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**Association for the Study of Nationalities World Convention  
Columbia University in New York City**

*PANEL BK15*

*Breaking Down or Re-Building Walls?  
The EU and the Balkans Facing New Challenges*

*Roundtable in collaboration with  
Europe and the Balkans International Network – EBIN*

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On Friday, 15 April 2016, a roundtable entitled “Breaking Down or Re-Building Walls? The EU and the Balkans Facing New Challenges” was convened at the annual Association for the Study of Nationalities World Convention at Columbia University in New York City. Francine Friedman (Ball State University) chaired the roundtable.

Stefano Bianchini (University of Bologna) spoke about the radical departure of the Schengen Agreement since the Peace of Westphalia in 1648 codified the sovereignty rights over a non-fixed population within state borders. Now, as a result of the Schengen Agreement, Europeans can easily cross borders for the purposes not only of tourism, but also of employment and education. There are now no nation-state restrictions like there had been during the past two hundred years, including the Cold War restrictions against free movement. Now, however, the Schengen Agreement and the resultant free movement of people are under great challenge.

The recent asylum seekers crisis led most of the European states to restrict people’s mobility, building fences on the borders and threatening of the most notable achievements of the EU. According to the Italian newspaper “Il Corriere della Sera,” eighteen walls (including the Chinese wall) were dividing the world during the Cold War period. Currently, the newspaper has calculated that, as of 2015, there are 58 walls. Despite the internet and its contributions to soft borders, walls have increasingly made distinctions between groups and are supposed to halt free migrations. Jeremy Rifkin’s 2010 book, *The Empathic Civilization*, forecast that migration would be a great challenge for the world, because migration movements were never before as large as they are now. The potential impact on Europe of these migrations will be huge in terms of reshaping social and cultural identities, transforming the demographic framework (which is declining currently on the

Continent as a whole, including Russia), but also increasing the labor force and tax incomes (if immigrants are legally included).

Symbolically, however, these events are in some way connected to Hungary, a country which was not bound by the Dublin Agreement at the end of the 1980s. In 1989, the wall between Hungary and Austria was breached in order to allow East Germans to enter West Germany. This action meant the beginning of the end of the Iron Curtain. Ironically, Hungary has been the first country to build walls to halt the migration from Turkey, Greece, and other places that is moving toward Germany and other European countries. This naturally poses a great challenge to Europe's ideas and values.

The Middle East is also becoming destabilized by migration. Migrations from that area to Europe have occurred as people search for access to peace, jobs, welfare, and other benefits. This wave of migration was encouraged by Germany's Chancellor, Angela Merkel, when she invited one million immigrants to Germany. The first wave of those migrations consisted to a large extent of more educated, younger people, which Germany needed as an addition to its labor force. However, in the wake of this migration, the German state structure experienced a shock, as it was unprepared for the challenges of incorporating so many people into the state. Furthermore, Middle Eastern migrants brought with them many children, which has led to a problem with the dynamic structure of Europe. Additionally, the gender relations of the newcomers is different than European relations, which makes it even more difficult to absorb the migrants.

The complaints by some EU countries to the European Court of Justice against the quota distribution of migrants among the 28 member-states has created a cacophony of questions about how to deal with these problems. For example, Lithuania rejected accepting even the small number of 200 immigrants, fearing that these "others" would negatively affect its political and social culture.

Back in 2010, Merkel, British Prime Minister Cameron, and former French President Sarkozy had individually criticized the failure of multiculturalism in Europe without offering any alternative. This was because it was so difficult to deal simply with the migrant groups. Basically, they have been treated as "ethnic entities," closed in their "boxes" with no communication with others and with a local leadership that was supposed to represent each group in its entirety. As a result, instead of truly integrating incoming groups, a "plural monoculturalism" (as Amartya Sen called it in his book on identities and violence) has been established by transferring the European ethno-national political culture into the migrant groups. The ultimate result was really depressing.

Now, the opening of borders is forcing the EU countries to deal with many of the "others," but Europe finds itself unready. This puts into question the entire integration process.

Craig Nation (Dickinson College) noted that Russia and the United States are complicit in the refugee crisis, but are not likely to be part of the solution. This is because they are both pursuing geo-strategic goals. The contemporary large migrations are a result of unresolved global conflict, such as Syria and Afghanistan, which has caused the problem of irregular migrants.

The U.S. is being asked to rescue Europe—again since 1989. The U.S. is being asked to oppose “Brexit;” suspend some of the features of its special relationship with Great Britain; take in more refugees than it already has; intervene more decisively in Syria; fix the Ukrainian problem, etc. However, it is not likely that the U.S. will resolve any of these problems decisively, because there are no vital American interests at stake. Nor is there American will nor ability for the U.S. to fix these problems. The American energy and financial power are now focused on reassuring European security in the face of Russian aggression.

In fact, refugee camps are not the answer to the problem of dealing with the migrant problem, as they produce health issues, opportunities for predation, economic hardship, mental health problems, radicalization, and political violence. The U.S. promised to accept 10,000 refugees, but, in actuality it has only accepted about 1700. The fear in the United States is of Islam, which is a particular fear of “otherness.” The U.S. welcomes approximately one million immigrants per year, but not nearly as many refugees, accepting only one million refugees total since 1975. This shows a lack of political will to resolve this problem.

Nearly twenty percent of Syrians have left the country as refugees. The best way to end the Syrian war (and manage the refugee problem) is to allow Assad to win the war.

Russia has a good organization for accepting refugees, although are still financial and bureaucratic barriers. Furthermore, refugees can be exploited there by employers. Russia is more used as a transit country to Finland and Norway than a destination country for refugees. In fact, new Russian laws restrict foreign refugees from gaining permanent residence in Russia.

Thus, the U.S. and Russia are watching each other, with the U.S. attempting to maintain its influence in Europe through NATO and Russia becoming more aggressive in various parts of the world. It is evident then that Russia and the U.S. are complicit in the refugee problem and not likely to be part of the solution, because they are still involved in unresolved armed conflicts.

James Gow (King’s College) stated that some European leaders have signaled that this is the end of the policy of simply “waving refugees through the Balkans” and into the rest of Europe. He pointed to the historical creation of the Krajina in the Balkans, which Austria-Hungary designated as a border against the entry westward of Ottoman “Islamic infidels.” The question facing European leaders now is whether to set up a cordon sanitaire or continue to “wave the refugees through.”

However, instead of only discussing hordes of people moving around the globe and into Europe, perhaps the human element must be inserted into the discussion. Current migration into Europe is massive, consisting of more than one million people in 2015 alone. There are 57 million displaced people in the world, more than one-tenth of those simply stuck where they are because they have no papers and documents.

The legal issues of the refugee problem are confusing. For example, the 1951 Refugee Convention simply does not cover refugees fleeing from armed conflict, even though religion and ethnic persecution are usually the cause of this movement of populations. Refugees should be able to seek refugee status from the first place they arrive. But how do you define the difference between genuine refugees and illegal entries?

Contemporary warfare does not provide a clear answer to that question, because warfare also indirectly affects people's social life and economic life, even if they are not being directly or immediately shot at. In Europe, refugees are entitled to a hearing about their status, but European human rights laws provide that refugees cannot be forced to leave.

There is also a difference among the various refugees. For example, refugees from Afghanistan are immediately turned away. Only refugees from Syria and Iraq go into the European system. Even while the number of refugees is growing, the space for asylum is shrinking along many parameters, such as territory, legality, and moral will.

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