

Pries, Ludger

Article — Published Version

“We will Manage It” – Did Chancellor Merkel's Dictum Increase or Even Cause the Refugee Movement in 2015?

International Migration

Provided in Cooperation with:

John Wiley & Sons

Suggested Citation: Pries, Ludger (2019) : “We will Manage It” – Did Chancellor Merkel's Dictum Increase or Even Cause the Refugee Movement in 2015?, International Migration, ISSN 1468-2435, Wiley, Hoboken, NJ, Vol. 58, Iss. 5, pp. 18-28, <https://doi.org/10.1111/imig.12684>

This Version is available at:

<https://hdl.handle.net/10419/230121>

Standard-Nutzungsbedingungen:

Die Dokumente auf EconStor dürfen zu eigenen wissenschaftlichen Zwecken und zum Privatgebrauch gespeichert und kopiert werden.

Sie dürfen die Dokumente nicht für öffentliche oder kommerzielle Zwecke vervielfältigen, öffentlich ausstellen, öffentlich zugänglich machen, vertreiben oder anderweitig nutzen.

Sofern die Verfasser die Dokumente unter Open-Content-Lizenzen (insbesondere CC-Lizenzen) zur Verfügung gestellt haben sollten, gelten abweichend von diesen Nutzungsbedingungen die in der dort genannten Lizenz gewährten Nutzungsrechte.

Terms of use:

Documents in EconStor may be saved and copied for your personal and scholarly purposes.

You are not to copy documents for public or commercial purposes, to exhibit the documents publicly, to make them publicly available on the internet, or to distribute or otherwise use the documents in public.

If the documents have been made available under an Open Content Licence (especially Creative Commons Licences), you may exercise further usage rights as specified in the indicated licence.



<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>

“We will Manage It” – Did Chancellor Merkel's Dictum Increase or Even Cause the Refugee Movement in 2015?

Ludger Pries*

ABSTRACT

In public and scientific debates about the dynamics of the so-called refugee crisis of 2015, there are highly controversial positions concerning the statement on August 2015 by Chancellor Merkel: “We will manage it” Did this dictum actually increase or even unleash the refugee migration towards Europe in 2015? Was Germany’s governmental policy against the legal European and national frame? Based on an analysis of legal documents and public statements, the article first reconstructs the development of refugee immigration into the EU, especially to Germany, in 2015 and reviews whether the German government violated law and opened one-sided borders. Based on survey data of 4,500 refugees in 2016, it then analyses whether the Merkel dictum significantly changed the volume and the reasons why refugees decided to flee to Germany. Finally, some conclusions are drawn.

INTRODUCTION

When in 2015 the wars in Syria and Iraq against ISIS and between many armed groups escalated, almost one and a half million refugees entered the European Union (EU). The exodus of millions of civilians had begun some years before, but 2015 was definitely decisive in many aspects. The loss of control over the outer borders of the European Schengen space became obvious. The majority of the refugees entering the EU in 2015 did so without being registered or having a valid visa when stepping into an EU member state. For civil society and politicians in the EU and all over the world, it was evident that national and European borders were porous or even blurred. Another aspect that became clear was the inability of the EU to define a joint answer and solution to the situation. Although the “Common European Asylum System” (CEAS) existed and was approved by the European parliament and Commission in 2013, mainly the Dublin mechanism of refugee protection did not work. According to this, the EU member state of first arrival of a refugee is responsible for organizing accommodation and asylum application procedure and decision.

Since 2015 there has been public and scientific debates on how the refugee movement of 2015 could be explained.¹ This article focuses on just one facet: the role of Chancellor Merkel and the German government in August/September of that year. In an interview that Merkel gave at the Federal Press Conference on 31 August 2015 she was asked if Germany was prepared for such a high

* Ruhr-Universität Bochum, Bochum

The peer review history for this article is available at <https://publons.com/publon/10.1111/imig.12684>

inflow of refugees. She answered: "I put it in a nutshell: Germany is a strong country. Our approach to these things must be the following: we have already managed so much – we will manage this! We will manage it, and wherever there is an obstacle to this, we will conquer it and we will work on it. The federal government will do everything in its power – together with the states and municipalities – to enforce exactly this".² In mid-September 2015, Merkel repeated and strongly defended her position in a TV interview: "When we should be forced to apologize right now, for showing a friendly face when confronted with an emergency situation, then this is no more my country".³

