinavian countries come across to the outside world as almost identical, but thus represent opposite positions with regard to the migration and refugee issue. In short, how did Europe end up in this chaos, and what will be the implications on security, for Sweden, Denmark and the rest of Europe?

Two Countries, a Bridge Apart "Refugee? Welcome to Sweden!"

That cheerful message greeted those arriving last fall to the Central Station in Malmö, the third largest city of Sweden where the trains from Copenhagen, Denmark arrive after crossing the 5-mile *Øresund Bridge* which connects the two neighboring countries.³ Bright green arrows painted on the floor and the walls marked the way to the nearest refugee center from every corner of the train station. Similar arrangements were made in other cities to facilitate the arrival of the asylum seekers, every day entering Sweden by the thousands at that point.

As one of the countries with the most generous refugee policy, Sweden was, jointly with Germany, the destination of many of the newcomers who made the headline news around the world ever since the dramatic months in the fall of 2015 when the external and internal

borders one after the other collapsed in Europe. Once inside the EU, the asylum seekers, crossing the European continent by foot, train and sometimes by car, were for all practical purposes free to set out for whatever country seemed most welcoming. To a large number of them, that country was either Germany or Sweden.

Then suddenly one day in late November, all signs and arrows were removed, literally overnight as the Swedish government abruptly reversed its hitherto welcoming stance to introduce a new and restrictive policy.⁴ In addition, Swedish police started to board all trains arriving from abroad to check passengers' passports or national id's. On January 4, 2016, when carrier's liability was introduced by the Swedish government, an additional control was set up already on Danish territory at Kastrup international airport (the main international airport for all of Southern Scandinavia), while another control greeted passengers about to embark on the ferries that sail every 20 minutes between the twin cities, Helsingør (or Elsinore) on the Danish side and Helsingborg in Sweden.

A number of tough new restrictions were announced as the government moved to pull the breaks on the steady flow of newcomers to Swedish territory, at that point peaking at around 1500 to 2000 a day. Only temporary resident permits would be granted for the next three years, replacing the permanent ones that had previously been given all Syrian refugees; stricter regulations were introduced for bringing in family members, and much more.⁵

For the residents of the Öresund region, where the two countries merge to form one single region and market for living and working, daily life became suddenly much more complicated at the end of 2015. The residents of the Nordic countries have benefitted from the *Nordic Passport Union* since 1954, allowing them to travel and reside in the five countries without any need to carry national identification cards.⁶ The Nordic Passport Union thus preceded with almost half a century the Schengen agreement of 2001 which extended the same rights to all EU citizens.

The closing of the hitherto open Swedish borders from one day to the next, and the reluctant though determined reversal of the country's policy on the migrant issue, serve to illustrate the dramatic events that marked 2015, with the greatest refugee and migrant crisis in Europe since World War II. The decision by the government of Sweden – a country with a predilection for describing itself as a “humanitarian superpower” - was quickly followed by Denmark, where thousands of migrants would otherwise have been stranded as they made their way towards Sweden. The approach to the historic crisis by the two neighbors on opposite sides of the Strait could, however, hardly have been more different. The government of Sweden has, jointly with equally generous Germany, departed from a moralist stand and an “open hearts” policy, as it has been referred to ever since the former Prime Minister, Fredrik Reinfeldt coined the phrase in a speech in the summer of 2014 in which he urged the Swedes to “open their hearts” to welcome the new wave of asylum seekers which he and his government expected in the months and years to come.⁷

Across the narrow strait of Öresund, Denmark has been widely criticized for a much harsher – or more realistic, some would say - attitude, with yet another round of new anti-immigration legislation in early 2016, including a controversial (and much misinterpreted) proposal to have newcomers hand over cash and valuables on arrival to the Danish authorities to contribute to the costs of housing and living. Denmark's positions on the migrant crisis are governed by its opt-out on EU judicial affairs (“EU justice and home affairs”), including asylum issues, which was reinforced in the referendum in December, 2015. Denmark is amongst the signatories to the Dublin Regulation, but because of its opt-out has not participated in the (failed) EU plan to resettle 160.000 refugees.

The fact that Sweden was the first of the two countries to close its borders is in this sense ironic, though as we have seen, this step was taken very reluctantly and at only a very late stage, at a point when the Swedish authorities

realized that they were about to lose control of both the situation and Swedish territory as a result of the massive inflow of newcomers. The decision by Denmark to shut down its own border to Germany was thus determined by a desire to avoid getting stuck with the thousands of asylum seekers on their way towards Sweden. The deep disagreements between Stockholm and Copenhagen on how to handle the dramatic surge of asylum seekers sent relations between the two otherwise close and friendly neighbors to an exceptional, all-time low at the end of 2015.

