

“Europe on the move – Workers, refugees and security”

London, 28th February 2017

CONFERENCE REPORT

Introduction

This conference brought together two leading academics and a German security policy adviser in an attempt to inject some clarity into the immigration component of the Brexit debate and the wider issues arising from free movement and the flow of refugees which have captured political campaigning across Europe, and have had a significant impact on security policy-making.

As the Director of the Federal Trust, Brendan Donnelly observed in his opening remarks: Workers, refugees and security are all different topics but they are powerfully interrelated at the present time. Hans-Hartwig Blomeier, Director of the London office of Konrad Adenauer Foundation, noted that these themes were having a significant influence over domestic debates throughout Europe and that there was an overwhelming need for clarity rather than the all too often prevailing confusion. It was unlikely, he added, that 2017 would be any less “exciting” in this regard than 2016.

The panel were keen to redress the imbalances of the wider media debate in the UK. Both Professor Christian Dustmann of University College London and Professor Jo Shaw of Edinburgh University drew their audience’s attention to the many misconceptions about immigration and EU workers which had been ventilated in many domestic analyses of the issues.

The first point made by both speakers was that EU citizens in the UK were not “some individuals” enjoying some “inferior class of citizenship” but were legally, culturally and historically - while the UK remained part of the EU - expressing their inalienable right of free movement under British law.

The second important parameter was that as Professor Dustmann insisted: the migration debate is a highly complex one in which “simple questions are not simply answered”. Every analysis of the impact of migration requires not only a high level of intellectual rigour but also considerable sophistication in drawing meaningful, accurate conclusions. This was especially the case in an era of “alternative facts”.

Professor Jo Shaw of the University of Edinburgh reminded the audience of another important parameter, the inequitable practical application of policy in the UK in the run-up to and immediate aftermath of the Brexit vote. She noted that a certain confusion appeared to be taking

hold in the UK's enforcement agencies which were increasingly interpreting the rules in the narrowest way possible. This tightening up of Home Office regulations in practice was an obvious infringement of EU Commission directives. The intensity of the interaction between "security of the state" and the immigration process was making enforcement heavy-handed, over bureaucratic and unhelpful.

Finally Dr Niko Bosnjak, a security policy specialist, noted that the refugee crisis of 2015 had injected a new element into the entire debate which it was important not to confuse with the pre-existing economic migration trends dating back to the 1960s and 1970s. To blur the distinctions between the refugee crisis and economic migrants had been one of the hallmarks of the Brexit campaign. This deliberate obfuscation by political populist groups had also entered the debate in Germany. Without doubt the refugee crisis had sorely tried the pre-existing internal security arrangements of the German republic which was still trying to redress the balance by reinforcing its security arrangements and border controls through a massive recruitment drive for police personnel.

Migration in Europe: Background and Facts

1/ Professor Christian Dustmann's contribution

Professor Dustmann has devoted his entire academic career to researching migration issues. As a young post-doctoral student he was warned by many distinguished academics that he had chosen a "cul-de-sac" field of research for which there was "unlikely to be any demand" during his lifetime. This, happily (or unhappily), had proved wrong. Professor Dustmann's research has become highly topical and he is much in demand for his insights and perspectives.

Professor Dustmann constantly alluded to the difficulties in drawing sensible conclusions from the raw data of migration. Even something as basic as attempting to evaluate the net fiscal contribution of migrants on domestic markets, including house prices, the cost of food or even the levels of crime, was highly demanding, despite the presence of exhaustive sources of data. Those politicians who sought to draw simple black and white deductions from these facts were often guilty of distortion or at worst malicious intent.

This was because they often ignored what the professor referred to as "the missing counter-factual". For example, it was impossible to assess with any accuracy the impact of migration on the wages of British workers in a particular area because the missing counter-factual which allowed an analysis of the same area had migration not occurred was absent. The impact of migration on the indigenous population was also very difficult to evaluate. How much of a migrant's wages was being remitted back to the country of origin? How many jobs were previously in the hands of local workers? How many jobs had the migration created?