Merkel's words conveyed the message that the society of arrival felt at least partially responsible for the refugees' plight and would make huge efforts to help those in need. Mainly conservative politicians interpreted Merkel's dictum as an invitation to flee to Germany and argued that Merkel's declarations fuelled the so-called "refugee wave". Chancellor Merkel, German politicians supporting the reception of refugees and German civil society in general were suspected of destroying the EU refugee order with its Dublin mechanism of assigning responsibility for refugee reception to singular member states. International observers criticized Merkel and German policy as a unilateralist attempt and violation of established EU norms. Some interpreted this as a kind of compensation for the history of Nazi genocide. Especially politicians and journalists from the right and the far-right argued that, by opening its borders one-sidedly and warmly welcoming refugees, Germany caused the refugee crisis of autumn 2015. But moderate politicians in Europe and elsewhere took a sceptical view of Germany's refugee policy. As a consequence of the open-door-policy, Germany asked for solidarity and the distribution of refugees to all EU member states. Thereby the country "suddenly became the supplicant and turned to France and other EU Member States for support. A large number of French politicians has felt a certain *schadenfreude* at this, as Germany's economic superiority, along with the euro crisis, has long since left them with the impression of being lesser equals to their partner. They also drew on old clichés of a Germany acting in a calculating and arrogant manner. There was talk that France's neighbour was pointing the "moral finger", but, in fact, all that they wanted to do was capitalise demographically and economically on the immigrants".⁴

While it is understandable that politicians search for exploiting the (supposed) faults of their adversaries, it is noteworthy that even scientists argued in a similar way. Alexander Betts, Director of the Refugee Studies Centre at Oxford University, and Paul Collier from the Blavatnik School of Government, blame chancellor Merkel for breaking the Dublin rules by inviting refugees to come to Germany: "The German national narrative of living down the past and the Chancellor's personal sense of political authority came together in what was soon seen as a sensational decision. In late August 2015, Chancellor Merkel decided that Germany would no longer adhere to the rules of the Dublin Agreement: the refugees reaching Germany would be permitted to remain rather than being sent back to Hungary" (Betts and Collier, 2017: 84). So, according to the authors, it was Germany and chancellor Merkel in person who suspended the EU Dublin system – and this is explained by German Nazi-history (and the wish for reparation). According to the authors, the consequences of this "sensational decision" were that even more refugees took the route, from Syria or the refugee camps in Jordan and Lebanon, in order to reach the "new promised land" Germany. By their dictum, Merkel even increased the smuggling industry: "It was not by chance that boats were overcrowded and sank, but an inevitable consequence of these unregulated market forces and the desperation of the people involved. While the industry was already well-established in the Mediterranean, the massive rise in demand triggered by the invitation from Germany further increased demand for smuggling by criminal syndicates" (ibid.: 108; for a critical review of the smuggler industry argument see Hintjens, 2019).

Opposed to such critiques of Merkel's and Germany's refugee policy in 2015, the Professor of Migration Law at the Free University of Amsterdam, Thomas Spijkerboer, summarized his review on the question "Did 'Wir Schaffen Das' Lead to Uncontrolled Mass Migration?" as follows: "It is

very unlikely that the decision to suspend Dublin has influenced the number of Syrian asylum seekers and refugees in Europe. It is unlikely that the peak of the number of asylum seekers and refugees in Europe was related to “Wir schaffen das”. It is quite possible that “Wir schaffen das” has contributed to asylum seekers choosing Germany instead of other EU Member States as the country of destination” (Spijkerboer, 2016). So, a lot of questions arise; and debates on how to interpret the dynamics of 2015 are still going on, five years later. Given the significance of the events for the political climate and relations of power in Germany, for the challenges and future of the European Union and, last but not least, for the fate of millions of forced migrants all over the world, it is of crucial importance for society and for science how we interpret these events and what we learn from them.

In the following, only some specific questions will be asked, based on scientific data: Did Germany suspend and violate the Dublin mechanism of refugee protection in 2015? Did Germany unilaterally open the borders for refugees? Did Merkel’s dictum “We will manage it” actually lead to the increase in refugees’ decision to go to Germany? In light of the questions, in the following we will test scientifically the situational background and the impact of Merkel’s “We will manage it” on the actual dynamic of the refugee movement in 2015. Therefore, we will first reconstruct the development of refugee immigration into the EU and especially to Germany, in light of the CEAS and particularly the Dublin mechanism. Then we will empirically review if Germany violated law and opened one-sidedly borders. In a third step we analyse whether the Merkel dictum significantly changed the volume and the reasons why refugees decided to flee to Germany. Finally, we will draw some conclusions on the motives and dynamics of refugee movements in general and on scientists’ responsibility therein (section 4).

DID GERMANY SUSPEND THE DUBLIN SYSTEM OF THE EUROPEAN UNION IN 2015?