That year, a grand total of 163,000 newcomers applied for asylum in Sweden, a country with a population of approximately 10 million; in addition, an unknown number had escaped registration. Up to 80,000 of these applications would be rejected for not meeting the criteria for asylum, Swedish authorities announced in early 2016.⁸ Many Swedes are however skeptical of the authorities' ability to actually deport that many from the country's territory, considering the meager success so far in ousting illegal migrants.

The number of asylum seekers made a sharp turn downwards right after the introduction of the new border controls. But in spite of these, estimates of a continued influx to Sweden in 2016 ranged from 40,000 to 70,000 and even the double.⁹ Denmark – with half the population of Sweden, and geographically a much smaller territory - received approximately 21,000 asylum seekers in 2015; the lowest increase among the Northern European countries since 2014, according to a study by Eurostat. The significantly lower number was seen by the Danish government as proof of the efficiency of its efforts to discourage migrants from picking Denmark as their destination.¹⁰

The European Migrant Crisis

Asylum seekers from Syria and elsewhere had been arriving on European ground already for years when the number of newcomers trying to reach the continent exploded in the late summer and fall of 2015. As the external EU-

borders collapsed in Italy and – with even graver consequence for the Union – in Greece, refugees and migrants started to pour into the Union by the thousands.

European populations and governments watched with disbelief as a seemingly endless stream of people moved, often by foot, from one country to the next on their way north. The Dublin Regulation that stipulates that applications for asylum in the EU should be processed in the first Schengen country of arrival was quickly thrown aside as Greek authorities proved either unable or unwilling – or both – to register all those arriving to the archipelago from Turkey and elsewhere.

With their minds and hearts set on reaching the two countries most hospitable to refugees – Germany and Sweden – thousands of people determinedly trudged through the Balkans and onwards, swiftly shifting routes as borders closed and leaving a trail of neighborly disagreements within the EU behind. Although the stream of asylum seekers crossing the Continent was often described by the media as refugees from the Syrian civil war, many were thus economic migrants trying – with mixed results – to melt in with the refugees and pose as Syrians, thereby hoping to be granted asylum.

Only a third of the asylum seekers were estimated to be actually Syrian, while the rest had made it to Europe from other destinations, primarily Afghanistan and Iraq but also from as far away as Eritrea, Pakistan and Iran.¹¹ Many were young boys under – or claiming to be under – the age of 18. As “anchor babies,” the role of the unaccompanied minors was – and is – to get asylum in the EU, and thereby the right to bring their families along at a later stage (a right which however was restricted in Sweden at the end of 2016).

More often than not, the newcomers had paid a steep prize in cash to the rapidly growing industry of ruthless smugglers who profit on the human tragedies. Not all made the hazardous journey in rickety boats from the Turkish coast to

the Greek islands, or the dangerous crossing of the Mediterranean from the African coast where Libya's collapse into a failed state provide fertile ground for smugglers and terrorists. The photo of the dead body of three-year-old Alan Kurdi washed ashore on a Turkish beach moved compassion for the Syrian plight to new heights among Europeans and marked a virtual game changer in the debate.

In Germany, a total of one million people had applied for asylum by the end of 2015. The decision by the German chancellor, Angela Merkel, in early September, 2015 to set aside the Dublin Regulation and open her countries' borders to the tens of thousands stranded in Hungary, who arrived through Austria while chanting "Germany, Germany, Germany" - a first for the Chancellor's country given its troubled historic past - dramatically escalated the crisis. More than 20,000 asylum-seekers arrived in Germany only the weekend after Merkel's decision.¹² "Wir schaffen das" - we'll handle it - said a confident Chancellor. Many of her colleagues at home and in the EU were far from certain.

In 2015, the 28 EU countries split, roughly speaking, into three groups with regards to the migrant crisis: the countries of first arrival - primarily Greece and Italy - followed by the transit countries, which one after the other proceeded to close their borders as the trail of migrants moved north, and finally, countries that (also after the restrictions) were the favored destinations for the migrants, thus primarily Germany and Sweden.

Towards the end of the Union?

With thousands and thousands crossing the Mediterranean and Aegean Sea to illegally enter the Continent, Europe and the EU were thrown into chaos, crisis and disarray. As divisions deepened by the month - or even week or day - inside the EU, the long term consequences of the migrant crisis dawned on observers, with many questioning the ability of the Union to actually survive this crisis of historic

proportions. The Dutch EU presidency that took over in the spring of 2016 quickly made the migrant crisis its number one priority.

"For the EU, migration is thus likely to become the ultimate make-or-break issue", concludes a report from Carnegie Europe in early 2016.¹³ Others agreed, arguing that the EU could be rapidly moving towards a collapse as the result of several factors, prior amongst them the scenario of a Brexit and the migrant crisis.¹⁴ The negative outcome in early April, 2016 of the Dutch referendum on the EU agreement with the Ukraine provided yet another example of the mounting skepticism of the European population towards the EU.

