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## Europe under Threat



*The deserted courtyard outside the Louvre Pyramid, 2 March (Ludovic Marin/AFP/Getty Images)*

*Europe is under threat by Covid-19 like everybody else, but also by the fighting in Syria and Libya, writes Dr. **Daniel WOKER**, Co-founder of [Share-an-Ambassador/Geopolitical coaching](#) and Former Swiss Ambassador to Kuwait, Singapore and Australia. In the federalist EU, it is still up to the individual states, often also their parts, to take the most drastic measures to counter the spread of Covid-19. Quite unthinkable what will happen when the virus jumps over to the huddled migrant masses in Europe's Southern camps. It probably has already happened in Italy, only we don't know about it as medical care is slow to reach the migrants. So, what can the EU do to prevent a migrant disaster during these trying times when state resources are primarily engaged against a deadly virus?*

To even think that "closing the border" can halt the spread of Covid-19 is illusory. That goes for those in the middle of Europe: EU non-member Switzerland has around 75'000 workers who cross in and out for work every day from neighbouring Italy alone – where the first European Covid-19 cases were made public. And that is basically the same for recent EU non-member Great Britain, nowadays linked to the continent by umbilical cord which not even Boris Johnson can and will want to cut. So, the only rational way of fighting the disease is by common effort.

The same goes for the potential refugee crisis threatening in the wake of the fighting between Turkey and Assad's Syria in the North-West of the country, with Idlib as epicentre. And the potentially even worse crisis emanating from Libya, not only with regard to Libyans but all the African migrants stranded there. They all, Syrian, Afghans, Iraqi, Africans and those from further apart want to ultimately reach Western Europe and in particular Germany. To take them all in is simply impossible. Because of a lack of receiving, let alone integration structures. But above else because the nationalist right,

surging after the first wave of Non-European immigrants in 2015, would threaten to gain more ground, if not politically take over in European key countries.

As an immediate measure against the opening of the Turkish Western border for refugees by Erdogan, Greece has closed its borders by land and tries to do so by sea. We have all seen the media reports over the last months showing the hopelessly overcrowded immigration camps on Greek islands and mainland territory, with untenable conditions for the occupants even before the Idlib exodus.

Quite unthinkable what will happen when Covid-19 jumps over to the huddled migrant masses in Europe's Southern camps. It probably has already happened in Italy, the Covid-19 epicentre in Europe, only we don't know about it as medical care is slow to reach the migrants.

So, what can Europe, can the EU do to prevent a migrant disaster during these trying times when state resources are primarily engaged against a deadly virus? Three points come to mind, all eminently possible if the political will is there.

**First**, the EU must increase massively financial and other aid to its primarily affected member states Greece, Italy, Bulgaria, Croatia and Spain in view of migrants out of Libya. Also, to Turkey where the big part of Syrian refugees is already and should continue to be housed in provisional centres.

**Second**, to make sure that the Turkish camps stay provisional and that the situation in Libya won't explode, the EU should put maximum pressure on Putin to reign in his two puppets Assad in Syria and Haftar in Libya. The situation in both countries is of course not only of Putin's making but its acceleration towards two major crises is. And, oh yes, he could be made to budge if only the pressure is strong enough. The pin-prick measures against some in Putin's inner circle under the 2012 Magnitsky Act of the US, decreed when American policy was still rational, have pointed the way. Blocking personal and financial access and flows as well as refusing acceptance and respect for Putin in international gatherings would likely make him, after initial bluster, give way. His geopolitical trump card, betting on China, would not help him on these two points.

**Third** and in the medium term, credible European military might will have to be built up. NATO would normally come to mind first as it has the means and includes Non-EU member Great Britain. At least as long as Trump is President, using NATO in the near-abroad of Europe and essentially for European purpose, looks difficult. A hybrid solution involving battle ready troops from EU members and the UK will have to do. At least till a European Army stands which is as long-term as it is inevitable.

Boris Johnson has lately presented his ideas for a future agreement with the EU. They are uncompromising. Yet the economic well-being of his people will depend on free access to the continent, implying the acceptance of its framework of laws and regulations. Just as with regard to security, the UK is an island away from the continent no longer, as the flow of virus' and immigrants amply demonstrates.



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