Most scholars working on the CEAS agree that this regulatory framework was and still is very incipient. The CEAS package was adopted by the EU bodies in 2013, consisting of two *regulations* and three *directives*, and lays down: (1) how and (2) where an identity verification has to proceed (Regulation EU No 603/2013 [EURODAC] and Regulation EU No 604/2013 [Dublin III]); (3) according to which criteria asylum procedures have to be decided ([Qualification] Directive 2011/95/EU); (4) on which basis asylum procedures have to be conducted ([Asylum Procedures] Directive 2013/32/EU); and (5) how asylum seekers are to be accommodated ([Reception] Directive 2013/33/EU).

Compared with earlier EU regulations, those of individual member states and also those of other countries like Canada or the USA, the CEAS has to be recognized as representing raised standards of refugee protection. In a broader sense, the CEAS package also included:

- (1) the establishment of the European Asylum Support Office (EASO; Regulation (EU) No 439/2010, which became operational with the opening of its central in Malta in 2011),
- (2) the directive for temporarily protecting refugees in case of a “mass influx of displaced persons” (Temporary Protection Directive 2001/55/EU, which had not been implemented until then), and
- (3) the establishment of the Asylum and Migration Fund (COM 2011/751) set up in 2011 and provided in 2014 to operate for six years with public funds of 3.1 billion euros.⁵

According to these legal provisions, asylum applications should be managed in the country of first entry of an asylum seeker. But this is not an obligation. Article 17 of the REGULATION

(EU) No 604/2013 says: “By way of derogation from Article 3(1), each Member State may decide to examine an application for international protection lodged with it by a third-country national or a stateless person, even if such examination is not its responsibility under the criteria laid down in this Regulation”.⁶ This legal option to manage asylum applications in another EU member state than that of first entry was applied long before the events of 2015 by German courts in the case of refugees who had first entered in Greece, and it was recognized by the European Court of Justice in the case of a Somali refugee who had lodged an asylum application in Austria after having travelled via Turkey, Greece, Macedonia, Serbia and Hungary.⁷ Therefore, receiving refugees and accepting asylum applications of persons who had entered the EU via another country is not violating European or national law. For Greece as country of first entry, German courts and the European Court of Justice had even decided that there was an obligation to accept asylum applications of persons, who first had entered Greece, in other member states due to the deficits of the Greek asylum system (an aspect that also could be applied to other EU member states like Hungary).

Besides these legal regulations of the CEAS, the Dublin rule did not work in practice long before 2015. Since the beginning of the twenty-first century, every year some hundred to four hundred thousand refugees arrived at the EU borders applying for asylum. They asked for asylum mainly in the Mediterranean countries, Greece, Italy, Malta, Spain and Cyprus, or went further, to other European countries – with or without corresponding registration. The rest of the EU member states were in the comfortable situation that only few refugees could ask for asylum in their country without having entered another EU member state before. In sum, for more than a decade comparatively few people seeking refuge arrived at the shores of the EU. According to the Dublin rules they had to apply for individual asylum in the EU member state they entered first. This was a comfortable situation for the Western, Northern and central European countries, given that only few asylum seekers knocked at their doors. The mostly challenged Mediterranean countries had no adequate systems for receiving and managing asylum seekers (the case of Cyprus, Greece and Malta) and/or felt left alone with problems that were basically an EU challenge. For the majority of EU member states, the Dublin mechanism allowed all responsibilities to be given to the countries of first entry.

Refugees asking for asylum in Germany or France were sent back to Italy or Spain if they had been registered in that country first. As a reaction, Italy and Spain were not highly interested in accurately registering all incoming refugees, because those not registered in their territory could not be sent back. A mechanism of “organized non-responsibility” became established in the EU and was working quite well until 2015 (Pries, 2018: 84f). It was a situation not only of non-responsibility, but of *organized* non-responsibility, given that all member states knew that the Dublin formula had structural problems but, in spite of working together on solutions, each country accused others of not complying with their duties. Mediterranean countries were lax in registering and criticised the rest of member states for not sharing responsibility; countries of transit or arrival criticised the first entry countries for not conforming to the common rules.

This mechanism of *organized non-responsibility* worked more (for the central-Northern-Western countries) or less (for the Mediterranean countries) smoothly for the member states. It was a virtual burden sharing – but at the cost (1) of the formal rules and (2) of sharing responsibilities between EU member states and, most important, (3) at the expense of the refugees as remaining “in limbo”. Many of them, in some years a third of all applicants, were the main victims of the Dublin deficits in the sense that EU member states – in a process lasting several months – checked which state was responsible for the asylum procedure. Often, applicants were sent back and forth from one country to another. In this respect, the formal regulations of the 2013 CEAS improved the situation for refugees, e.g. by defining a maximum of three months for taking a decision on which country was responsible.⁸ In sum, Germany and Chancellor Merkel did not unilaterally break the CEAS rules, neither formally not in practice.

