

Book Review

Kosovo's Refugees in the European Union



Edited by Joanne van Selm
London and New York: Pinter, 2000

Joanne van Selm's edited volume provides a critical analysis of European refugee policies during and after the Balkan crises, and introduces a balanced selection of new studies for readers interested in studying the European case.

Van Selm sheds light on the reactions of select European states and societies to the Kosovo crisis, within the context of the creation of a common policy for European immigration and asylum. Contributors to the book come from different disciplines and specialize in different countries, each attempting to make sense of the approach (both past and future) by EU member states to the Kosovar refugee crises.

In her previous work, *Refugee Protection in Europe*, van Selm also addressed the issue of refugee protection based on the lessons to be learned from the (pre-Kosovo) crisis in the former Yugoslavia. Specifically, she provided a comprehensive overview of the twentieth-century history of refugee protection, the relationship between refugee protection measures and the human rights regime, and trends in the formulation of asylum and immigration policies in Europe. In her earlier work as well as the Introduction to this edited volume, van Selm asserts the need for and merits of a common, comprehensive approach to forced migration in Europe. Meanwhile, she is also keenly aware of the limitation posed by the relations between states, between states and the societies they govern, and, the general framework of prejudices about "non-Europeans," "refugees," "aliens," and "migrants" affecting European societies. In this context, *Kosovo's Refugees in the European Union* is a further step in understanding the complex phenomenon of refugee acceptance and protection in this quintessentially wealthy and powerful corner of the world. The book offers a rewarding combination of topical, timely, and in-depth analysis, for the debates presented are built upon the expertise of van Selm and other contributors on refugee reception in Europe.

According to van Selm, the Kosovo crisis is a test case for the European asylum and immigration laws that came into effect with the 1999 Treaty of Amsterdam. Europe-wide debates on asylum seekers and immigration quotas, particularly in the area of temporary protection, are crucially important in how they reveal the practical meaning of European claims for possessing a truly civilized, humanitarian identity. *Kosovo's Refugees* sets the stage for debating these issues within the paradigm of linkages between "societal security and [perception] of refugee movements." Each of the case studies in the book thus works around questions on the relationship between causes of forced migration, the types of protection offered by the chosen European country, and the locus of challenges to the protection of refugees in the receiving state. In this context, policy reactions of EU governments to the Kosovo crisis are treated as a microcosm of general European trends in immigration and refugee protection. In turn, the response of member states to the outpouring of Kosovo refugees is examined for lessons learned first from the Bosnian and then Kosovar cases, related and resultant national debates on asylum and immigration, and the impact of EU integration policies on the responses of individual states. Although wider theoretical issues are also brought into the picture, the volume's strength lies more in the careful examination of select cases.

Both van Selm and contributing scholars to the volume regard the Kosovo case as a "European refugee crisis." And yet their analyses of Austrian, French, German, Italian, Dutch, Swedish, and British responses to this crisis are largely based on the problems caused by the perception of these and other "foreigners" as security threats to the receiving European societies. Consequently, there is an embedded tension in each article as a result of the "mismatch" between the geographical location and cultural classification of Kosovo Muslims. It is true that the member states chosen as case studies reflect significant variation in Euro-

pean attitudes towards asylum and immigration policies, the investment or interest EU states in the formulation of a “common European approach” or “burden-sharing schemes,” and their stance on the NATO intervention in Kosovo. However, both in the weakness of a coordinated response to the Kosovo refugee crisis and in lessons learned and emerging areas of reflection, there is a gap between what each government considers a threshold for accepting needy foreigners, even if they happen to be coming from within Europe, and what the refugee crisis demanded. Across Europe, post-Bosnian perception of refugees is coloured by the introduction of restrictive measures aimed at halting spontaneous arrivals and ad hoc arrangements and quotas for the application of the non-convention, temporary-protection category. It is interesting that these measures were introduced, despite the fact that only Germany had to shoulder the burden of large number of Bosnian refugees. In other words, the lessons learned from the Bosnian case were far from constructive; they were tainted by fear and an increased sense of vulnerability toward the sudden arrival of thousands in Fortress Europe. In this context, it is not surprising to see the European governments’ hesitation and unplanned approach to the Kosovar refugee crisis.

Meanwhile, there is also something uniquely elevating about the analyses presented in *Kosovo’s Refugees*. Both van Selm and the contributing authors argue that government reactions to the Kosovo refugee crisis were out of sync with the general public reception of refugees and their needs. In fact, they provide considerable evidence supporting the case that national debates on asylum and immigration favoured acceptance of this particular group of refugees. This unusual reaction was partly due to the fact that Kosovars were perceived as “good refugees” of European origin. Needless to say, the highly orchestrated media campaign portraying the NATO intervention in Kosovo as a necessary act of self-protection of the European civilization went hand in hand with this peculiar approach. In summary, the conviction of the volume is that the European public related much more to the plight of the Kosovars than did their governments or indeed the political body of the European Union. The feeling of “relatedness,” in turn, reduced the (perceived) threat to European identity in receiving societies and allowed the portrayal of refugees not as abusive intruders but as victims of violence and intolerance who needed protection. Whether one can extrapolate from this particular case and argue for a promising trend in members of the European Union opening their doors for future refugee crises of non-European origin, however, is an altogether