As key elements of EU regulations were disregarded with first the collapse of the Union's external borders, followed by a wave of closings of national borders, and the Union and its member states seemed unable to agree on ways to handle the crisis, the odds seemed indeed to work in favor of such somber conclusions in early 2016. At that point a number of unsuccessful attempts had been made to rescue the Schengen agreement - and in the longer perspective, the EU - and to reinforce the Union's external borders by providing new resources to the Union's border units, Frontex. These efforts were inspired by the Italian Mare Nostrum operation in 2013-2014 which had successfully reduced the number of migrants to primarily Sicily and the number of casualties on the Mediterranean.¹⁵ But negotiations were slow, as Greece, though clearly unable to handle it themselves, refused to let other countries to take over the patrol of its borders. In early February, 2016, NATO was asked, and subsequently quickly agreed, to deploy one of its Standing Maritime Groups to monitor the flows of migrants in order to deter illegal human trafficking in the Eastern Aegean Sea.¹⁶

A parallel line of negotiations was aimed at getting Turkey to stop the flow of refugees from pouring out of the camps and over to the Greek islands. Also that model was to some extent inspired by Italy, and the deal that then-Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi signed with

Libya's Colonel Gaddafi in 2008, offering a generous trade deal in return for a reduction in the flow of migrants (though officially the deal was to compensate for Italy's colonial rule over Libya in the past).¹⁷

The external borders of the Union however remained porous, and one EU country after the other closed down borders, or limited access to their territory. An unprecedented step was taken by Austria, one of the countries that had accepted a heavy burden in the crisis, when it invited a group of Balkan countries to a summit in Vienna in early 2016 in an effort to shut the migrant route passing through their countries.¹⁸ When non-EU country Macedonia closed its border, tens of thousands of migrants got stuck south of the border in the Idomeni camp in Greece, from which groups of migrants repeatedly tried to force their way north.

The EU had also agreed on a quota system in the fall of 2015. But the idea of relocating asylum seekers more evenly among the 28 EU countries quickly proved inadequate, as countries in particular in Central and Eastern Europe, with limited prior experience of immigration, resisted calls to accept the newcomers. As of February, 2016 fewer than 500 migrants were reported to have found new homes in the EU as a result of the quota system.¹⁹

Clearly, a solution had to focus on stopping the flow of migrants from leaving the camps in Turkey, where they had often lived for years, to cross the Aegean Sea. After lengthy negotiations, with a gradually higher price tag delivered from Ankara, an agreement was finally reached in March, 2016 between the EU and Turkey, with a "one-for one" policy at its core. According to this deal, all asylum seekers who arrived to Greece by sea would be returned to Turkey, and in return, the EU agreed to accept one Syrian refugee already in the Turkish camps for everyone who was sent back. Those returned, and those who tried to enter the EU illegally after the deal was in effect, were to be dispatched to the very end of the line for future European resettlement.

Several incentives were offered by the EU for Turkey to agree to this deal: not only would Ankara receive financial assistance in the amount of several billions from the EU, the EU also promised to ease the visa requirements for Turkish citizens travelling to the EU and to open new chapters in the negotiations on EU membership for Turkey. In addition, discussions on a reform of the Dublin Regulation were initiated in Brussels, with a number of alternative methods for dispersing asylum seekers among the member countries presented by the Commission. The first ships with deported refugees on board departed from the Greek islands to the Turkish shore in the first week of April. The message was clear to those contemplating a journey in the reverse direction: don't do it, and if you still do it, you will be sent back to Turkey and your hopes for a future in the EU would vanish for years or more. But human smugglers were reported to quickly have found other ways to get migrants into the Union, by exploring new routes through Bulgaria and Albania and reopening the Italian route, which had actually never really closed. According to the Italian authorities, more than 153,000 migrants arrived by sea to Italy in 2015, and warnings were issued that 800,000 migrants or more were preparing to depart from camps in Libya in the spring of 2016.

Apart from various Mediterranean routes, migrants and their smugglers had also discovered an alternative – and somewhat unexpected – route leading to the wealthy Nordic countries through Russia, whose involvement in the migrant crisis became increasingly clear in the first months of 2016.²⁰

Importing terrorism

The "near existential threat" that US Secretary of State John Kerry had referred to in his speech at the 2016 Munich Conference once again became painfully real when yet another terrorist attack occurred on European soil right before Easter. This time Islamist terror hit Brussels, where bombs exploded in the morning of March 22, first at the airport and shortly

afterwards in the metro, killing more than 30 and hurting hundreds more.