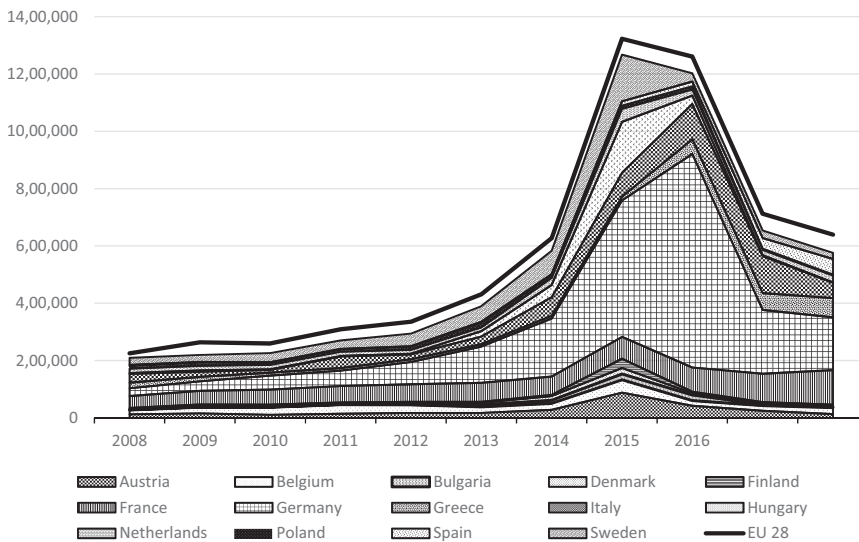
Numbers of immigrants seeking refuge in the EU had already begun to rise since 2013, but 2015 definitely represented a substantial increase. This was due mainly to the war in Middle East, which

began with an invasion of Iraq by a coalition led by the USA in 2003. After 2010 it spread to Syria and developed as a complex mix of internal conflict and civil war, but also as a proxy war with the intervention of superpowers like the USA and Russia, and middle range powers like Iran, Saudi-Arabia and Turkey.⁹ These armed conflicts in Middle East and the on-going organized violence in Afghanistan and Pakistan, as well as in the Northern and Sub-Saharan Africa, have to be considered as the main causes of the refugee movement in 2015. Given the above-mentioned policy of not registering all entering refugees, the official numbers of asylum applications in the EU alone are not a very strong indicator for analysing a (possible) push effect of Merkel's dictum. What can be seen in Figure 1 is the rise of asylum applications in the EU since 2010, and a substantial growth since 2012 – long before Merkel's dictum.

DID GERMANY UNILATERALLY OPEN THE BORDERS AND SUSPEND THE CEAS?

Taking the actual timeline of events in 2015 seriously, many factors influenced the dynamics of the refugee movement that year, especially in September 2015. Factors to mention are the politics of each of the EU member states, the public communication and images produced by the media, the actions of civil society and refugee-related organizations, as well as the perceptions, expectations and behaviour of refugees themselves. There is no doubt that Merkel's statement raised refugees' hopes that there would be countries complying with their international obligations to offer protection to refugees. However, similar signals were made at a certain moment by the Austrian and the Swedish government. At the beginning of September 2015, the Hungarian president Orbán announced the building of a fence at the southern border of the country – which induced thousands of refugees to try to reach northern Europe before this wall would be effective. During the first half of the year 2015 the Hungarian government registered all incoming refugees; and the corresponding

FIGURE 1
ASYLUM APPLICANTS EU28 AND SELECTED COUNTRIES 2008–2016



Source: <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/asylum-and-managed-migration/data/database> [migr_asyappctza]

numbers increased to hundreds of thousands. But then the Hungarian government changed its policy, stopped registering refugees and sent them further to other EU member states. Orbán organized trains to accelerate refugees' transit through Hungary. On 4th of September Orbán stopped this transfer by trains, and refugees stacked and hindered in Budapest spontaneously began to go on foot towards northern countries (Austria, Germany and Sweden had been at the top of preferred countries). Whatever the effect of Merkel's dictum from 31 of August might have been on later decisions of people in countries of origin, at the beginning of September 2015 there were already hundreds of thousands of refugees on the way, given the average time of the journey from Syria or other countries through the Balkan route (of some weeks) long before Merkel's dictum. Merkel's "We will manage it" and also the declarations of the Austrian government at the beginning of September 2015 therefore have to be interpreted first and foremost as an answer to the existing challenge of hundreds of thousands of refugees retained on the Balkan route.

