

The New York Times <http://nyti.ms/1UuJWj5>

EUROPE

Numbering of Migrants by Czechs Brings Outcry

By **DAN BILEFSKY** SEPT. 3, 2015

LONDON — Human rights advocates and Jewish groups expressed outrage on Thursday after the authorities in the Czech Republic wrote numbers on the skin of migrants who were pulled off trains this week, a move they said summoned memories of the Nazi era.

The Czech officers used felt-tip pens to write the numbers on the hands of some of the more than 200 mostly Syrian migrants at Breclav railway station on Tuesday. The officers were apparently unaware of the historical resonance with World War II, when the Nazis tattooed numbers on the arms of Jews at concentration camps.

The Czech government said Thursday it had abandoned the practice, but the dehumanizing treatment of migrants has come under criticism by human rights groups at a time when countries across Europe have grappled with how to respond to the migration crisis in the face of the rise of far-right anti-immigrant parties that have demonized migrants.

Language used to describe migrants has come under criticism, including in Britain, for example, where Prime Minister David Cameron in July referred to them as “a swarm of people coming across the Mediterranean.”

This week, the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum in Poland was criticized for installing sprinkler showers at its entrance to combat heat, a move that a visitor complained evoked the painful history of the concentration camp.

The episodes in the Czech Republic and at the museum in Poland, said Tomas Kraus, the executive director of the Federation of the Jewish Communities in the Czech Republic, showed a lack of sensitivity and historical awareness.

“It is 70 years after the war, and it is a new generation, and they have no clue about history,” he said by telephone. “It is a lack of education, a lack of empathy. If they understood the history, the images from the history, they would not do it.”

Jan Brulc, a spokesman at Migrants’ Rights Network, an advocacy group based in London, said the Czech episode reflected the extent to which many European Union countries are ill equipped to deal with the large influx of migrants.

“This incident shows how certain countries in Europe have been hit completely off guard,” he said. “The image of labeling refugees brings historical images of the Second World War to mind, and the police and border guards should understand the requirement under international conventions to treat migrants with the dignity they deserve. Countries can’t punish people for being migrants.”

The Czech Interior Ministry said that the inscriptions, which were written after the migrants were taken off a train traveling from Hungary to Germany, were not standard practice.

The ministry said that the priority of the police had been to ensure that families were not separated, and a spokeswoman noted in an emailed statement that the authorities were under pressure to move quickly.

The spokeswoman, Lucie Novakova, added that new rules would be initiated “in order to prevent such a situation in the future.”

The Czech Republic has so far received 884 asylum requests this year, compared with 800,000 that Germany is expected to get this year, yet the country has experienced a simmering anti-immigrant backlash.

During 40 years of Communism in Eastern and Central Europe, immigration was relatively small, and countries are still trying to come to terms with the challenges of immigration and integration. There are fewer than 20,000 Muslims in the Czech Republic, and anti-immigration groups have exploited the relative lack of

familiarity with Islam to suggest that migrants, many of whom are fleeing Syria, pose a terrorist threat.

The human cost of the migration crisis was called into sharp relief this week after at least 12 migrants fleeing the war in Syria, including two boys, drowned on Wednesday while trying to reach the Greek island of Kos. The image of one of the boys, whose body was found face down in the sand, spread across the Internet, and some human rights officials hope the response will compel European leaders to act.

Dinah Spritzer contributed reporting from Prague.

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A version of this article appears in print on September 4, 2015, on page A10 of the New York edition with the headline: Numbering of Migrants by Czechs Brings Outcry.

The New York Times <http://nyti.ms/1i0bfFA>

The Opinion Pages | OP-ED CONTRIBUTOR

Who's Responsible for the Refugees?

By STEVE HILTON SEPT. 10, 2015

Policy paralysis over the refugee crisis is convulsing Europe: *Of course we want to help, but if we're too generous, more will come.*

As a former adviser to the British prime minister, David Cameron, I understand the pressure politicians face from citizens demanding controlled immigration and tightly policed borders. As the son of immigrants welcomed into Britain from Communist Hungary, I feel a strong moral instinct to extend a similar welcome to others fleeing their homelands in even worse circumstances. But still. Before condemning European politicians, aid agencies or anyone else, let's try to cut through the complexity with some simple human truths.

