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Europe's Mass Migration: The Leaders vs. the Public

by Douglas Murray
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- "[T]he more generous you are, the more word gets around about this -- which in turn motivates more people to leave Africa. Germany cannot possibly take in the huge number of people who are wanting to make their way to Europe." — Bill Gates.

- The annual survey of EU citizens, recently carried out by Project 28, found a unanimity on the issue of migration almost unequalled across an entire continent. The survey found that 76% of the public across the EU believe that the EU's handling of the migration crisis of recent years has been "poor". There is not one country in the EU in which the majority of the public differs from that consensus.

- At the same time as the public has known that what the politicians are doing is unsustainable, there has been a vast effort to control what the European publics have been allowed to say. German Chancellor Angela Merkel went so far as to urge Facebook founder Mark Zuckerberg to limit posts on social media that were critical of her policies.

Is Bill Gates a Nazi, racist, "Islamophobe" or fascist? As PG Wodehouse's most famous butler would have said, "The eventuality would appear to be a remote one". So far nobody in any position of influence has made such claims about the world's largest philanthropist. Possibly -- just possibly -- something is changing in Europe.

In an interview published July 2 in the German paper *Welt Am Sonntag,* the co-founder of Microsoft addressed the ongoing European migration crisis. What he said was surprising:

> "On the one hand you want to demonstrate generosity and take in refugees. But the more generous you are, the more word gets around about this -- which in turn motivates more people to leave Africa. Germany cannot possibly take in the huge number of people who are wanting to make their way to Europe."

These words would be uncontroversial to the average citizen of Europe. The annual survey of EU citizens recently carried out by Project 28 found a unanimity on the issue of migration almost unequalled across an entire continent. The survey found, for instance, that 76% of the public across the EU believe that the EU's handling of the migration crisis of recent years has been "poor". There is not one country in the EU in which the majority of the public differs from this consensus. In countries such as Italy and Greece, which have been on the frontline of the crisis of recent years, that figure rockets up. In these countries, nine out of ten citizens think that the EU has handled the migrant crisis poorly.

How could they think otherwise? The German government's 2015 announcement that normal asylum and border procedures were no longer in operation exacerbated an already disastrous situation. The populations of Germany and Sweden increased by 2% in one year alone because of that influx of migrants. These are monumental changes to happen at such a speed to any society.

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Philanthropist and Microsoft co-founder Bill Gates recently said in an interview: "...you want to demonstrate generosity and take in refugees. But the more generous you are, the more word gets around about this -- which in turn motivates more people to leave Africa. Germany cannot possibly take in the huge number of people who are wanting to make their way to Europe." (Photo by World Economic Forum/Wikimedia Commons)

At the same time as the public has known that what the politicians are doing is unsustainable, there has been a vast effort to control what the European publics have been allowed to say. Chancellor Merkel went so far as to urge Facebook founder Mark Zuckerberg to limit posts on social media that were critical of her policies. This was just one example of a much wider trend. Across the continent, any private or public figure who dared to warn that importing so many people in such a disorganised manner was the origin of a catastrophe found themselves impugned with the darkest imaginable motives.

Even after the November 2015 terror attacks in Paris, and the discovery that members of the terror-cell had slipped in and out of Europe using the migrant routes, European leaders dismissed public concerns about the migration crisis. European Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker berated the public and the few politicians who opposed Merkel after the Paris attacks:

> "I would invite those in Europe who try to change the migration agenda we have adopted - I would like to remind them to be serious about this and not to give in to these base reactions that I do not like."

It is understandable that some humanitarian impulse might prevail during a period in which thousands of people were crossing the Mediterranean and many were drowning. Back then in 2015, at the height of the crisis, Bill Gates himself urged America to take in migrants at the levels that Germany was taking them in. Since then, however, Gates has noticed what most people who live in Europe have noticed -- which is that while opening your country's borders may have a short-term moral appeal, it causes a whole variety of long-term societal concerns.

It is these concerns -- which the European public can see all around them, as well as on their newspapers' front-pages -- which lead the majority of the public across Europe to want the flow of migrants to be reduced. In his recent German newspaper interview, Bill Gates also expressed this sentiment -- and starkly -- saying, "Europe must make it more difficult for Africans to reach the continent via the current transit routes."

All this is, of course, true. It is not possible for Europe to become the home for everyone and anyone in Africa, the Middle East or Far East who manages to cross a fairly narrow stretch of water. The people of Europe have known this for a long time. Some people -- heavily criticised by the mainstream media and the political class -- have even expressed this. But perhaps now that a measured and surely non-Nazi philanthropist such as Bill Gates has noticed it, something will change. It is probably too much to hope for that the Western European political class might actually listen to his advice. But might they at least rein in their disdain for the reasonable concerns of the general public?

Douglas Murray, British author, commentator and public affairs analyst, is based in London, England.

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