The treks of thousands and thousands of desperate, hungry and unprotected refugees filled the headlines (a picture also impacting on public opinion was that on 2nd of September of Aylan Kurdi, who died at the Turkish shore when trying to flee with his family to Greece). As Orbán denied any responsibility of his country, Austria and Germany had to find a solution. On 4 September the Austrian and German chancellors, Feimann and Merkel, agreed to receive the refugees who were already "in the pipeline" from Greece through the Balkans, and to set about distributing them in their countries and in other member states. On 5 September the southern German state of Bavaria decided – similar to Orbán's politics – not to register the incoming refugees but transmit them directly to other federal states (Länder) in Germany or other countries (this decision could be interpreted as due to an excessive demand of refugees and to an effort to relegate responsibilities to others). On 9 September the German parliament accepted and supported Merkel's decisions. On 12 and 13 September Austria and Germany decided to reconstitute border control but to let in registered asylum seekers. On 22 September EU member states (against the votes of Czech Republic, Hungary, Romania and Slovakia) accepted that some 160,000 refugees should be distributed proportionally (out of this number, until May 2017 less than 20,000 were actually relocated; see EC 2017; Oomen and Rodrigues de Oliveira, 2017).

Based on the timeline of events in 2015 it could be scientifically shown that.

- (1) borders were not unilaterally opened for refugees by Merkel or Germany, but borders actually always had been open in the EU since the Schengen treaties;
- (2) in the summer and autumn of 2015, there arrived hundreds of thousands of refugees in Greece, that country being unable to cope or offer an adequate infrastructure of refugee protection;
- (3) based on this, hundreds of thousands of refugees went further through the Balkan route aiming at arriving in other EU member states;
- (4) when all Balkan countries and Hungary agreed to be countries of transit but not of arrival for refugees, hundreds of thousands of persons got stuck on the route with no chance to return easily;
- (5) in August and until mid of September Austria and Germany took on responsibility for receiving the refugees, hoping that a European solution for distribution could be found;
- (6) since mid of September, border control in Austria and Germany – absent until then – was reinforced;
- (7) despite of many meetings of all EU member states and searching for common solutions, no joint decision could be taken concerning the share of responsibilities, and
- (8) most of the EU member states – either for having right-wing governments or for fear of right-wing parties and movements in their countries – were unable to take in a substantial number of refugees based on a resettlement programme – *organized non-responsibility* went on.

In this context, Merkel's statement "We will manage it" was not an isolated, spontaneous or primarily value-driven or romantic individual expression. It was a timely and courageous, collective and governmental decision in order to cope with challenges that would not have disappeared of their own volition. Already on August 22 of 2015, the Secretary of Foreign Affairs, Sigmar Gabriel, expressed in an interview: "I think we will manage it if we all engage jointly (...) We are a strong country with great humanity".¹⁰ In fact, Merkel's announcement was simply expressing Germany's commitment to the principles that the country had consented to decades ago in the framework of its constitution, of international law, of humanitarian law and of European law. The Basic Law of Germany, the Geneva Convention on Refugees, European legislation, international law and human rights imply beyond any doubt that refugees have to be granted protection.

Thus, the policy of the German government until mid-September 2015 was based on the legality and legitimacy of the national, European and international regime of refugee protection (Crage, 2016; Gerhards et al., 2016). It was not against the law and norms of refugee protection, but it was against the prevailing *organised non-responsibility* in the EU (Ostrand, 2015). It did not violate the CEAS or Dublin system but tried to rescue some of its basic imperatives. When the Austrian, and then the German, government became aware that there was no chance of reaching consent at EU level, majorities of their leading members joined the prevailing practice of organized non-responsibility (as could be observed in the case of substantial differences and tensions between the parties in charge in Germany SPD, CDU and CSU; see Carrera and Guild, 2015; Pastore, 2017). In any case, it seems more than strange when scientists (like Betts and Collier, footnote 5) argue, that it was for Merkel to decide "that Germany would no longer adhere to the rules of the Dublin Agreement".

DID MERKEL'S DICTUM SUBSTANTIALLY INTENSIFY THE REFUGEE MOVEMENT?

Besides such fundamental arguments without empirical substance, another argument criticising Merkel's statement and policy is that – even if it was made with good will – led to a substantial increase of the refugee movement, given the raised expectations of people already on the route or even of those who decided to leave Turkey in order to arrive in Germany. All over Germany and in the international press there appeared photos with refugees wearing slogans and pictures of Merkel. Many refugees interviewed expressed their gratitude to the German government and people for receiving them warmly. International journalists and scientists began to feel like psychologists or specialists in collective traumata, interpreting official German policy and/or civil society's behaviour as a late attempt to make up for the genocide and crimes of World War II. Such aspects could be interesting for comparative and empirical analysis, mainly referring to civil society's attitudes, activities and *stimmungswechsel* (see Bornemann and Ghassem-Fachandi, 2017; Feischmidt et al., 2019).

