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Passing the Border Fences; The Promised Land and the «Fallen» Angels

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Key points

Ceuta and Melilla, the only two European cities in Africa, find themselves tackling vast migration flows. The fact they belong in EU makes them alluring for irregular migrants who know that just a step on their land provides them rights they would never have in their country. Since 2014 almost 30.000 people pasted their land borders with Morocco¹. The fences separating the cities from Morocco are not enough to protect them. This policy brief examines the difficulties immigrants find on their way to the cities, the impact the flows have at the enclaves, Spain and EU and suggests some measures which can ameliorate the situation:

- EU should intensify the cooperation with the African states from where most migrants come from.
- Razors should be removed from the fences as they are dangerous for immigrants' lives and against EU's principles.
- The already existing asylum centers should get bigger and get equipped with more personnel and the necessary for living items.

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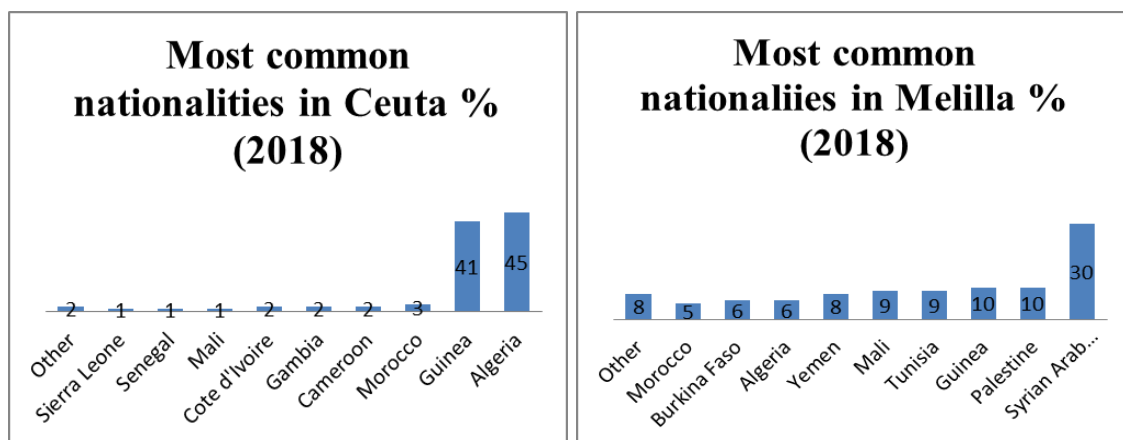
Introduction

The Spanish autonomous cities Ceuta and Melilla face an unprecedented immigration crisis. Thousands of Africans are trying to get illegally in them, aiming to apply for asylum. They log freedom of movement within EU in order to live the so-called “European dream”.

However, this dream goes against the interests of Ceuta, Melilla, Spain, EU and their citizens. In order to solve the problem, EU moved to bilateral agreements with Morocco, funding the latter one million eurosⁱⁱ to help the elimination of the flows through both land (Ceuta and Melilla) and sea. Furthermore, Morocco was proposed to build some reception centers for the migrants in its territory, something that the Foreign Minister emphatically declined declaring this is a sovereignty’s issueⁱⁱⁱ.

Apart from the co-operation with Moroccan authorities, EU enforced the already in existence fences separating Spanish territories from Africa, increasing their height to 6 meters. In Melilla a third fence was constructed^{iv}, while in Ceuta the two fences were enforced with barbed wire at their highest part^v. In addition, all fences get guarded by Spanish policemen and the paramilitary force Guardia Civil from the one side, and by Moroccan policemen from the other.

These measures provoke lots of reactions as there are meant to militate against the right of the refugees and economic migrants to reach the asylum centers. Because of that it is impossible to be examined if they deserve asylum or not. Even more controversies create the accusations of violence against those who try climbing the fence by Moroccan or Spanish policemen and guards^{vi}, while the forcible (and simultaneously illegal^{vii}) push-backs, make the situation worse.



Those Graphs include both land and sea arrivals^{viii}.



The pathologies of the migration flows

Migrants' dangers

For those who have no papers, the crossing of the borders is a really risky action. The immigrants who want to storm the fences are gathered at the mountains just across Melilla and Ceuta in order to have visual contact with them. They live there for months

separated into national groups under awful conditions organising the attack. The chosen night they start running towards the borders in big groups. Climbing the fences, they get injured by the razors, some of them fall from big heights or become victims of the guards' cruelty^{ix}. On the other side, those who attempt to hide under vehicles or inside items, are usually found semi-unconscious because of the high temperatures and the lack of oxygen^x.