However uncertain it might be to extrapolate reality from dry statistics and other data, Professor Dustmann was adamant that two broad conclusions were irrefutable: First that migration generally contributed to the economic well-being of the host state; and second that migrants generally travelled to areas where the economic, security and social situation was generally stable and therefore favourable.

Professor Dustmann drew a distinction between the post-war migration of the 1950s and 1960s in Europe which was fuelled by domestic expansion in northern Europe. In England this led to a huge influx of migrants from former colonies and significant racial tensions. In France the former colonial inheritance also supplied the need for a new younger workforce. In Germany, shorn of her colonies by the victorious powers in 1918, the demand was met by the phenomenon of the “Gastarbeiter” (guest worker), so called on account of the widespread, sometimes illusory, belief that such workers, mostly from Yugoslavia and Turkey, were only likely to stay in Germany for a limited period.

This period of migration rested on a wide element of popular consent and political direction. Professor Dustmann therefore referred to it as a time of “arranged marriages”. Both parties to the contract, host country and country of origin, were in broad agreement over the need for the arrangements and its likely extent. Financial incentives even played a role. This era of course could not be compared to the present period which Professor Dustmann characterised as the era of “forced marriages”. Nearly five million Syrians had been displaced by the conflict in their country and had by the suddenness and method of their arrival created far more disquiet among the indigenous population than the arrival a couple of generations earlier of the “Gastarbeiter”. This phenomenon was not to be confused with migration resulting from the free movement of labour in accordance with membership of the EU. Here the UK example showed that such free movement had been hugely beneficial to the UK economy as it had allowed for highly specialised talent to be recruited for the benefit of many specific industries, including the National Health Service, financial services, the arts and high tech companies. As these were disproportionately located in London, the perception of this benefit unsurprisingly was reflected in voting patterns in the capital during the recent Referendum. Similarly UK cities with prestigious universities accustomed to benefitting from a rich pool of European specialists among teaching staff, also reflected this perception in their voting behaviour. Professor Dustmann reiterated that it was blatantly obvious that professions which could draw on a pool of 500 million people (the population of the EU) would benefit enormously compared to those limited to a pool of talent numbering only 65 million (the population of the UK).

Indeed the unquestioned benefits may, the Professor hinted, have contributed to the UK’s notable recent inability to “control” immigration. Immigration targets such as those set by the Home Office had conspicuously failed. This was clear from statistics referring to the immigration of non-EU citizens into the UK whose numbers the government in theory was able to limit even though it had failed to meet even its own self-imposed targets.

Other political factors which imposed their dynamic on the immigration question also played a role and Professor Dustmann drew the audience’s attention to the fact that refugee related deals with Turkey came at a significant political price, one that also could destabilise internal politics in several EU states. This led him to his conclusion which dwelt on his view that the entire debate was dominated by politics rather than economics. The political considerations and consequences of immigration would, in his view, always trump the economic consequences.

2/ Professor Jo Shaw’s contribution

Professor Shaw began by defining the debate in terms of “boon or burden”. The benefits of immigration were tangible in many parts of the UK but the UK government’s White Paper had

deployed language which was a “straight read across from immigration law”. This reflected security concerns and other “priorities of the state”. This perspective meant that in practice the application of immigration law in the UK was labyrinthine and increasingly severe. Nearly 25% of all EU citizens applying for recognition of their permanent residence under the citizens’ rights directive in the UK over the last six months had been rejected. The forms for such applications were complex and bureaucratic, running in many cases to nearly 100 pages and had rightly, in the professor’s view, drawn the ire of the EU Commission.

