5. An Ongoing Paradox in the World-System of Migration

The EU's Response to the Migration Crises, Rising Nationalism, and its Treatment of Greece

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In 2015, Greece was a state in crisis as it found itself unable to manage the mass influx of refugees and migrants into the country. European leaders, citing the Dublin Regulation, commonly framed it as a "Greek" problem, despite the migrants seeking to exit the country for other European countries.[1] Unlike in 2015, however, when Greece found itself isolated due to the Greek Financial Crisis, the European Union (EU) actively assisted the country in the 2020 Migration Crisis. The European Commission, uncertain of Greece's ability to handle the crisis alone, dispatched Frontex to the Greek-Turkish land and maritime border to prevent a mass influx of migrants and refugees into the continent.[2] The migration crisis in 2015 disproportionately affected Greece due to its position on the European periphery in both the geographic and political sense of the word.[3] In 2020, however, European leaders referred to the country as Europe's shield.[4]

1 Andrew Connelly, "Europe's Failed Migration Policy Caused Greece's Latest Refugee Crisis," *Foreign Policy*, September 20, 2020, https://foreignpolicy.com/2020/09/20/europes-failed-migration-policy-caused-greeces-latest-refugee-crisis/.

2 Jon Stone, "EU chief praises Greece as 'shield' of Europe after police attack refugees at border," *The Independent*, March 3, 2020, https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/greece-refugees-border-eu-police-ursula-von-der-leyen-a9373281.html.

3 For an elaboration of the ideas of core and periphery, see Immanuel Wallerstein, *The Modern World-System*, vol. 1: *Capitalist Agriculture and the Origins of the European World-Economy in the Sixteenth Century* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2011 [1974]).

4 Stone, "EU chief praises Greece."

The differing responses by the European Union directly reflect the changing priorities of the organization in its efforts to maintain its prominent position as part of the core in global affairs. In 2015, Greece was the problem child of the European Union, with its role in the EU Financial Crisis causing European leaders to consider expelling it from the organization. By 2020, however, Brexit, as well as Turkey changing from a potential member candidate to a rival actor, caused the EU to reevaluate Greece's role on the continent. Whereas in 2015 Greece found itself isolated, in 2020, the rise of right-wing nationalism in Europe, in part sparked by the events of 2015 as well as Brexit, meant that Greece transitioned from being the problem child of the EU to Europe's border guard. The country, to apply Immanuel Wallerstein's world-systems analysis, had changed in the eyes of the EU leadership from a European peripheral space to a global semi-peripheral space due to the shift in the political setting because of international migration.

Before discussing Greece and the EU's response to the migrant crises of 2015 and 2020, it is important to define the terminology of migrant and refugee. Legally, the distinction is quite clear. The Refugee Convention of 1951 defined a refugee as an individual who,

> owing to well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable, or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of his former habitual residence as a result of such events, is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it.[5]

Thus, states consider an individual who is not facing imminent threat to be a migrant rather than a refugee. This distinction, however, is only a legal one. Scholars of migration, starting with Everett Lee in 1966, instead view migration as a multifaceted spectrum. Migration possesses both 'pull' factors – such as the pursuit of a better life – as well as 'push' factors – ones that force an individual from their home.[6] In Lee's analysis, an individual faces both push and

5 *Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees* (New York, 1951).

6 Everett S. Lee, "A Theory of Migration," *Demography* 3, no. 1 (1966): 47–57.

pull factors, and neither is paramount in all circumstances. Most major theories of migration continue to draw upon Lee's seminal research.[7]

Importantly, in the case of Greece in 2015, individuals entered the country due to both the push and pull factors that Lee identified. In the case of pull factors, Europe, as one of the global cores, attracted individuals seeking economic opportunities. There were also push factors at work, such as people attempting to flee their homelands. This aspect was most evident in the case of the Syrian Civil War. Lastly, these reasons often overlap. In the case of economic migrants to Europe, Afghanistan consistently ranks in the top five countries of origin.[8] While officially considered economic migrants, Afghanistan has faced protracted warfare since 1979. There exists a link between Afghanistan's ongoing instability due to conflict and the lack of economic opportunities in the country.

It is also important to briefly explore the world-systems theory as it relates to migration. World-systems theory, first developed by Immanuel Wallerstein and subsequently expanded upon by other scholars, considers the world-system, and not nation-states, to be the primary means of analysis.[9] Where nation-states enter Wallerstein's analysis is that they are the primary means of dividing labour, with the resulting division creating core, semi-periphery, and periphery states. Core countries, like those that have come to dominate the European Union, focus on high-skilled and capital-intensive production, whereas the periphery and semi-periphery focus on low-skilled and labour-intensive enterprises as well as raw materials.[10] While Greece is in the EU, one of the global cores, its economy – focused on tourism and light industry – would result in it being classified as a periphery or semi-periphery state in most analyses.