The Brussels bombs came only four months after the devastating attacks that took place simultaneously in several different parts of Paris in November. It was soon clear that the two were related, with a number of terrorists involved in both and planned by interconnected cells. It was also revealed that the Brussels attack had originally been planned as a second attack in Paris. The Washington Post concludes in an article in April, 2016, that “over the past six months, more than three dozen suspected militants who impersonated migrants have been arrested or died while planning or carrying out acts of terrorism. They include at least seven directly tied to the bloody attacks in Paris and Brussels.”²¹

A link to Sweden quickly emerged in the investigations. One of the jihadists who were shot by the Belgian security forces right before the Brussels attack had lived in Sweden until two years ago, when he had joined the Islamic State. In addition, one of the two terrorists involved in the metro attack – the one who had left without setting off the bombs he was carrying - was a Swedish man, Osama Krayem, who was born and raised in Malmö and who had returned to Europe with the refugee trail using a fake passport with the name Naim Al Hamed after a stint to receive training in Syria.²² Osama Krayem was caught and arrested after an intense manhunt. The investigation following his arrest quickly discovered that he had also been involved in the Paris attacks.

That Swedes were among the architects of the terrorist attacks in 2015 and early 2016 did not surprise experts, since Sweden is one of the EU countries with the highest number of IS recruits, after Belgium and Austria.²³ As of January 2015 – that is, before the flow of migrants escalated into a major European crisis – the Swedish Security Police (SÄPO) estimated that 130 persons with Swedish passports had joined the IS, plus an additional 100-150 or more who have not been accounted for. At least 80

jihadist fighters had returned to Sweden.²⁴ The Danish Security Police (PET) reports a total of at least 125 Danish citizens to have left for Syria as of spring 2016, of whom 27 have been killed and 60 had returned to Denmark.²⁵

In April, 2016, Swedish press reported – and the Security Police confirmed - that the Iraqi security service had warned their Swedish colleagues that 7 or 8 IS terrorists had entered Sweden to launch an attack in Stockholm, right at the time when several big events were taking place in the capital, including the celebration of the King’s 70th birthday and the Eurovision Song Contest. The Iraqis also alerted Swedish and other authorities that IS terrorists could hide in the refugee trail to Europe.²⁶ Generally speaking, the risk for an attack is however not considered quite as high in Sweden as for other countries that are actively participating in the fight against IS, such as Denmark.²⁷

Both countries have experienced terrorist attacks at home; in Copenhagen, twice in one day on Valentine’s Day, February 14, 2015 when a radicalized Muslim first attacked a café where a public meeting was taking place, killing one in the audience, and later the city synagogue, where the unarmed man who was guarding the gate while a Bat-Mitzwa party was going on inside was killed. In addition, there have been a number of aborted attacks in Denmark following the cartoon crisis in 2006. In Sweden, a failed attack that could have killed hundreds of Christmas shoppers in the center of Stockholm killed only the suicide bomber himself in December, 2008.

In spite of these multiple warning signals, Denmark is reportedly the only country to have followed up on the names of jihadists listed in the 22,000 documents that were leaked from the Islamic State in early 2016, with nine arrests in one single weekend in Copenhagen in April. Sweden, Belgium, Holland, France and United Kingdom had at that point reportedly not yet made any arrests as a result of the information in the leaked documents.²⁸

Terrorist expert Magnus Ranstorp – himself a Swede living in Copenhagen – is not surprised by the high number of jihadists departing from Sweden, or that Swedes participated in the European attacks. According to Ranstorp, Sweden has long avoided confronting the issue of European terrorism. “The country has been a perfect hiding place”, he says, while pointing also to the limited debate on the dangers of Islamist terror, and the lack of political initiatives to prevent radicalization. Until quite recently it was, for instance, not illegal to join a terrorist organization or to sign up as an IS terrorist.²⁹

The risk of importing terrorism through the migrant flows was initially rejected in Denmark. A statement by the head of the Danish Defense Intelligence Service (FE) only a week before the Paris attacks, claiming that it was unlikely for terrorists to use the migrant trail to get into Europe has been strongly criticized, as have similar declarations by representatives of the Security Police.³⁰ It was quite simply too complicated a route to take for the jihadists, who would be able to make it to Europe anyway, they argued.

There have however been many signs that the migrant chaos has been used by the IS to reenter terrorists into Europe after training in Syria. Osama Krayem, who as we have seen was involved in both the Paris and Brussels attacks, first arrived with the refugee trail and a fake Syrian passport to the Greek island of Leros – the island preferred by the terrorists, since the EU border agency, Frontex, did not have much of a presence there.³¹ From there he continued to a refugee camp in German Ulm which he left shortly afterwards when his terrorist colleague from Paris, Salah Abdeslam (who was arrested by Belgian police prior to the attacks in Brussels) came to pick him up.³²