One of the consequences of the referendum result and the rhetoric coming out of the government following it was that many EU citizens resident in the UK were already leaving the country or reconsidering their options. Insecurity was particularly notable among highly skilled professions and jobs. The House of Lords attempts to amend the Article 50 bill triggering Brexit in a way which might offer comfort to EU citizens working at present in the UK were unlikely to succeed and many Europeans resident in the country already believed “freedom of movement” would end once Article 50 was triggered.

These opinions were occurring against a backdrop of increasing severity on the part of the Home Office immigration department. February 1st saw the introduction of new regulations which appeared to introduce more restrictions on EU citizens in addition to the new comprehensive sickness insurance requirement which is catching out many EU citizens and which is arguably contrary to EU law. Professor Shaw noted that these negative developments followed a Referendum campaign which specifically excluded non-UK EU citizens resident in the UK from voting as well as denying the vote to the generation most likely to be affected by Brexit, 16 and 17 year olds. Free movement was already moving towards becoming a “fiction” which would soon be interpreted highly selectively by a UK government set on a hard Brexit. The asymmetry of the referendum outcome was especially telling, she added, in Scotland where another powerful voice was bound to be raised in protest at what was happening in the name of “controlling immigration” and “regaining our sovereignty”.

Summing up Professor Shaw believed that all these factors had already contributed to a significant human cost. This cost could only increase as a result of the enduring polarisation of views in the UK. Social media was also playing an important role in amplifying these developments and therefore exacerbating tensions.

3/ Dr Niko Bosnjak’s contribution

Dr Bosnjak’s theme was the German security response to the refugee crisis and he gave a detailed summary of the effects of the crisis on the internal German security organs which had undoubtedly found themselves overwhelmed as events unfolded in 2015. Ever since then, the German authorities had scrambled to keep up with developments. The federal police organs, usually responsible for protecting the borders, overseeing security at public events and securing transportation infrastructure were quickly exhausted by the crisis and had to redeploy forces from patrolling Germany’s northern frontiers to the Austrian border. This redeployment had left large parts of Germany under-policed. Recent budget increases for policing had stabilised the situation and had helped improve processing. An additional 7,500 police personnel had been recruited and the security situation had been significantly improved.

To give an idea of how very different the influx of approximately one million refugees to Germany in 2015 was from earlier years, it was noted that in 2006 there had been only 30,000 refugee applications for entry to Germany of which only 2,000 had been granted. This contrasted with nearly a million applications in 2015 alone. Thanks to the recent crisis, the human fabric of the security apparatus had taken some strain; unsurprisingly sick-leave and mental health problems among policemen relocated to Bavaria had increased exponentially as a result of work schedules having to accommodate “nearly 2 million hours of overtime”.

On the whole, despite these dramatic events, the response of the German people had been “largely positive” but Dr Bosnjak was adamant that a “new wave” of immigration could easily swamp this fragile calm. Moreover the “security landscape has shifted”. Whereas in 2014, there had been only 150 attacks recorded against refugees, in 2016, the number of recorded attacks had risen to well over 1,000. The rise of extremist views was affecting the internal political environment. Two thirds of those responsible for these attacks had had no previous history of involvement with the police, implying that anti-refugee sentiment was spreading beyond right-wing fringe radical movements and sub-cultures and was now gaining a foothold among some elements of the political mainstream. Attacks on police had meanwhile also doubled.

These events, taken cumulatively, had shattered any complacency in political circles. The new mood in Germany had persuaded the German government to do all it can to avoid the impression of “losing control”. Therefore high on the government’s agenda is the tightening up of the refugee registration process. Initially this had been so lax that thousands of refugees had entered Germany without identification and had been “lost in the system”. Even today, the federal authorities have no idea where these people are or indeed who they are.