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7 See Paul L. Knox and Sallie A. Marston, *Human Geography* (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1998), 127; Caroline B. Brettell and James F. Hollifield, eds., *Migration Theory: Talking across Disciplines* (New York: Routledge, 2014), *passim*.

8 Laura Smith-Spark, "European migrant crisis: A country-by-country glance," *CNN*, September 5, 2015, https://edition.cnn.com/2015/09/04/europe/migrant-crisis-country-by-country.

9 Wallerstein, *The Modern World-System*, 46–49.

10 Stephen P. Borgatti and Martin G. Everett, "Models of core/periphery structures," *Social Networks* 21, no. 4 (2000): 375–395.

Critical for the core countries in maintaining their dominance in the world system, as Karatzogianni and Robinson note, is immigration control.[11] The world-system, without the proper maintenance of diversified labour, would collapse, as it relies on a stratified work force. As such, for the European Union to maintain its position as a core region, it needs to prevent migrants from readily accessing its territory. The EU's goal of preserving its privileged position in global affairs guided its policy towards Greece between 2015 and 2020.

One cannot examine the 2015 Migrant Crisis and the European response without first mentioning the Greek Financial Crisis. The Greek Financial Crisis commenced in 2009 against the backdrop of the Great Recession, and the country found itself unable to pay its creditors. There were a multitude of reasons for the Greek Financial Crisis. One can, however, largely reduce them to three factors: excessive Greek government spending and underreporting of their debt, structural issues in the Greek economy itself, and a lack of monetary and fiscal flexibility caused by their membership in the Eurozone.[12] The end result for Greece was three separate bailout packages (2010, 2012, and 2015), severe austerity measures, and political instability. The financial crisis shattered Greece's traditional two-party system, and radicalized groups capitalized on the political instability to push for dramatic changes to the country. On the far-right, Golden Dawn, a party with neo-Nazi overtures, gained seven percent of the vote in the 2012 elections. In 2015, the Coalition of the Radical Left (SYRIZA) gained a plurality of the vote.[13] The financial crisis and the resulting austerity measures, in short, disrupted Greek political culture and norms. Populism, in many ways, became the new norm in Greek politics, and the only major traditional party to do well in the post-financial crisis political climate, the right-wing New Democracy, incorporated elements of it into their policies.

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11 Athina Karatzogianni and Andrew Robinson, *Power, Resistance and Conflict in the Contemporary World: Social Movements, Networks, and Hierarchies* (New York: Routledge, 2009).

12 For a full list of domestic factors behind the crisis, see *Update of the Hellenic Stability and Growth Programme* (Athens, January 15, 2010), https://ec.europa.eu/economy_finance/economic_governance/sgp/pdf/20_scps/2009-10/01_programme/el_2010-01-15_sp_en.pdf. For an analysis of the Euro's role in the crisis, see Gylfi Zoega, "Greece and the Western Financial Crisis," *Atlantic Economic Journal* 47, no. 2 (2019): 113–126.

13 Kevin Ovenden and Paul Mason, *Syriza: Inside the Labyrinth* (London: Pluto Press, 2015), 24–25; Michal Novoth, "The Greek Elections of 2012: The Worrisome Rise of the Golden Dawn," *Israel Journal of Foreign Affairs* 7, no. 1 (2013): 87–94.

Due to this financial crisis, Greece was completely unprepared for the wave of migration from Syria in 2015. However, it is important to note that refugees and migrants arriving in Europe was not a new development. Migrants and asylum seekers have been a regular feature of EU politics. The consistency of the issue was why the EU agreed to the Dublin Regulation as early as 1990, with it formally coming into effect in 1997 for the original 12 signatories. The goal of the Dublin Regulation was to "determine rapidly the Member State responsible [for an asylum claim]."[14] In effect, however, the Dublin Regulation, and its subsequent iterations, transferred responsibility for migrants and asylum seekers to the country of entry. When Greece signed the Dublin Regulation in 1990, the country had approximately eight and a half thousand refugees within its borders.[15] Given that Greece was on the periphery of the European Community at the time of the signing, it makes sense that its numbers were low. Migrants and refugees, quite simply, possessed greater opportunities elsewhere in Europe. Geopolitical and technological changes, however, would fundamentally alter this calculus.