Contrary to the analysis by the Danish intelligence service and others, the terrorists had plenty of reasons for taking cover in the migrant trail through Europe with fake Syrian passports in their pockets. The Islamic State often confiscates

the recruits’ original passports, and in addition, the terrorists may obviously prefer not to use their real identity for fear of being discovered by the authorities.³³ General Philip Breedlove, Supreme Allied Commander of NATO, remarked at a U.S Senate hearing in early March, 2016, that the stream of refugees into Europe was “masking the movements of criminals, terrorists and foreign fighters”, with ISIS “spreading like a cancer taking advantage of paths of least resistance, threatening European nations and our own with terrorist attacks”.³⁴

King Abdullah of Jordan went even further than that in a blunt statement made during an interview with *The Guardian* in late March, 2016, in which he argued that President Erdogan of Turkey was sending dangerous and violent radical Islamists to Europe mixed in with the flows of migrants.³⁵ Concerns have also been voiced that the removal by the EU of the visa requirement for Turkish citizens, which is a key part of the EU-Turkey deal, will increase the risk of terrorists entering the Continent.

Russia and the Migrant Crisis

Six months after launching the air campaign in Syria, Vladimir Putin officially announced that Russia was withdrawing, though Russian ships remained in the naval base which his country keeps in Syria, and fighter jets were supposedly on stand-by to make a quick return if needed. Though the purpose of the Russian military campaign was officially presented as the same as that of the Western coalition - to stop the IS advance in Syria - it did not take long for the world to realize that Russia’s real objective was to support President Assad and eliminate the moderate opposition that was fighting the government forces.

By the ruthless bombing of civilian targets inside Syria, and a particularly brutal assault on the city of Aleppo – which was the stronghold of the opposition - Putin also achieved another major goal with the campaign: to trigger a new wave of Syrian refugees towards Turkey and onwards to Europe, and thereby to further

destabilize and weaken the EU and the West. Putin's real objectives thus seem to have gone far beyond the Syrian ground. The military assistance to Assad was part of a grand strategy to establish Russia as a major power in the Middle East and to challenge the West and the entire international system, in a similar fashion as with the illegal annexation of Crimea two years earlier.

As U.S Senator John McCain phrased it at the 2016 Munich Security Conference: "... (H)e (Putin) wants to exacerbate the refugee crisis and use it as a weapon to divide the transatlantic alliance and undermine the European project".³⁶ According to that analysis, Putin thus expected a new heavy stream of refugees from Syria pouring into Europe to deepen the conflict between European countries with different views on how to handle the crisis, and to put the Schengen agreement and the entire EU project into serious jeopardy.³⁷ At his Senate hearing, General Philip Breedlove used a similar vocabulary as Senator McCain when he talked of the "weaponisation of immigration" and stated that he himself "couldn't find any other reason for them (air strikes against civilians) other than to cause refugees to be on the move and make them somebody else's problem".³⁸

As thousands more refugees and migrants flowed into Europe, Putin was counting on the East European countries that were reluctant to accept huge numbers of asylum-seekers from the South to become further isolated within the EU. As it happens, those very same countries also strongly reject any proposals by the EU High Representative Federica Mogherini and others for lifting the sanctions on Russia after Ukraine. Another massive flow of refugees into the Turkish camps opposite the Syrian border would also further exacerbate tensions between the EU and Turkey. As a NATO Ally, Turkey is also in a position to draw the Alliance into the scene, or alternatively demonstrate NATO's weakness if it fails to provide support to Ankara. The NATO mission in the Aegean Sea was important from also this perspective, as a show of resolve and presence.

Speculations on Moscow's involvement, including of Russian financing of human smugglers, took a new turn when Syrian refugees started to show up in the very opposite part of Europe, on the Russian border to Norway and Finland. The opening of a new, Northern route for refugees and migrants to make it into Europe would thus provide Putin with yet another instrument for destabilizing the EU. The Defense Minister of Finland, Jussi Niinistö from the anti-immigration party True Finns, warned that his country – which up until that point had accepted only a very limited number of newcomers - might be facing a wave of up to one million asylum seekers from Russia. "Illegal immigration through the Eastern border is without doubt our greatest challenge", the Defense Minister stated, while also declaring this as part of Russian hybrid warfare.³⁹

However, there were also other, indirect but equally serious, consequences of the migrant crisis with regards to Russia. The arrival of huge numbers of newcomers to especially Sweden diverted resources, especially in the fall of 2015, when military personnel was assigned other tasks, such as the registration of asylum seekers or setting up tents for housing. By forcing countries under heavy pressure by the crisis to turn inwards to handle urgent domestic challenges with – in the Swedish case - hundreds of thousands of newcomers, there was also an obvious risk that the political and military focus is removed from the Baltic Sea, with an ongoing Russian aggression with simulated bombing attacks and submarine intrusions in the Nordic archipelagoes.⁴⁰

Clashes of Cultures in Europe

One group has greatly benefitted from the migrant crisis, and from the profound demographic changes that Europe has experienced with increasing strength over the past few years: the nationalist anti-immigration parties. The success of the Alternative für Deutschland (AfD) in the German state elections in March 2016 was a strong vote of protest against Chancellor Merkel's open border

Willkommenskultur. The established old parties did poorly also in neighboring Austria, where Norbert Hofer from anti-immigration Die Freiheitliche Partei Österreichs (FPÖ) triumphed in the first round of the presidential elections in April, though lost in the last round to the former leader of the Green party, Alexander Van der Bellen. For the first time since 1945, the second round was not a contest between candidates from the two old parties in Austrian politics, the Conservatives and Social Democrats. Following the devastating results of the elections, Werner Fay decided to resign as both Chancellor of Austria and leader of the Social Democrats in early May.

