



IRREGULAR MIGRATION IN THE MEDITERRANEAN

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Each year, thousands of African refugees try to reach the European mainland. In the majority of cases hunger, grinding poverty and the fear of persecution caused by race, religion or language are the motivations for people fleeing their homes in one of the numerous unstable countries in Africa. The routes used by the refugee-smugglers lead them in parts across multiple States on the African continent before they reach the ocean and continue their dangerous journey by crossing the Mediterranean to reach southern Europe or make their way through the Sinai to reach Israel. Israel, as the only democracy in the Middle East, has increasingly become a desirable destination for immigrants, especially for those from the East African States of Eritrea and Sudan.

The Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung Israel in cooperation with the Harry S. Truman Research Institute hosted a three-day roundtable entitled: "Irregular Migration in the Mediterranean from 2005 to 2015: Past trends on Prospects for the Future". This roundtable brought together an international group of experts consisting of professors and doctors together with field researchers and former refugees addressed where they discussed issues relating to the topic. The experts shared their knowledge and additionally presented current research results in the dedicated areas about the refugee theme.

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The head of the foreign office at the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung Israel, Dr. Michael Borchard, gave a concise introduction to the topic and then opened the debate. Dr. Ben-Zeev from the Truman Institute expressed her thanks for the partnership of KAS Israel and briefly introduced the participants. The expertise of many participants based on their particular research-focus on the numerous existing refugee routes. Completed by geographic experts on the different types of borders, participants gained a detailed overview of migratory movement.

Former director of the Mediterranean Migration Observatory in Athens, Dr. Edwards began his presentation with a historical overview of the development of migratory refugees from the Maghreb region to Spain since the 1980s to the present day. Here, Dr. Edwards referred among other things to the 1992 UN embargo against Libya and also recorded the adjustments of laws applied in the Maghreb and in Spain to respond to the increasing refugee flow. By now, it became obvious that the importance of individual refugee-routes depends upon the political situations within the countries. For example, in the course of 2005, a decrease in the use of refugee routes from West Africa to Spain can be noticed because the Spanish government began their sea surveillance system called SIVE. Accordingly, the use Eastern European routes (Greece and Turkey) increased in 2006-2010 significantly. In the wake of this, the success of the border agency Frontex was critically discussed since the costly program to ensure the EU's external borders often tackles the problems only in parts. It was highlighted that the closer of the main routes used increases the use of alternative routes. Additionally, it was discussed how the Arab Spring increased the migration to Europe.

Following the previous discussion, Dr. Spijkerboer, from the Free University of Amsterdam focused his presentation on the fate of those Africans who die during the escape. Here, the question of relations between the border technologies and the death of the migrants arose. Dr. Spikerboer explained to the group that the project turned out to be difficult, as facts about the causes of death are poorly documented. The large number of unidentified individuals turned out to be a problem as well. Here, the speaker also referred to the technical possibilities of DNA analysis and advancements of connected databases which should facilitate the identification in future. However, the research group of Dr. Spikerboer examined among others records of people drowned in the Mediterranean during the period from 1993 to 2009. They Team was supported by the organizations *Fortress Europe* and *UNITED*. In the subsequent discussion it became clear how complex and varied the variables are that influence the origin and development of refugee routes.

Professor Paolo Cuttitta, from the University of Amsterdam's Faculty of Law explained that there was a reconfiguration of the refugee problem in European politics during the 1990s and as a reaction to this, the smuggler organizations increased their level of professionalism to face new challenges. He added that they expanded their networks and abused the poor socio-economically situation of people throughout the Mediterranean region to gain support. Refugee routes often lead through countless intermediate stations in many countries, facing the omnipresent risk of detection and deportation.

Dr. Gideon Biger, from the Department of Geography and Human Environment at Tel Aviv University highlighted the issue from a historical and geographical perspective. Biger initially referred to the historical young phenomenon of the present meaning of borders. Border crossings were not considered to be a problem until the second half of the 19th century. It was only during the last 150 years when boundaries received a deeper strategic meaning (for example: the prevention of terrorism attacks or refugees). A further variable that characterizes the importance of borders, the political system of the connected countries was also highlighted. Dr. Biger touched upon the historical development of Israel's borders with Egypt during the British Mandate period and beyond. The geostrategic importance was illustrated and it became obvious that even the smallest changes in boundary lines can have a big strategic impact. During the discussion, similarities between the Israeli-Egyptian and American-Mexican border were hotly debated and it was stated that different problems lead to stricter or more liberal border policies.