While the structural issues that Greece faced from the financial crisis inhibited its ability to act, the circumstances of migration also shifted after 1990. The first major area of change was in terms of technology. The proliferation of cellphones and smart devices facilitates migration from less wealthy countries to Europe. As Gilespie and others note, for refugees seeking to reach Europe, "the digital infrastructure is as important as the physical infrastructures of roads, railways, sea crossings and the borders controlling the free movement of people."[16] Individuals undertaking migration, and thereby attempting to reach the core, can access routes, information about patrols by governments seeking to prevent their entry, as well as contact information for a variety of smuggling groups and organizations.

This simple technological innovation has fundamentally altered migration flows at a global level and poses a significant challenge to how countries in the

14 "Council Regulation (EC) No. 343/2003 of 18 February 2003 establishing the criteria and mechanisms for determining the Member State responsible for examining an asylum application lodged in one of the Member States by a third-country national," *Office Journal of the European Union* 50, no. 1 (2003): 1–10.

15 "Total number of refugees in host country, end of 1990," Migration Data Portal, accessed October 20, 2020, https://www.migrationdataportal.org/international-data?i=refug_host&t=1990.

16 Mary Gillespie et al., *Mapping Refugee Media Journeys: Smartphones and Social Media Networks* (Open University, 2016), 5–6.

world-system have dealt with the issue in the past. When European countries signed the Dublin Regulation in 1990, the number of individuals able to migrate was more restricted, both in terms of absolute numbers and socio-economic background. Said individuals typically migrated directly to Western European countries rather than Greece due to the greater economic opportunities afforded in the former countries. The smartphone and the internet, however, have significantly changed migratory flows. As Stevenson notes:

> Yet the same forces that have shrunk the world for people in its wealthier precincts – instantaneous, pocket-size communication, mundane air travel, globalized culture – have also been an invitation, or perhaps a taunt, to those in less fortunate circumstances. Confronted with war, persecution and poverty, the migrants are well aware that people are living far better in a not-too-distant place, and that their smartphones and social networks can help guide them there.[17]

Migration, in short, was no longer limited to those of advanced means. Whereas migration to Europe was previously primarily done by wealthy individuals who could bypass the semi-periphery, the increasingly large number of individuals from less advantaged backgrounds now had to pass through the semi-periphery to reach the core. Migrants' and refugees' awareness of better lives beyond their countries' borders, and the ability to access the means of getting there through social media connections, led to a significant increase in migrants and refugees.

The increased ability of people, regardless of socio-economic background, to migrate was further complicated by an internal EU policy: the Schengen Agreement. Originally signed in 1985 and initially implemented in 1995 by Western European countries, the Schengen Agreement largely removed passport and border controls from the member nations. Greece ascended to the agreement in early 2000.[18] Migrants and refugees, by entering Greece, would then have access to the rest of the EU.

These technological and internal EU political developments compounded the second factor regarding refugee and migrant flows to Europe in 2015: the

17 Richard W. Stevenson, "Stories of Hope, Courage, and Loss as Historic Journey Unfolds," *The New York Times*, November 12, 2015.

18 "Council Decision of 13 December 1999 on the full application of the Schengen acquis in Greece," *Official Journal of the European Communities* 327, no. 58 (2000).

Syrian Civil War. Scholars still debate the causes of the Syrian Civil War.[19] The results and impact on its population, however, are not up for debate. By 8 September 2015, there were 4.1 million Syrian refugees registered with the UNHCR.[20] This number, furthermore, did not include internally displaced peoples (IDPs) within Syria. Combined, the total number of refugees and IDPs comprised more than half the population of Syria.[21] Given that the Syrian Civil War showed no signs of abating – and, in fact, continues to this day – its people looked elsewhere for new opportunities.[22] Europe, with its high standard of living and relative security, appeared ideal.

By mid-2015, Greece had overtaken Italy as the primary country of entry by migrants and refugees into the European Union. As instability in Syria increased due to the Syrian Civil War and Italy became increasingly proficient at preventing migrants and refugees from entering Europe via the Central Mediterranean route, Greece's location and political troubles made it an ideal entry point.[23] Furthermore, due to the financial crisis, the Greek government lacked the means of protecting its borders, especially given the unprecedented number of migrants and refugees seeking to enter the country.

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19 These causes include demographic imbalances, unequal wealth distribution, draught, and authoritarian governance. See Shahrzad Mohtadi, Colin P. Kelley, Mark A. Cane, Richard Seager, and Yochanan Kushnir, "Climate Change in the Fertile Crescent and Implications of the Recent Syrian Drought," *PNAS* 112, no. 11 (2015): 3241–3246; Badr Eddin Rahimahl, "The Class Oriented Rationale: Uncovering the Sources of the Syrian Civil War," *The Muslim World* 106, no. 1 (2016): 169–186; Human Rights Watch, *World Report: Events of 2009* (New York: Human Rights Watch, 2010), https://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/world_report_download/wr2010.pdf.