But empirical evidence of the impact of Merkel's dictum on the actual refugee movement and decisions leads to a clear conclusion: there was no substantial, measurable impact of Merkel's "We will manage it" on the volume and reasons of refugees' decisions to orient towards Germany. The number of *weekly registered* incoming refugees in Germany (this number is different from that of registered asylum applications) increased significantly in January and February (up to more than 10,000), stagnated until April (at less than 10,000), and then constantly increased with almost the same rhythm until September (some 40,000), stagnated in September, reaching its overall peak in November 2015 (almost 55,000) and then constantly declining to less than 5,000 in February 2016 (see IAB, 2016: 3). If there is any significant shift in the numbers to be observed, it is the stagnation in September – the opposite of what would be expected if the Merkel's dictum of August would had substantially fuelled the number of arriving refugees.

The dynamics of the numbers of weekly registered refugees is quite different from the development of the quantity of monthly registered asylum applications. As outlined in Figure 2, the total number of (new and secondary) asylum applications grew constantly from January 2015 up to a peak in August 2016. Hence, the number of registered asylum applications is substantially “delayed” compared with the number of registered incoming refugees. This is simply due to the fact that, especially in the turbulences of 2015, refugees had to wait many months before being invited to make the formal application for asylum. But even taking over three months as an average, the Merkel dictum of August should have led to an increase of asylum applications in November or December 2015 – again, the opposite could be noticed in Figure 2.

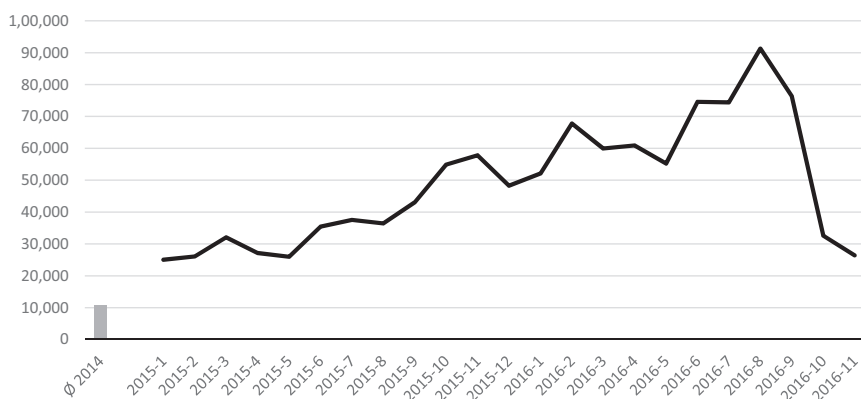
A final test could be made based on the data of a survey held with some 4,500 refugees in 2016. A representative sample was taken from the Central Register of Foreigners (Ausländerzentralregister) selecting persons who had applied for asylum between 1st of January 2013 and 31st of January 2016 (Brücker et al., 2016). All interviewed persons were asked, why they chose Germany as their country of arrival and asylum application.

Figure 3 represents the answers of the interviewees, according to the month when they arrived in Germany. If Merkel’s dictum had substantially shifted the dynamics of the refugees’ decision-making processes, there should be a significant drop between August and September in the reasons for refugees to come to Germany.

The shares of reasons for choosing Germany as the destination country in which to apply for asylum are outlined in Figure 3. In total, there are 11 types of reasons, from “family members already here”, “friends and acquaintances already here”, “people from my country of origin already here” to “economic situation in Germany”, “recognition of human rights in Germany”, educational system in Germany”, “social welfare system in Germany” and “culture of welcoming in Germany”, “asylum procedures in Germany”, “by coincidence” and “other reasons”. The three most frequently mentioned reasons are human rights recognition, the educational system and the culture of welcoming. The composition of reasons remains relative stable during 2015 and then becomes more volatile in 2016. The most significant difference appears from March to April 2016.

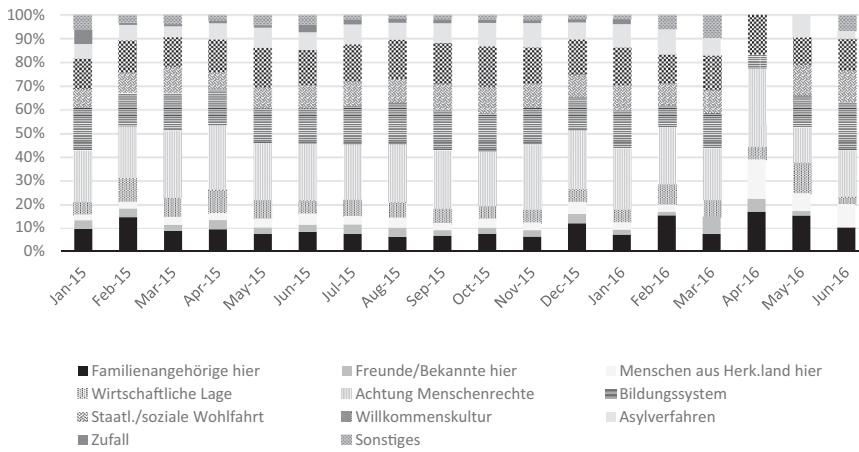
One could question the validity and reliability of the data, assuming that respondents gave answers they were supposing to be desired and expected. But the survey was organized by a highly