In Denmark, the Danish People's Party (Dansk Folkeparti, DF) have been a political force to reckon with for almost two decades, and is again back in the key position as the parliamentary "support party" to the minority government headed by Prime Minister Lars Løkke Rasmussen from the liberal (in a European sense) party Venstre. The elections to Parliament – *Folketinget* - in the summer of 2015 were a great success for DF and its new party leader, Kristian Thulesen Dahl, who brought the party from 12.3 % in 2011 to a record high of 21.1 % in 2015. Equally important is the "pull effect" which DF exercises on Danish politics generally; most significantly on the Social Democrats, which in the election campaign in 2015 went to great lengths to outdo DF in its anti-immigration rhetoric. In addition, new far-right xenophobic groups such as the Soldiers of Odin – a phenomenon that originates from Finland – have now started to appear also in Denmark.⁴¹

In Sweden, Sverigedemokraterna (The Sweden Democrats, SD) - with Nazi roots, which the DP does not have - have seen a steady rise in electoral support in the last few years. Since the election in 2014 SD is the third largest party in the Swedish parliament, with 12.8 % of the vote and up more than 7 % since the previous election in 2010. In addition, the numbers for SD kept going up in every opinion poll during the peak of the migrant crisis in the fall of 2015. The popular support for the SD coincides with studies that for

the first time ever identify "immigration" as the number one political issue for the Swedish electorate, after 30 years when Swedes consistently rated "welfare" and "jobs" as their first priority.⁴²

The steady increase for the SD however came to a stop when the government pulled the brakes and closed the Swedish borders, and when the main opposition party, the center-right Moderate party, now headed by Anna Kinberg Batra, made a sharp u turn from the previous open-hearts policy represented by her predecessor as leader of the party, the former PM Fredrik Reinfeldt. Opinion polls registered the Moderates as again the largest party in Swedish politics in early 2016.⁴³ The electoral pattern in those parts of Europe which have carried the heaviest burden in the crisis suggests that Europeans are now "tired of the refugee problem", as phrased by a Danish newspaper.⁴⁴ It has moved from being a humanitarian issue to the day-to-day level, with the electorate expressing concerns that the enormous costs for receiving such large numbers of newcomers will drain the welfare state.

On top of that, the attacks by large groups of young male asylum seekers and migrants on New Year's Eve in Cologne and Stockholm, but also in small towns like Swedish Kalmar, and reports of harassment of young girls in public swimming pools and elsewhere, have raised the issue of whether Europe is heading into a historic clash of cultures as a result of immigration on such a large scale by people by people from widely different cultural backgrounds. Not only does migration affect demographics, but also the gender balance, with young men making up for 73 % of the asylum applicants in 2015 and early 2016. Sweden in particular is reported to be facing a "man problem", with an unbalanced ratio between men and women.⁴⁵

The increase in popularity for the anti-immigration parties thus reflects a growing inward-looking tendency among the European electorate. Some of the parties, especially in Eastern Europe, have their roots in the Fascist

parties of the 1930s. In addition, several – though far from all – of these parties combine a strong sense of nationalism not only with anti-Americanism, anti-EU, and anti-NATO, but also with a positive view of Russia and Putin, including a readiness expressed by for instance French Marine Le Pen – who is a candidate in the presidential elections in 2017 - to stop the sanctions imposed by the EU after the Russian aggression in Ukraine and the illegal annexation of Crimea.

Conclusion. From Migration to Security

A Carnegie report on the migrant crisis concludes: "...Europe will undergo profound changes. So much is certain. But whether this process proceeds in a managed fashion with due regard to the interests both of the newcomers and of the current European population or takes place chaotically and disrupts Europe's political and societal structures, this is clearly one of the most crucial questions for the future of the continent".⁴⁶

That is indeed true; but the migrant crisis is so much more than solely a European problem.

The massive flows of asylum seekers on European ground long ago stopped to be just a matter of migration, albeit on a much larger scale than ever before in modern times. What originated as a refugee or migration problem quickly evolved into one of security.