20 Ariane Rummery, "Worsening conditions inside Syria and the region fuel despair, driving thousands towards Europe," United Nations High Commissioner on Refugees, September 8, 2015, https://www.unhcr.org/uk/news/latest/2015/9/55eed5d66/worsening-conditions-inside-syria-region-fuel-despair-driving-thousands.html.

21 UNHCR, *Protecting and Supporting the Displaced in Syria: UNHCR Syria End of Year Report*, https://www.unhcr.org/sy/wp-content/uploads/sites/3/2016/11/UNHCR-End-of-Year-2015-En.pdf.

22 "Seven factors behind movement of Syrian refugees to Europe," United Nations High Commissioner on Refugees, September 25, 2015, https://www.unhcr.org/news/briefing/2015/9/560523f26/seven-factors-behind-movement-syrian-refugees-europe.html.

23 "Migratory Routes: Eastern Mediterranean Route," Frontex, accessed October 20, 2020, https://frontex.europa.eu/along-eu-borders/migratory-routes/eastern-mediterranean-route/.

The recent memory of Greece threatening the very stability and raison d'etre of the European Union inhibited a pan-European response. The efforts by the Greek government in the summer of 2015 to challenge the conditions imposed by the EU through a referendum on the austerity package caused considerable ill-will to develop in European capitals towards Greece. In the lead-up to the referendum, Jean-Claude Juncker, the President of the European Commission, stated that a "no [vote] would mean that Greece is saying no to Europe."[24] The referendum passed, but it was a pyrrhic victory for the Greek government under Alexis Tsipras, who, immediately upon winning, was told by the French President that Juncker's statement was no brinksmanship, but rather fact; Greece could either accept the bailout terms or leave the EU.[25] Humiliated, Tsipras, despite organizing the referendum, was forced to accept the EU's terms.

The result of Tsipras' dangerous referendum gamble was that Greece, the country in Europe least well-equipped to deal with a major crisis, initially dealt with the migration issue largely on its own. Even when the European Union sought to intervene, they aggravated the problems. Angela Merkel, the Chancellor of Germany, declared in August 2015 that her country would ignore the Dublin Regulation and not place a cap on the number of refugees it accepted into Germany.[26] While this dealt with humanitarian concerns and alleviated the pressure on Greece, Italy, and other countries on Europe's periphery, it exacerbated the refugee crisis facing Europe. By giving migrants the opportunity to reach Germany via Europe's periphery in Greece, more migrants and refugees undertook the journey. These migrants and refugees were not only from Syria. Other groups, notably Afghan and Iraqi nationals, attempted to use Germany's newfound openness to enter Europe in greater numbers as well.

Certain EU leaders planted the seeds for the organization's future stance towards migrants and refugees in 2015. Eastern European leaders, dismayed at the increasing number of refugees and migrants entering Europe and the fact that the policy of the central European authorities seemed to be either to do nothing or to exacerbate the problem, took exception to these develop-

24 Ian Traynor, "Alexis Tsipras Must Be Stopped: The Underlying Message of Europe's Leaders," *The Guardian*, June 29, 2015.

25 *Inside Europe: Ten Years of Turmoil*, episode 2, "Going for Broke," 2019.

26 Samuel Osborne, "Angela Merkel Admits She Lost Control of Refugee Crisis in Germany and Would 'Turn Back Time' If She Could," *The Independent*, September 22, 2016.

ments.[27] Viktor Orban, the Prime Minister of Hungary, thought that Europe needed to take a more militant stance. On 15 October 2015, Orban, speaking to reporters, noted that "The best solution would be for Greece to honour its contractual obligations."[28] Greece, in short, should fulfil its obligations under the Dublin Regulation. Orban did seem to recognize that Greece's financial situation, as well as the exceptional nature of the 2015 Migration Crisis, meant that it might not be able to meet these demands, as he later added, "if [Greece] cannot then we should do it for her."[29] Ultimately, Orban's desire to send European forces to Greece's border with Turkey never came to pass. Nevertheless, while the EU did not approve such a plan in 2015, it remained a politically popular idea amongst certain factions of the EU on both the right and left.[30]

Internal EU policies did not solve the migrant crisis. Instead, foreign policy was crucial to its resolution. Specifically, in March 2016, the EU reached an agreement with Turkey to mitigate the number of refugees entering the continent. Critically, there were two key provisions to the agreement:

1) All new irregular migrants crossing from Turkey into Greek islands as from 20 March 2016 will be returned to Turkey. This will take place in full accordance with EU and international law, thus excluding any kind of collective expulsion. All migrants will be protected in accordance with the relevant international standards and in respect of the principle of non-refoulement. It will be a temporary and extraordinary measure which is necessary to end the human suffering and restore public order. Migrants arriving in the Greek islands will be duly registered and any application for asylum will be processed individually by the Greek authorities in accordance with the Asylum Procedures Directive, in cooperation with UNHCR. Migrants not applying for asylum or whose application has been found unfounded or inadmissible in accordance with the said directive will be returned to Turkey. Turkey and Greece, assisted by EU institutions and agencies, will take the

27 Justyna Segeš Frelak, "Solidarity in European Migration Policy: The Perspective of the Visegrád States," in *Solidarity in the European Union*, eds. Andreas Grimmel and Susanne My Giang (London: Springer, 2017), 81–95.

28 "Hungary PM: Shut Greek Border to Migrants," *Sky News*, October 15, 2015, https://news.sky.com/story/hungary-pm-shut-greek-border-to-stop-migrants-10342972.

29 Ibid.

30 Violeta Moreno-Lax, "The EU Humanitarian Border and the Securitization of Human Rights: The 'Rescue-Through-Interdiction/Rescue-Without-Protection'," *Journal of Common Market Strategies* 56, no. 1 (2018): 119–140.

necessary steps and agree any necessary bilateral arrangements, including the presence of Turkish officials on Greek islands and Greek officials in Turkey as from 20 March 2016, to ensure liaison and thereby facilitate the smooth functioning of these arrangements. The costs of the return operations of irregular migrants will be covered by the EU.

2) For every Syrian being returned to Turkey from Greek islands, another Syrian will be resettled from Turkey to the EU taking into account the UN Vulnerability Criteria. A mechanism will be established, with the assistance of the Commission, EU agencies and other Member States, as well as the UNHCR, to ensure that this principle will be implemented as from the same day the returns start. Priority will be given to migrants who have not previously entered or tried to enter the EU irregularly.[31]

Turkey did not reach the accord with the EU, however, out of concern for the refugees. Instead, Turkey did so under the condition that it received six billion dollars in financial support from the EU, as well as visa-free travel to the EU for its citizens if it met certain requirements.[32] Although some scholars and politicians have argued that the agreement was based on extortion, and this argument certainly can be made, it ignores the bigger issue.[33]

In the world-system, the burden of mass migration and refugees disproportionately affects states at the periphery and semi-periphery as individuals try to make their way to core states; in this case, in Central and Western Europe. Migration controls, as mentioned earlier, are one of the principal means that core countries possess for maintaining their position. Turkey, as both the entry point to Europe's periphery in Greece and a neighbour of Syria, had more official refugees within its boundaries than the entirety of Europe during the latter's 'crisis' in 2015.[34] Thus the agreement, rather than one of extortion, was instead one of core countries paying to avoid a crisis that had the potential to undermine their position in the world-system.

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31 European Council, "EU-Turkey statement, 18 March 2016," https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2016/03/18/eu-turkey-statement/.

32 Ibid.

33 Lisa Haferlach and Dilek Kurban, "Lessons Learnt from the EU-Turkey Refugee Agreement in Guiding EU Migration Partnerships with Origin and Transit Countries," *Global Policy* 8, no. 4 (2017): 85.

34 "Situation Syria Regional Refugees," United Nations High Commissioner on Refugees, accessed October 28, 2020, https://data2.unhcr.org/en/situations/syria/location/113.

Political Developments in Europe between 2016–2020

The most significant development for the EU in its history occurred soon after the EU-Turkish agreement on refugees: the 2016 United Kingdom's European Union membership referendum. Against the backdrop of the 2015 Refugee Crisis, the UK sought to renegotiate its relationship with the EU. This was not a new development; the UK, since joining the EU in 1973, had consistently chafed at regulations and policies that it perceived as infringing upon its national sovereignty.[35] Tensions subsequently escalated. Although the full scope of Britain's tumultuous relationship with the EU is beyond the scope of this paper, migration concerns were of paramount importance for those within the UK who sought to leave the EU.[36]