FIGURE 2
MONTHLY REGISTERED ASYLUM APPLICATIONS (AVERAGE FOR 2014 AND JAN. 2015 TO NOV. 2016)



Source: BAMF Asylgeschäftsstatistik Dez. 2014, 2015 und 2016

FIGURE 3
REASONS FOR CHOOSING GERMANY AS DESTINATION COUNTRY BY MONTH OF ARRIVAL



Source: own calculations based on survey data files

professional team that since more than thirty years is responsible for the Socio-economic Panel in Germany. And even independently of this question: If there would have been a substantial impact of Merkel's saying "We will manage it" on refugees' decision making, there should be tangible shifts in the composition of reasons by month from August to September and October 2015. Merkel's dictum should have influenced especially the reasons of culture of welcoming and of asylum procedures. But there is no evidence for such an assumption. With 99 percent of probability the Chi-Square-Test rejects any statistically significant correlation between the reasons for choosing Germany as compared for the months of August, September and October.¹¹

CONCLUSIONS: REFUGEES' CRITERIA FOR SELECTING TARGET COUNTRIES

In sum, Merkel's statement to keep Germany's commitment to refugee protection probably gave hope and expectations to refugees. However, it neither originated nor significantly intensified the refugee movement. When Merkel's declaration was made, hundreds of thousands of refugees already were on the trek, and it was just a matter of pragmatic, realist and humanitarian policy not to close national borders. The reasons for choosing Germany changed according to the time when refugees arrived in Germany; but not in the way predicted by all those who blame Merkel and the German government for having caused or at least increased the so-called refugee crisis. In face of this empirical evidence it is even more surprising that not only right-wing politicians but also some scientists put forward these arguments.

Studies of migration, especially those focussing on forced migration, indicate that people move according mainly to social ties, economic and socio-cultural prospects (Castles et al., 2013; de Haas et al., 2018; Helbling and Leblond, 2019). Most forced migrants all over the world concentrate in neighbouring countries of the conflict zones. They hope to be able to return soon; besides the economic resources necessary for longer trips, this is a crucial reason why, in the case of the Middle East, most refugees concentrate in Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey. We also know that refugees orient towards countries where arriving is expected to be easier, mainly because they already have relatives, friends or co-nationals there. But here also language and cultural affinities are at play, as well

as conditions of employment, security and state of law. Finally, the culture of welcoming or of xenophobia also have an influence – unfortunately, however, most refugees have little choice of taking all these aspects into account. In face of this scientific knowledge and the facts presented in this article, it is difficult to explain why even some scientists followed the strategy of blaming the Merkel dictum for the so-called refugee crisis.

NOTES

1. We prefer the term refugee movement to “refugee crisis”. As former UN Secretary General Ban Ki Moon underlined: “this is not a crisis of numbers; it is a crisis of solidarity” (see UN Press Release of 15 April 2016 ‘Refugee Crisis about Solidarity, Not Just Numbers’; <http://www.un.org/press/en/2016/sgsm17670.doc.htm>).
2. See: https://www.bundesregierung.de/Content/EN/Artikel/2015/08_en/2015-08-31-sommer-pk-der-kanzlerin_en.html?nn5709674; <http://www.bundesregierung.de/Content/DE/Mitschrift/Pressekonferenzen/2015/08/2015-08-31-pk-merkel.html>.
3. See: <http://www.tagesschau.de/inland/merkel-anne-will-103.html>; <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/angela-merkel-its-our-damned-duty-to-help-refugees-a6686631.html>.
4. <https://www.boell.de/en/2016/05/25/germany-and-france-locked-refugee-crisis-alone-together>.
5. See e.g. Bendel 2016: 21f; https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/what-we-do/policies/asylum_en; and https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/financing/fundings/migration-asylum-borders/asylum-migration-integration-fund_en.
6. <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32013R0604&from=EN>. In German law this is known as “Selbsteintrittsrecht” that applies for a variety of commercial, administrative and asylum law; see e.g. <https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Selbsteintritt..>
7. See <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/GA/TXT/?uri=CELEX:62012CJ0394>.
8. For instance, for 2008 there were 152,890 first time asylum applicants registered in the EU, for the same year, incoming and outgoing Dublin requests (a member state asking another member state or being asked by another member state to check for the first country of entry of an asylum applicant) summed up to 54,601 (22,288 incoming and 32,313 outgoing requests); see files mig_dub at <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/asylum-and-managed-migration/data/database>.
9. See https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Iraq_War; https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Syrian_Civil_War.
10. See <https://www.welt.de/politik/deutschland/article157920725/Wir-schaffen-das-war-eigentlich-Gabriels-Idee.html>.
11. As the sample was planned to be used for future panel surveys with the same persons, it was biased towards those asylum applicants with higher probabilities of a positive asylum decision (in order to reduce the panel mortality rate and needs to refill); for representativeness, data could be weighted accordingly. I am grateful to Ronja Szczepanski for assisting in statistical calculations.