The consequences of the migrant crisis range, as has been discussed on previous pages, from Europe now being targeted by the Islamic State and other extremist, jihadist organizations; to the division of Europe, with a patchwork of new, intra-European conflicts and the possible collapse of the Schengen agreement or even the European Union itself; to increased electoral support for xenophobic, nationalist parties in Europe, and clashes of cultures as numerous new populations from the Middle East settle in liberal and open democracies. With the Russian bombings in Syria, it became clear that yet

another factor could be added to an already complex picture, pushing the crisis to a geostrategic level.

The migrant crisis has thus assumed an international dimension with potentially far-reaching strategic consequences. In the course of ten or eleven months, the European continent developed into something of a battle ground for external forces emerging from both the South – ISIL, which exploits the migrant chaos to spread jihadist terror – and the East – Russia, whose military intervention in the Syrian civil war resulted in additional migrant waves and further increased the political division and destabilization of Europe. Through the migrant crisis, Putin may actually, though indirectly, be accomplishing the same objectives which characterized Soviet foreign policy; to neutralize Europe, break up NATO, and weaken liberal democracies across Western Europe and make them more authoritarian.

The crisis will have tangible consequences also for the US, though geographically removed from the scene. A weakened and divided Europe, and a non-functioning EU, is bad news for the transatlantic community and the Western world *per se*. The effect is even worse when it is combined with – and in part the result of – ISIL terror and another wave and form of Russian aggression. The Danish government made the interconnection between the various levels of the crisis clear with the decision to resume Denmark's participation in the international air campaign in Syria in the spring of 2016. One of the objectives emphasized by Foreign Minister Kristian Jensen was to "stop the refugee stream that put Europe under so much pressure in 2015".⁴⁷

The transatlantic relationship will increasingly come under strain as the European allies are preoccupied with handling the consequences of the crisis on their societies, at the same time as the adversaries of the Western world are gaining strength. But the magnitude of the European crisis does not seem to always be fully understood in the US. President Obama has

announced that the US will take in 10,000 Syrian refugees; approximately the number that arrived in Sweden in less than a single week last fall. So far, the US has only received in the neighborhood of 3,000 refugees since 2011.⁴⁸

However, the US and the American President carry a heavy responsibility for the situation that Europe finds itself in today. The Syrian refugee and migrant crisis is to a significant extent the result of the dearth of American world leadership during the past eight years, and the US reluctance to provide support to the Syrian opposition fighting the Assad regime. President Obama's red line that wasn't in August 2012 was a strong and clear signal that the US would not intervene in the war; but when the US didn't, others did. The rest is, as the saying goes, history – played out on European ground.

Copenhagen, June 2016.

The views expressed in this report are those of the author, and do not necessarily reflect the positions of any of the institutions to which she is affiliated, the Scowcroft Institute of International Affairs, the Bush School of Government and Public Service, or Texas A&M University.

¹ Because of this mix, the newcomers are here generally described as “migrants”, or “asylum seekers”, and the crisis as “the migrant crisis”, in accordance with the language used by among others The Economist.

² <http://www.state.gov/secretary/remarks/2016/02/252486.htm>

³ The Bridge itself is 5 miles (8 kilometers) and the tunnel that completes the construction another 2,5 miles (4 kilometers).

⁴ The change of policy was a surprise to everyone in Sweden, where the government – a coalition of Social Democrats and the Green Party - had up until that point firmly rejected all proposals for a revision to reduce the number of newcomers. The restrictions were the result of an agreement between the government and the four parties in the center-right opposition.

⁵ “Charlemagne. Bridge of sneers,” The Economist, December 5th, 2015, and <http://www.government.se/government-policy/the-governments-work-regarding-the-refugee-situation/>

⁶ Sweden, Denmark, Norge and Finland joined the passport union in 1954, Iceland in 1955, and the Faroe Islands in 1966.

⁷ <http://www.dn.se/valet-2014/reinfeldt-oppna-era-hjartan-for-de-utsatta/>

⁸ <http://www.di.se/artiklar/2016/1/27/tiotusentals-asylsokande-avvisas/>

⁹ <http://www.migrationsverket.se/Om-Migrationsverket/Nyhetsarkiv/Nyhetsarkiv-2016/2016-02-04-Stor-osakerhet-praglar-Migrationsverkets-prognos.html>.

¹⁰ The numbers are from an analysis by the Danish Ministry of Integration which in turn is based on a study by Eurostat. “Asylboomet anno 2015: stort i Danmark – men store hos naboerne”, Berlingske, April 7, 2016.

¹¹ “Forming an orderly queue”, The Economist, February 6, 2015.

¹² “Germany, Germany!”, The Economist, September 12, 2015. “Exodus”, September 12, 2015 and “The Chancellor’s crucible”, November 7, 2015,, both in The Economist.

¹³ Stefan Lehne, “How the Refugee Crisis Will Reshape the EU”, Carnegie Europe, February, 2016.

¹⁴ Mikkel Vedby Rasmussen, “Europa efter EU”, Ræson, 01/16.