Indirectly linked to the United Kingdom's decision to launch a referendum was the EU's relationship with Turkey. As James Lindsay-Ker notes, "In the UK, the debate over immigration became intertwined with the free movement of workers – one of the core principles of the EU."[37] Turkey joining the European Union would significantly aggravate the perceived issue of job loss that the British public believed the free movement of workers caused for the country. British politicians favouring Brexit, in short, unconsciously used elements of world-system analysis to justify their break from the EU. Turkey, a country decidedly within the periphery by most analyses, also possessed a population approaching 80 million individuals.[38] The 2015 Refugee Crisis, and the need to appease Turkey in order to stymie the flow of refugees and migrants to Europe, caused the EU to open two new chapters in Turkey's long-stalled process of joining the organization.[39] The 'Leave' campaign, already inculcating a fear in the general British public about Eastern Europeans taking their jobs, used

35 Stephen Wall, *A Stranger in Europe: Britain and the EU from Thatcher to Blair* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 1–17.

36 For an explanation of the United Kingdom's concerns about migrant labour in the lead-up to, and post-, Brexit, see Nicole Lindstrom, "What's Left for 'Social Europe'? Brexit and Transnational Labour Market Regulation in the UK-1 and the EU-27," *New Political Economy* 24, no. 2 (2019): 286–287.

37 James Ker-Lindsay, "Turkey's EU Accession as a Factor in the 2016 Brexit Referendum," *Turkish Studies* 19, no. 1 (2018): 1.

38 On Turkey's position, see Yukio Kawano, Benjamin D. Brewer, and Christopher Chase-Dunn, "Trade Globalization since 1795: Waves of Integration in the World-System," *American Sociological Review* 65, no. 1 (2000): 77–95.

39 Ker-Lindsay, "Turkey's EU accession," 4.

the threat of Turkey's EU ascension to magnify these fears.[40] The EU's need to stop mass migration to the core, in other words, helped push the UK out of the union. On 23 June 2016, the UK's population voted to leave the European Union. The United Kingdom's effort to fortify its position in the core and detach itself from the policies of the EU that allowed immigration from the semi-periphery countries of Eastern Europe and periphery countries elsewhere, therefore, played a key role in its decision to leave the supranational organization.

The United Kingdom's decision to leave the European Union changed the calculations of the decision-makers in Brussels towards Greece. Previously, politicians in Brussels were concerned that Greece and the other countries that faced major financial strain in the aftermath of the 2008 Financial Crisis (Spain, Portugal, and Ireland) would destabilize the Eurozone and threaten their position as a core region in the world-system.[41] Brexit, however, represented an even greater threat to the organization than Greece's ability to destabilize the financial system. The Eurozone, although an important part of the European dream of integrating the continent, was simply a part of the broader strategy. Although Greece challenged the form that European integration would take through its financial policies, the people themselves never gave up on the dream of EU integration. Even at the height of the financial crisis, a third of the country still held a favourable opinion of the EU. While individuals may argue that only a third of the people holding a favourable opinion of the EU indicates that the people gave up on the EU, given the domestic issues Greece faced due to the austerity measures imposed by the EU, this still represents a significant base of support. By 2019, once the worst elements of the austerity measures had passed, the EU's favorability rating returned to 53%.[42] Conversely, the people of the United Kingdom, by voting to leave the European Union, represented a fundamental challenge to the organization's right to exist. The EU's issues with Greece, therefore, were no longer as significant as they had been in the past.

Greece, in many ways, was the EU country that benefitted the most from the changing priorities in Brussels, as it improved its position in the world-system. Until Brexit, the debates in the European Union were not over its survival

40 Ibid., 7.

41 Zoega, "Greece and the Western Financial Crisis." 114.

42 Richard Wike et al., "The European Union," *Pew Research Center*, October 14, 2019, https://www.pewresearch.org/global/2019/10/14/the-european-union/.

but structural issues and optimizing the organization for its membership.[43] The UK's decision to leave the European Union, however, threw the organization's raison d'être into question and highlighted existing centrifugal forces that it faced.[44] If the EU lost additional members, this would potentially create a domino effect that would leave it either unviable or with a much-reduced role in global affairs. As an article in *Deutsche Welle* from 2017, when Grexit fears resurfaced, noted: "Who would have an interest in knocking everything off balance [by expelling Greece] just because Athens has been dragging out recent negotiations, for example, with regards to the liberalization of the job market? Surely no one."[45] While both the Greek government and EU Member States used the spectre of Grexit for domestic political consumption, the stakes for all parties were too high for anyone to contemplate the issue seriously. Greece now found itself firmly entrenched within the European Union as the core countries' shield against the periphery.

