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Germany has taken a leadership role in the current refugee crisis. It will accommodate about a million refugees this year and there has been widespread volunteering among its civil society to help them. International praise has ranged from the *New York Times* to the Pope. The German government stopped applying the Dublin Regulation for Syrian refugees in August, which would have obliged it to send refugees back to the countries where they first entered the EU, such as Greece and Italy, to seek asylum there. Shortly afterwards, when letting in stranded refugees from Hungary, it helped without unnecessary red tape. Later it strong-armed Eastern European countries into accepting the redistribution of 120,000 refugees within the EU through a majority decision by EU ministers of the interior against the votes of Hungary, Czech Republic, Slovakia and Romania. The goal is to install a reformed version of the Dublin Regulation and convince the EU border states that increasingly ignore it to comply by offering to redistribute their refugees. At the moment the refugee debate in Germany is dominated by immediate domestic concerns, but in the future the pan-European dimension of the issue is likely to acquire greater importance.

The German chancellor, Angela Merkel, has invested her political capital in the refugee crisis. When confronted with logistical bottlenecks, she famously declared “We will manage” and when criticised by her junior coalition partner CSU for letting the trains in from Hungary, she replied at a press conference: “I have to honestly say that if we now have to start to apologise for the fact that we show a friendly face in the presence of need, then.... this is not my country.”

Yet soon after, leaders of municipalities protested that they could not accommodate more refugees and Germany reinstated temporary controls at the border with Austria. In September it fast tracked a new asylum law meant to limit refugee flows by speeding up legal procedures, declaring safe country status for the Balkans and expediting the deportation of refused asylum seekers. The magnitude of the refugee crisis has obviously taken German politicians by surprise. The German interior minister, Thomas de Maizière, has suggested introducing EU-wide quotas for refugees beyond which no further

applicants would be accepted. This would amount to a severe curtailment if not effective abolition of the right to asylum, which is written into the German constitution and which knows “no upper limit” as the German chancellor declared shortly before.

The influx of refugees raises the issue of their long-term integration and puts considerable strain on logistical capacities. In an apparent swipe at de Maizière and his Ministry of the Interior, Merkel has moved the responsibility for coordinating the refugee crisis to her Chancellery. She is under increasing pressure domestically. Horst Seehofer, the chairman of the Bavarian sister party of Merkel's CDU has vocally opposed her. In an evident act of provocation he even invited Hungarian PM Viktor Orbán, who has taken a hardline stance on the refugee question, to a CSU convention. Her other coalition partner, the Social Democrats (SPD) also doubts Germany could sustainably accommodate one million refugees per year. It has argued that the borders should remain open in principle, but has called for migration ceilings combined with more proactive integration policies. Merkel's approval ratings have declined because of her position on the refugee crisis. Her in-party opposition has been growing and will continue to do so if the results of a number of regional elections in March 2016 turn sour.

Such elections might also bring a new right-wing party to the fore, the Alternative for Germany (AfD). In contrast to many other European countries, Germany has not had an established right-wing party until now. In July, the AfD ousted its founding chairman, Bernd Lucke, who ran on a ticket of fiscal conservatism and opposition to euro bailouts, but embraced liberal positions on immigration, provided migrants had the right qualifications. The national conservative wing has now taken over the party and is close to populist agendas as expressed by the infamous Pegida movement whose marches through the city of Dresden have become a common occurrence. Beside acts of solidarity, Germany has seen a record level of arson attacks on refugee centres. Many Germans are not strangers to xenophobic attitudes, especially in eastern Germany, where right-wing activism among some youth is entrenched and can count on a certain acceptance among parts of the broader population. The assassination attempt on the mayor of Cologne by a right-wing activist has shown that such attitudes can morph into fully fledged right-wing terrorism.

Opposition to the relative openness towards refugees is not only fed by populist sentiment and limited bureaucratic capacities, but also by concerns about long-term integration issues. Besides relatively well-qualified people from Syria's middle class, about 15-20% of refugees are illiterate, according to estimates. Around 70% of refugees are young males, a demographic that can be prone to social problems and political radicalisation if not well integrated into labour markets and connected with their families, which would still need to follow. Some of the issues have been on display during riots in cramped refugee camps. Christians and minorities like the Yazidis have complained about attacks and intimidation tactics by radical Muslims. To avoid future conflicts, police officials and politicians have suggested separating refugees along religious and ethnic lines. Yet others fear that such a separation might prepare the ground for future ghettoisation, an issue that played a role in the migration debate in Germany before the refugee crisis.

The German migration debate currently circles around domestic issues, but a European dimension will gain prominence as Germany tries to reduce its current migration inflow and to manage the long-term integration of new arrivals. Germany demands European burden-sharing, namely the redistribution of refugees between all member states, reduced migration flows via the Balkans and improved EU border security in cooperation with neighbouring countries like Turkey. It is also preparing to embark on diplomatic initiatives and aid transfers to address the immediate causes of refugee flows in the countries of origin.

In parallel, Seehofer's CSU has been pushing for the implementation of so-called "transit zones" on Germany's borders. Like at Germany's airports, they would allow immediate processing of asylum requests at the border and the speedy rejection of claimants from secure countries of origin like the Balkans. However, opposition parties, the Greens and the Left, as well as the SPD (the CDU/ CSU's coalition partner), have been concerned that this "speediness" might undermine the lawful vetting of asylum requests and that the vetting might not be as speedy as hoped, in which case transit zones would turn into longer-term detention camps. Ultimately the grand coalition decided against transit zones on 5 November, but agreed on the expedited handling of asylum seekers from secure destination countries in specially created immigration centres and their speedy expulsion in the case of rejected requests.

If established, transit zones could have been used to send refugees back to where they first entered the EU and thus press for the reinstatement of a reformed Dublin Regulation. In fact, the interior minister de Maizière said on 10 November that Germany would start to apply the Dublin Regulation again for Syrian refugees, except for those who are coming from Greece. For the time being, the idea of transit zones is off the table, but if a European solution should prove impossible and domestic opposition to current arrangements should grow, some modified version of it might resurface. In this case it could mark the beginning of national border controls and the end of the Schengen Agreement as we know it.