different debate. In fact, the Europe-wide insistence on the rhetoric of return and the temporariness of the protection provided suggests that the Kosovo case may well have been a highly conditional extension of the charitable hand. Furthermore, once the military conflict was judged to have come to an end, people leaving Kosovo were no longer considered as worthy of protection. Instead, the familiar description of “large groups of illegal Kosovar Albanian immigrants” forcing themselves through the borders quickly resurfaced. In this regard, in Europe, the threat-oriented perception of refugees appears to reign supreme, despite the brief spark of public goodwill and understanding that came with the Kosovo crisis. The remaining questions, then, are about how to erode the basis of this edifice of prejudice and what ethical principles could be introduced to or emphasized within the European context in order to achieve substantive and long-term change.

This book is suitable for a wide range of readers in refugee and migration studies, including academics, students, policy-makers, and lawyers.

There is a group of other recent titles in the related literature that need a brief mention here, as well. On the particular case of Kosovar refugees, the report prepared by Astri Sukhre, M. Barutciski, M. Sandison, and R. Garlock for the UNHCR, *The Kosovo Crisis: An Evaluation of UNHCR’s Emergency Preparedness and Response* (February 2000) is another essential reference. On European trends in general, Hans Korno Rasmussen’s *No Entry: Immigration Policy in Europe* (Handelshøjskolens, 1997), the edited volume *Refugees, Citizenship and Social Policy in Europe* by Alice Bloch and Carl Levy (Palgrave Press, 1998), Grete Brochman and Tomas Hammar’s *Mechanisms of Immigration Control* (Berg Publishers, 1999), the edited volume *Challenging Immigration and Ethnic Relations Politics* by Ruud Koopmans and Paul Stratham (Oxford University Press, 2000), and Rey Koslowski’s *Migrants and Citizens: Demographic Change in the European State System* (Cornell University Press, 2000) are some of the most influential works.

Combined, this body of inquiry would provide the reader an informed understanding of recent developments in Europe at state, inter-governmental, and popular levels. In *No Entry*, for instance, Rasmussen focuses on the demographic conflict between Europe’s fast-growing elderly population and swelling numbers of young people leaving Third World countries for the “Promised Land of Europe.” The two key questions the author attempts to answer are, Can Europe’s borders hold? and, Is it wise to protect Europe from immigration? In *Mechanisms of Immigration Control*, Brochman and Hammar regard the types of bar-

riers to movement of people as a litmus test for national and international politics. By attending to the control policies practiced by eight receiving European countries during the 1980s and 1990s, they provide a comparative picture of how immigration is perceived at the state level across the continent. Bloch and Levy's edited work *Refugees, Citizenship and Social Policy in Europe* is yet another valiant attempt to produce a comprehensive, up-to-date account of the policies of European welfare states towards refugees and asylum seekers, but this time with particular attention to norms and laws of citizenship within the European Union. Koopmans and Stratham's *Challenging Immigration and Ethnic Relations* also aims at presenting a substantive cross-national analysis of the contentious politics of immigration from the perspective of changing ethnic relations within Europe. The contributors to the edited volume discuss different European responses to the need for the integration and acceptance of minorities who arrived via immigration, and examine the linkages among policy-making, xenophobic, minority, racist, and anti-racist movements. In a similar vein, Koslowski's *Migrants and Citizens* examines the effects of East to West as well as South to North migrations and the post-cold war arrival of masses of refugees on Europe's self-perception. Koslowski concludes that the transformation of nationality laws, as well as European efforts for the establishment of joint border controls, reveals the extensive impact on migration movements produced in Europe. The history of European countries as a net exporter of peoples for centuries makes coping with the recent trends ever so difficult, a complication compounded by the lack of suitable institutions and political mechanisms to deal with the arrival of large numbers of foreigners.

The rich and multi-faceted debate on Europe's reception, perception, rejection, and acceptance of migrants and refugees indeed constitutes a very important dimension of the conceptualization and configuration of issues surrounding global forced migration. Europe represents a model, a particular way of viewing insiders and outsiders in established, wealthy societies, that thrived upon centuries-old relations of domination of and extraction from others. Individual European countries as well as sectors within each society vary significantly in their acceptance and integration of non-Europeans. However, especially with the further strengthening of European Union laws and political institutions with a Europe-wide command, these variations are essentially levelled, and a uniform facade is emerging. Studies such as van Selm's tell us that these new formations are worth continuous close examination for us

to understand how things work at the level of reaction-formation in receiving societies that are subject to the pressures produced by the unbalanced state of world affairs. Excesses of wealth confronted with misery, law and order confronted with chaos, aging populations confronted with the influx of eager young ones, traditional cultural identities and values confronted by cosmopolitanism and multicultural mixing, are not conditions unique to Europe. However, the European response to these challenges at least partially sets the tone for what future confrontations of this kind might hold for societies that both produce and receive refugees.

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