First, stop blaming Hungary. For months before this crisis hit the headlines in America, my hometown, Szeged, was the front line. Just days before I was there on a family vacation in July, 700 refugees were discovered in the woods where we used to play as children. My cousins told me, outraged, about the seemingly unending flow of new arrivals stealing fruit from their friends' trees and vegetables from their gardens; urinating and defecating in public places throughout the town; clogging up public services.

You could say: How xenophobic. Or instead: How would you feel if your daily life was being made intolerable while the authorities, thanks to European Union rules about registering refugees, seemed unable to restore order? Hungary is small and relatively poor. It's a little unfair, to put it mildly, to condemn Hungary for

callous — even racist — treatment of migrants when those doing the condemning bear far more responsibility for the crisis. Yes, America, I'm talking about you.

And here's the second simple truth. While we can argue forever about the causes of conflict in the Middle East, it is impossible to ignore the impact of American foreign policy on what's happening in Europe. It was shocking to see an "expert" from the Council on Foreign Relations quoted on Saturday saying that the situation is "largely Europe's responsibility." How, exactly? The Iraq invasion (which could reasonably be described as "largely America's responsibility") unleashed a period of instability and competition in the region that is collapsing states and fueling sectarian conflict.

European leaders wanted, years ago, to intervene directly in Syria in order to check President Bashar al-Assad's cruelty; the United States didn't. You can understand why — I wouldn't for one second question the judgment of American political leaders that their country was reluctant to participate in another military conflict. ~~But at least acknowledge the consequences of nonintervention: the~~ protracted Syrian civil war, the emergence of a lawless territory ripe for exploitation by the sick zealots of the Islamic State, and the resulting flood of millions of displaced people.

So it's a bit rich for American commentators to lecture Europeans when part of the reason the refugees are arriving on Europe's doorstep is American foreign policy. It's great that the United States is by far the largest provider of humanitarian assistance to Syrians, but America is bigger than Europe, and wealthier. Why should Europe be expected to take around a million refugees practically overnight and the United States, hardly any?

There's one more simple truth to acknowledge. The ideal number of refugees is zero. Today's crisis will worsen in the years ahead unless we deal with the causes, not just the symptoms. That means serious and sustained action to create free societies people actually want to stay in. Places with a market economy, property rights, the rule of law, a free press, an independent judiciary and accountable democratic processes.

This is America's chance to say, "We have a moral responsibility to help. So the United States will welcome as many refugees as Europe: Not just thousands; hundreds of thousands. But there has to be a bargain. We cannot keep doing this. So we will now embark on a new effort to bring the basics of a decent life to the world's hot spots."

There are practical steps we could take to entice leaders in the Middle East to open up their economies and provide greater rights and freedoms. The Oxford economist Paul Collier has proposed a plan for "job havens" bordering Syria, using an existing, but empty industrial zone minutes from the largest refugee camp in Jordan, where a future Syrian economy could be incubated, providing both an income and an incentive to stay for millions of displaced people.

The economist Hernando de Soto, backed in part by the United States Agency for International Development, has cataloged the vast untapped value of the informal economy in countries like Egypt, Tunisia and Algeria. If these assets were formalized, people across the region could own property, grow businesses and develop the desire to stay and build stable societies. We should put pressure on their rulers to implement the necessary legal reforms by cutting aid payments until they do it.

The Obama administration led the establishment of the Open Government Partnership, a well-designed effort to promote public sector accountability worldwide. Now let's give it real teeth: make trade deals and market access contingent on progress toward its goals. We have plenty of leverage if only we'd use it to pursue long-term structural reform.

Yes, it's a complicated world. But that's no excuse to do nothing. For America to lead in this way is not about imposing "Western values" on the rest of the planet. It's much more basic than that. It's about treating every human being with humanity.

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