¹⁵ <http://www.marina.difesa.it/EN/operations/Pagine/MareNostrum.aspx>

¹⁶ Andreas Jacobs, “In Troubled Waters. NATO’s New Maritime Activity in the Aeagean”. NDC Research Report 01/16 (Rome: NATO Defense College, 2016), and “NATO will send ships to Aegean Sea to deter human trafficking”, The New York Times, February 11, 2016.

¹⁷ "Italy pledge paves way for Libya investment", *Financial Times*, August 31, 2008.

¹⁸ <http://www.ft.com/cms/s/0/e6d2e0f0-7787-11dd-be24-0000779fd18c.html#axzz45FDxheGRnomist>

¹⁹ "Europe fails at migrant crisis", *The Washington Post*, February 17, 2016.

²⁰ See for instance, "Flygtningekrisen: Next Stop Italien", *Berlingske*, April 9, 2016.

²¹ "Tracing the path of four terrorists sent to Europe by the Islamic State", *The Washington Post*, April 22, 2016.

²² "Lämnade familjen för att ansluta sig till IS", *Expressen*, April 9, 2016, and "Først skjulte terroristene seg blant flyktningene. Så angrep de Paris og Brussel", *Aftenposten* (Oslo), May 10, 2016.

²³ Interview, April 30, 2016.

²⁴ The numbers are quoted by Magnus Ranstorp, Linus Gustafsson and Peder Hyllengren in "From the Welfare State to the Caliphate", *Foreign Policy*, February 23, 2015.

²⁵ Reported in "Danmark fører an med arrestationerne", *Berlingske*, April 9, 2016.

²⁶ "Misstänkt terrorhot mot Sverige utreds av Säpo", *Dagens Nyheter*, April 26, 2016, and "Inkommen information bedöms", www.sakerhetspolisen.se, April 26, 2016.

²⁷ "Mystik om terrortrussel mod Stockholm", *Berlingske*, April 27, 2016, and interview, April 30, 2016.

²⁸ "Danmark fører an med arrestationerne", *Berlingske*, April 9, 2016.

²⁹ "Expert: Sverige är ett bra gömställe för terrorister," *Svenska Dagbladet*, April 11, 2016, and Ranstorp, Gustafsson, Hyllengren, 2015.

³⁰ "Vurdering otte dage før Paris: Terrorister vil ikke udnytte flygtningestrømme", *TV2 Nyheder*, November 17, 2016, and "PET: Flygtningestrøm fører næppe terrorister til Danmark", *DR Nyheder*, September 22, 2015.

³¹ "Først skjulte terroristene seg blant flyktningene. Så angrep de Paris og Brussel", *Aftenposten* (Oslo), May 10, 2016.

³² Uppgifter: Osama, 23, från Malmö gripen för Brysseldådet", *Aftonbladet*, April 8, 2016

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ <http://www.ft.com/intl/cms/s/0/76a52430-dfe1-11e5-b67f-a61732c1d025.html#axzz46ZaCMHuU>

³⁵“SAS deployed in Libya since start of year, says leaked memo”, *The Guardian*, March 25, 2016.

³⁶ <http://www.mccain.senate.gov/public/index.cfm/2016/2/remarks-by-senator-john-mccain-on-syria-at-the-munich-security-conference>.

³⁷ Janusz Bugajski, “Moscow exploits migrant crisis”, *CEPA*, February 19, 2016.

³⁸ <http://www.ft.com/intl/cms/s/0/76a52430-dfe1-11e5-b67f-a61732c1d025.html#axzz46ZaCMHuU>.

³⁹“Försvarsminister Niinistö: Styrningen av flyktingsströmmen en del av hybridkriget”, *Huvudstadsbladet*, February 29, 2016.

⁴⁰ Ann-Sofie Dahl (ed.), *Baltic Sea security – how can allies and partners meet the new challenges in the region?* (Copenhagen: Center for Military Studies, 2016).

⁴¹ Thomas Larsen, “Oprøret fra højre ulmer i Danmark”, *Berlingske*, March 20, 2016.

⁴² For the “SOM- studies”, see www.som.gu.se.

⁴³ <http://www.svt.se/nyheter/inrikes/moderaterna-storsta-partiet>.

⁴⁴ “Ekspert: danskerne er mættede af flygtningekrisen”, *Berlingske*, January 21, 2016.

⁴⁵ “Oh boy,” *The Economist*, January 16, 2016.

⁴⁶ Stefan Lehne, “How the Refugee Crisis Will Reshape the EU”, *Carnegie Europe*, February, 2016.

⁴⁷ Kristian Jensen: Danmark har tre klare grunde til at gå ind i Syrien”, *Berlingske*, April 1.9, 2016.

⁴⁸ <http://www.politico.com/story/2016/03/few-syrian-refugees-united-states-220720>.

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