Of course, passing the borders does not always mean reaching the asylum centers; push-backs are not rare. Only some «lucky ones» get in them. There, migrants need months to have their asylum process completed. The centers are overcrowded^{xi} and that causes low-functioning. For all that period immigrants are prohibited leaving the town and because they can start working only six months after their asylum's application is accepted, many of them panhandle around the city^{xii}.

Ceuta's and Melilla's plague

The aforementioned situation degrades the two enclaves' quality of life. Scenes of violence are almost a daily routine near the fences and the border gates, while the wandering migrants seeking for money are an unpleasant spectacle. However, even the migrants who do not beg for money but look for a day work, affect the citizens. The low wages for which they are willing to work for, drop the price of the Melilla and Ceuta citizens' work, too. Besides, asylum seekers are often accused for absorbing job vacancies citizens could get.

Melilla and Ceuta are also victims of the negative publicity. The news medias reproduce for the irregular migration result in reduction at the tourists' rates^{xiii}. Lastly, a great issue that the cities face is the traffic jam. Both ports and land gateways are crowded because of the excessive and long-lasting controls. This leads to delays and the citizens' and tourists' anger.

Spain's dilemma

Spanish authorities are highly criticised for the conditions in the autonomous cities. EU member states and their citizens ask them to solve the problem using more efficient



measures, while NGOs and the Council of Europe urge them respect the immigrants' rights and treat them properly. Tomáš Bocek, the Council's of Europe special representative on migration and refugees, blamed Spain for the push-backs, the overpopulation in the asylum centers, the poor equipment of the laters and the lack of effective minors' protection^{xiv}.

Apart those accusations, Spain is confronted with a rise of racism and far-right beliefs^{xv}. The xenophobia is rocketing, while the fact that most refugees getting through the enclaves are black, muslim Sabsaharian men makes Spanish feel endangered. Governors need to persue citizens everything is under control in the same moment that Morocco seems to blackmail Spain letting immigrants in if EU does not give them more money^{xvi}.

The challenge of EU

European institutions, from the other side, need to surpass the member states' disagreements on the issue and follow its principles. The high economic impact of what is happening in Melilla and Ceuta brinks difficulties to EU, as states do not want to give money for aliens while the european economy is wounded. Moreover, european citizens are afraid that letting immigrants in may cause augmenting of crime or even terrorist attacks^{xvii}. Who knows if some of those coming are memebers of Boko Haram or ISIS? Europeans believe the difference between the western civilazation and the immigrants one is huge so they ask their culture to be protected.

EU also faces a great problem with its collaborators; the Moroccans. NGOs accuse EU giving money to authorities that mistreat people and violate basic human rights. The cynical way they use to keep might-be immigrants far from the european borders and the constant categories for women' abuses proves they are unable to control the situation^{xviii}.

Recommendations

How the problem can be shrunk?

Intensify the cooperation with the African states from where most migrants come from.

EU should ameliorate its relations with African countries which are not included in the Southern Neighborhood. States as Guinea do not only need the financial help that EU already offers them. They also need investments which would lead to new job opportunities for their citizens. If unemployment gets reduced, Africans will stop fleeing home as they could find employment there. For this to be done, EU should offer benefits



to possible investors and cooperate more with the WTO regarding the developing countries.

Off course, its opponents or some conservative politicians from the African countries would talk about recolonisation by financial means, but the benefits for all those in need would be adequate to prove the opposite.

The razors' removal from the fences

EU's most important characteristic is its respect to life and proper living. Measures which could result in the loss of a man do not suite its institutions and beliefs. People who want to feed their families do not stop because of the possible wounds. They make efforts using blankets or clothes, while there are reported occasions of men who placed their bodies on the wires in order others to pass without injuries.

The removal of the razors will benefit the whole society. First of all, immigrants will not be in danger, while Spain and EU will improve their image regarding humanity. Additionally, medical equipment would be saved in the enclaves' hospitals as no men would be injured and the towns' citizens would not be witnesses of displeasing images.

Enlargement of the asylum centers and hiring of more personnel

The overcrowding in the asylum centers can be treated only if more buildings get constructed for the refugees to be hosted and more administrators are employed. The bigger number of interviewers will speed up the asylum process so immigrants will not be gathered in centers for months.



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