Following the lunch break, Israeli police crime statistics of African refugees team members Tali Rotschild and Yonathan Ilan presented research in Israel. First, they clarified by definition, that refugees includes all asylum seekers who do not have Israeli citizenship. A brief insight into the data base then revealed that the most crime committed among young African refugees is from the 19-35 years age group. 55% of them in Tel Aviv, the city with the highest concentration of African refugees. At the same time the two public servants added, that crimes only then were statistically recognized when the suspect can be identified by name. Therefore, a large part of the crimes unregistered. However, theft and violent crimes are those crimes which are committed under the African asylum seekers most often.

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The second day began with the Presentation of the German scientist Dr. Rosenthal. Using the biographical method, the sociology professor and her research team took interviews with police officers, NGO representatives and refugees with the aim of collecting a wide range of material from the involved groups and to document the motivation of individuals through their migration experience. The research team concentrates on refugees who tried to obtain asylum in Europe by entering the Spanish enclaves in Morocco, Ceuta and Melilla. Again, different definitions of boundaries and their meanings in case of experiences of transgression, by foot, by car or in a boat have been highlighted by Dr. Rosenthal. It was presented that the refugees are often exposed to the threat of various national and regional militaries and paramilitaries. In addition to the social and financial existence risk, individuals are exposed physical risks. A special importance of the multiple border crossings in Africa and the turbulent history of its numerous boundary changes results in African refugees that are not a homogeneous group, but an ethnically diverse group with various backgrounds. This manifests itself into the refugee camps where discrimination and hierarchies according to the nationality are always present. Prof. Rosenthal stated, therefore, that the biography of the individual is as important as the quantitative determination of the refugees. Individual and collective factors such as religion, ethnicity and tribal membership characterize the individual experiences.

Professor Rebeca Rajzman from Haifa University focused again on the Israeli approach to the refugee issue. For this purpose we were first introduced in the age and religion structure of Israel before and then specified the juridical situation for Aliyah. The largest immigration waves to Israel took place after the founding of Israel and the collapse of the Eastern Bloc in the early 1990s. It was interesting to learn that 60% of the former Soviet-Union migrants were officially not Jewish. Although they had Jewish ancestors, they did not meet all the requirements for recognition. In the discussion afterwards, the exclusive climate of Israeli society against foreigner was mentioned and it was found out, these aversions don't relate on facts but on ideology.

Anthropologist and political activist Adi Hercowitz-Amir from the University of Haifa, then described the Israeli bureaucratic structures and political hurdles asylum seekers confront to get asylum. It was stated that almost not one asylum application is accepted by the government. The anthropologist clarified again how hostile the Israel bureaucracy is towards strangers.

Prof. Cuttita brought discussion of another research report of a highly frequented route to the roundtable. This time the focus was set on central Mediterranean routes, primarily from Tunisia to Lampedusa in Sicily. In Lampedusa, the conditions for refugees have intensified by the strict asylum policy of the Italian government.

Dr. Gazit from the Truman Institute finally drew a differentiated image on the border between Israel and Egypt and the different experiences at the border. The experiences of the border guards were primarily described and participants got to know the scenarios on the border a bit better. Given the diverse representation in those attempting to cross the border, the border guard soldiers are put under high levels of stress from the security threat and from experiencing empathy from the dire situation of the refugees. We also learned how some soldiers criticized the measures taken on asylum seekers and therefore informed NGOs with the hope to sway the Israeli government's restrictive border policy. The result presented by Dr. Gazit suggests how diverse and sometimes contrary the role patterns of border guards are in stressful situations.

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After the end of the two-day conference, the expert team went on a bus tour to the Israeli-Egyptian border, the subject of numerous contributions. The first stop of the tour took them to the Holot refugee camp where the group met Motasim Ali and other residents of the camp and exchanged views on the difficult living conditions and the psychological occurring during the stay in Holot. In addition, the daily routines and practices in Holot were described as well as the special relationship of the Eritrean and Sudanese occupants. The group also exchanged experiences on the life of migrants before they arrived in Holot. Anat Ben-Dor, a human rights lawyer and head of the legal clinic for refugees and asylum seekers in Tel Aviv University, talked about the Israel migration policy and its efficiency toward the African migration to Israel (i.e. the border fence, the anti-migration legislation the Holot detention center). Hatbom Mehari, an asylum seeker from Eritrea, explained the situation in Eritrea and the reasons for leaving his country. Hatbom also explained about the economic dimensions of this phenomenon. Lastly, Motasim Ali, an asylum seeker from Darfur, talked about the life conditions of asylum seekers in Israel and their struggle for recognition and safe haven.

Afterwards, participants went to the Ezuz settlement near the Egyptian border where they listened to the descriptions of local residents about the dynamics within the border zone. Residents reported illegal border crossings as well as the importation of contraband to carry out terrorist activities.