REFERENCES

- Bendel, P.
2016 ‘Refugee policy in the European Union: protect human rights!’, *WISO-Diskurs*, Bonn: Friedrich Ebert Stiftung (<http://library.fes.de/pdf-files/wiso/12405.pdf>).
- Betts, A. and P. Collier
2017 *Refugee: Transforming a broken refugee system*. Allen Lane, London.
- Bornemann, J. and P. Ghassem-Fachandi
2017 ‘The concept of Stimmung. From indifference to xenophobia in Germany's refugee crisis’, *Hau: Journal of Ethnographic Theory*, 7(3): 105–135.
- Brücker, H., N. Rother and J. Schupp
2016 *IAB-BAMF-SOEP-Befragung von Geflüchteten 2016. Studiendesign, Feldergebnisse sowie Analysen zu schulischer wie beruflicher Qualifikation, Sprachkenntnissen sowie kognitiven Potenzialen*. IAB, Nürnberg.

- Carrera, S. and E. Guild
 2015 'Can the new refugee relocation system work? Perils in the Dublin logic and flawed reception conditions in the EU', *CEPS policy brief*, 332 (http://aei.pitt.edu/67888/1/SCandEG_RefugeeRelocationProgramme_0.pdf).
- Castles, S., H. de Haas and M.J. Miller
 2013 *The Age of Migration: International Population Movements in the Modern World*, 5th edn. Macmillan, Basingstoke, Hampshire and New York.
- Crage, S.
 2016 "The more things change . . . developments in German practices towards asylum seekers and recognised refugees", *German Politics*, 25(3): 344–65.
- de Haas, H., M. Czaika, M.-L. Flahaux, et al.
 2018 "International Migration. Trends, determinants and policy effects", *Population and Development Review*, <https://doi.org/10.1111/padr.12291>.
- Feischmidt, M., L. Pries and C. Cantat (Eds.)
 2019 *Refugee Protection and Civil Society in Europe*. Palgrave, Houndmills.
- Gerhards, J., S. Hans and J. Schupp
 2016 "German public opinion on admitting refugees", *DIW Economic Bulletin*, 243–9. (https://www.diw.de/documents/publikationen/73/diw_01.c.534664.de/diw_econ_bull_2016-21-1.pdf).
- Helbling, M., and D. Leblond
 2019 "Controlling immigration? How regulations affect migration flows", *European Journal of Political Research*, 58(1): 248–269.
- Hintjens, H.
 2019 "Failed securitisation moves during the 2015 'Migration crisis'", *International Migration*, 57(4): 181–196.
- IAB (Institut für Arbeitsmarkt- und Berufsforschung)
 2016 Aktuelle Berichte. Eine vorläufige Bilanz der Fluchtmigration nach Deutschland. No. 19/2016.
- Oomen, B. and R. Rodrigues de Oliveira
 2017 'Relocation and its numbers – which role for the courts?' (<http://eumigrationlawblog.eu/relocation-and-its-numbers-which-role-for-the-courts/>).
- Ostrand, N.
 2015 "The Syrian refugee crisis: a comparison of responses by Germany, Sweden, the United Kingdom, and the United States", *Journal on Migration and Human Security*, 3(3): 255–279.
- F. Pastore (Ed.)
 2017 "Beyond the migration and asylum crisis: options and lessons for Europe", Aspen Institute (https://www.aspeninstitute.it/system/files/private_files/2017-02/doc/Beyond_the%20Migration%20and%20Asylum_Crisis_web.pdf).
- Pries, L.
 2018 *Refugees, Civil Society and the State. European Experiences and Global Challenges*. Edward Elgar, Cheltenham.
- Spijkerboer, T.
 2016 "Fact check: did 'Wir Schaffen Das' lead to uncontrolled mass migration?", (<https://www.law.ox.ac.uk/research-subject-groups/centre-criminology/centreborder-criminologies/blog/2016/09/fact-check-did-eu>).