The 2020 Migrant Crisis and the European Response

It was against the backdrop of a European Union that was more concerned with preserving the integrity of the organization and its position at the core of the international system rather than punishing what it viewed as its problematic member states that the 2020 Migration Crisis emerged. The immediate causes of the 2020 crisis were not new but rather the result of the Turkish-EU agreement in 2016. Almost immediately after reaching this agreement, negotiations over Turkey's ascension stalled. European leaders viewed Erdogan's plans to transform Turkey from a parliamentary to a presidential system as potentially compromising the rule of law in the country. Germany's President, Frank-Walter Steinmeier, noted that "The way we look (at Turkey) is characterized by worry, that everything that has been built up over years and decades is

43 For what were seen as pressing issues immediately before Brexit, see Martijn Lak Jaap de Zwaan, Abiola Makinwa, and Piet Willems, eds., *Governance and Security Issues of the European Union: Challenges Ahead* (The Hague: Asper Press, 2016), 1–11.

44 Michelle Cini and Amy Verdun, "The Implications of Brexit for the Future of Europe," in *Brexit and Beyond: Rethinking the Futures of Europe*, eds. Benjamin Martill and Uta Staiger (London: UCL Press, 2018), 66–68.

45 Georg Matthes, "The myth of Grexit," *Deutsche Welle*, February 20, 2017, https://www.dw.com/en/opinion-the-myth-of-grexit/a-37642633.

collapsing."[46] However, the efforts of the German government, as well as those of other EU countries, to pressure Turkey were in vain. Erdogan responded by stating, "Turkey is not a country you can pull and push around, not a country whose citizens you can drag on the ground."[47] This symbolic action by the German President, and Erdogan's bellicose response, echoed his reaction to the European Parliament symbolically voting to halt Turkey's ascension talks due to the repressive measures the Turkish government introduced in the aftermath of the attempted coup d'état by elements of the Turkish military in July 2016.[48] Over the next three years, a variety of diplomatic furores would further dampen relations between Turkey and the EU.

Most problematic for Turkey, however, was that the EU continued to neglect its obligations under the 2016 agreement, according to which Turkey took on the preponderant burden of migrants and refugees for the European Union. In exchange, the EU was supposed to provide Turkey with financial support and visa-free travel for Turkish citizens to the EU.[49] Regarding the latter, the European Union was supposed to finalize the visa liberalization process by June 2016. Although it formally initiated the process on 4 May 2016, progress has since stalled on the issue, and even in the initial address, EU politicians placed the burden on Turkey. In the initial announcement, First Vice-President of the European Commission, Frans Timmermans, noted:

> Turkey has made impressive progress, particularly in recent weeks, on meeting the benchmarks of its visa liberalization roadmap. There is still work to be done as a matter of urgency but if Turkey sustains the progress made, they can meet the remaining benchmarks. This is why we are putting a proposal on the table which opens the way for the European Parliament and the Member States to decide to lift visa requirements, once the benchmarks have been met.[50]

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46 Frank-Walter Steinmeier, cited in Ece Toksabay, "Erdogan warns Europeans 'will not walk safely' if attitude persists, as row carries on," *Reuters*, March 22, 2017, https://www.reuters.com/article/us-turkey-referendum-europe-idUSKBN16T13E.

47 Ibid.

48 "Euro MPs vote to freeze Turkey EU membership talks," *BBC*, November 24, 2016, https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-38090121.

49 European Council, "EU-Turkey statement."

50 "European Commission opens way for decision by June on visa-free travel for citizens of Turkey," European Commission, May 4, 2016, https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP_16_1622.

In short, while the proposal promised much, it amounted to little of substance. Later, the European authorities, when questioned about the matter, noted that Turkey had not done enough to meet the requirements needed for visa-free travel.[51] The ability of Turkey's citizens to access the Schengen Zone, and therefore the core countries, without requiring visas was, and continues to be, indefinitely delayed.

Likewise, the financial support that the European Union provided Turkey, while appearing considerable, did little to resolve the migrant crisis or aid Turkey in a significant manner. Turkey continues to host 3.6 million refugees from the Syrian Civil War, and this does not include other migrants forced to remain in Turkey as they seek transportation to the core countries of the EU.[52] The root causes for mass migration to the European Union, its high standard of living, and the accessibility of information about it did not disappear in the years since the EU-Turkish agreement in March 2016. If anything, the underlying issues have become more pronounced as technological distribution to the developing world increases and continues to highlight the disparities that exist globally. Thus, not only had the financial support promised to Turkey, six billion Euros by 2018, ended, but it was also insufficient given the scale of the crisis, and, notably, had not even been fully disbursed. In an ironically self-laudatory press release on 10 December 2019, the European Commission noted, "The European Union has fully mobilised the €6 billion operational budget of the Facility for Refugees in Turkey, in line with its commitment to the implementation of the EU-Turkey Statement. Out of the total Facility budget of €6 billion, €4.3 billion has now been contracted and €2.7 billion disbursed."[53] Despite not meeting its obligations under the 2016 agreement, the European Commission still felt the need to recognize that it had disbursed less than half the agreed sum. This was almost a year after the amount in its entirety was due. With political tensions escalating due to Turkey's ascension to the EU being indefinitely delayed and the EU failing to fulfil its obligations under the 2016 agreement, Erdogan used one of the few means at his disposal

51 Ibid.

52 "Situation Syria Regional Refugees."