Other refugees, on the other hand, had taken advantage of uncoordinated bureaucratic intervention and had been registered for benefits in up to ten places. Finger-printing of refugees and other measures are now standard practice although Dr Bosnjak indicated that Germany “still had a long way to go” in increasing surveillance and other “security measures standard” in other countries. Federal Germany’s very structure also hindered security. The conflict between state competences and federal responsibilities was slowing the introduction of greater consistency across the different regions of the country, not least in the field of deportation where state and federal competences collided regularly. Criminal statistics reflected the prevalence of young unemployed males from the refugee communities posing an ongoing challenge on integration.

4/ Debate

The debate was opened up to the floor where a number of interesting questions and comments reinforced the panel’s call for greater clarity in the immigration debate. One member of the audience noted that “there was a danger of the door being locked after the horses had bolted”. A raft of security measures being introduced in the wake of the 2015 crisis in Germany created the appearance of moves in the direction of a “police state”. Even in the UK, “we do not know who is in the country”. The passenger surveys “randomly” deployed at airports by thinly disguised security staff were a “farce”. But who, he asked, in the EU was successful at integration?

This theme was taken up by the next questioner who asked whether it was time for the UK to introduce identity cards but Professor Dustmann warned against deploying statistics to tighten

up security. “Loose numbers feed Farage. Stick to the facts”, he said. On the whole the UK had an exemplary record on integration of diverse ethnic groups, one which was the envy of many other European states.

Professor Dustmann noted that investment in learning the language of the destination country depended very much on “future perspectives” in that country. The German apprentice system could be helpful in getting young men into skills but this required at present three years training with exceptionally low pay, an investment, unsurprisingly, not many refugees felt they wanted to make while their long-term future was so uncertain.

Professor Dustmann also observed that whereas following the Dayton accords, 85% of the Bosnian refugees in Germany had been repatriated to Bosnia-Herzegovina, the ongoing crisis in Syria meant that this was unlikely to be possible in the near future for Syrian refugees. Unlike the conflicts in the Balkans, there was no sign of the war in Syria coming to a speedy conclusion. Normally 40% of all immigrants return after 5 years and the vast majority of economic migrants are temporary but war zones make these standard academic assumptions less compelling.

Professor Stephen Haseler of the Global Policy Institute asked if the agreement between Berlin and Ankara would endure. Professor Dustmann and Dr Bosnjak both agreed the dynamic between Germany and Turkey could be accurately described as “blackmail” but that one of the keys to stemming immigration numbers was also Libya, a country which under Gaddafi had proved its value, notwithstanding the egregious aspects of the regime, as a stabilising factor in the eastern Mediterranean. The attempt by France and Britain, under Sarkozy and Cameron to impose “democracy on a tribal culture” had proved “disastrous”.

Finally, a participant asked if statistics in Germany showed whether there was, as was frequently suggested, a preponderance of young Muslim males among the refugees. Dr Bosnjak said, in remarks that underlined his acceptance of Professor Dustmann’s strictures on ventilating raw data, that he had no up-to-date data on numbers and that it was “very difficult” to pinpoint this but that “there might be evidence” suggesting this was the case.

Conclusion

The consensus view at the end of the debate was that immigration was a statistical swamp in which great efforts needed to be maintained in order to draw valid points from the wealth of data now available on the movement of people. Only a dispassionate and extensive analysis, taking into account many different factors could contribute meaningfully to the debate but at a time when the concepts of “alternative facts” and “the post truth era” are gathering momentum, the immigration debate with its corollaries of security and refugees remain a soft target for populist rhetoric.

A second point which was underlined by the quality of the speakers was that Germany despite its comparatively low level internal security apparatus had so far weathered the 2015 refugee crisis reasonably well although at a significant political cost, the full extent of which would only perhaps become apparent later this year with the elections.



Finally it was agreed that public opinion in the UK had suffered considerable manipulation on immigration statistics in the run-up to the referendum and that until the level of debate in the UK received more rigour both in the media and among the political class the reality of these issues was unlikely to be grasped by the wider public. Once Article 50 was triggered there was a danger that the immigration and security issues would be distorted in an attempt to score negotiating points abroad and party political advantage at home.

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