53 "EU Facility for Refugees in Turkey: €6 billion to support refugees and local communities in need fully mobilised," European Commission, December 10, 2019, https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_19_6694.

to create pressure upon the EU: weaponizing the refugees and migrants.[54] Greece, as one of the EU countries that shares a border with Turkey, was at the frontline of this threat.

Greece's politics, likewise, had come into alignment with the EU consensus. In 2015, a radical left party led Greece, which was out of step with the major actors of the European Union. While Greece also experienced radicalization on the right, most notably with Golden Dawn gaining seats in parliament, New Democracy's position as an anti-austerity party allowed it to defeat this challenge from the far-right. New Democracy's success in 2019 returned Greece to its traditional two-party system.[55] The rise of a centre-right government re-oriented Greece to the types of governments gaining influence in Europe since 2015. Even within European countries where governments withstood political challenges from the right and populist organizations, such as France, groups espousing these beliefs made significant inroads.[56] While Greece shifted its government to the right much later than several European governments that would become key allies in 2020, most notably Austria and Poland, the challenges posed by the 2015 Migration Crisis brought European politics into rough alignment.

Unlike in 2015, the EU would take a hardline against migrants and refugees in 2020. The polarization that occurred in Greek politics before the 2015 Migration Crisis had spread to the rest of Europe in the intervening five years. Specifically, populism, whether in its left- or right-wing form, became a major political force in Europe.[57] The perspective of Viktor Orban in Hungary, previously considered anathema by other European states, gained resonance in the

54 The weaponization of refugees is not a new concept or development. For an analysis of the issue, see Kelly M. Greenhill, "Strategic Engineered Migration as a Weapon of War," *Civil Wars* 10, no. 1 (2008): 6–21.

55 For an explanation of Golden Dawn's rise, see Sofia Vasilopoulou and Daphne Halikiopoulou, *The Golden Dawn's 'Nationalist Solution': Explaining the Rise of the Far Right in Greece* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2015). For coverage of the 2019 Greek election, see Lamprini Rori, "The 2019 Greek parliamentary election: retour a la normale," *West European Politics* 43, no. 4 (2019): 1023–1037.

56 See Ayhan Kaya, *Populism and Heritage in Europe: Lost in Diversity and Unity* (London: Routledge, 2019).

57 For an examination on the rise of right-wing populism in Europe, see Kaya, *Populism and Heritage in Europe*; for an examination of left-wing populism in Europe, see Giorgos Charalambous and Gregoris Ioannou, eds., *Left Radicalism and Populism in Europe* (London: Routledge, 2019).

European Union as a whole. The populism witnessed in Greece, already having fertile seeds in Europe, spread further in the aftermath of the 2015 Migration Crisis. Furthermore, the governments of Germany and France, the two core countries of the EU that opposed the more strenuous measures proposed in 2015, had faced significant challenges from the right since 2015. These developments made opposition to the more strenuous border defences proposed by Austria, Hungary, and other European states difficult, if not impossible. Thus, immediately before the global pandemic halted Turkey's attempt to weaponize the refugees against Europe, the EU stood relatively united on the issue due to its need for Greece to provide a buffer between it and the periphery.

Conclusion

The EU's need to solidify its position as one of the key cores of the international system led to different responses to the refugee crises in 2015 and 2020. In 2015, the EU, seeking to stabilize the monetary aspect of the supranational organization, initially left Greece to deal with the matter by citing the Dublin Regulation. Even when Germany and other key states of the EU intervened, they did so only to preserve their own positions within the organization. In 2020, however, the position of the EU was less stable than it had been in 2015. The decision of the United Kingdom to leave the organization, the first country to do so, caused EU leaders to reemphasize solidarity within the bloc rather than punish its members. Combined with the perceived threat of mass migration emanating from Turkey, a country on the European periphery that EU policymakers increasingly viewed as a destabilizing force and not a future member, European countries supported Greece in 2020 to a degree that they had been unwilling to do in 2015.

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