

## The Challenge of Migration and the European Fortress

When we think about frontiers, we naïvely imagine dotted lines on a cardboard map that draw the limits and separations between sovereign territories. However, an actual frontier is more serious and complex than that: it is a natural or man-made barrier which is politically accepted to reach international recognition, provides a country with its own character, and creates an iconographic representation of safety and protection against potential external enemies. Thereby, border areas, identified by specific boundary markers and symbols of power, control, defense and security, are the subject of specific national systems of management, making them imperious guardians of sovereignty.

A barrier that is arbitrarily drawn and separates a country from its neighbors not only defines the space under the state sovereignty, but also demarcates national identities, cultural processes, political and economic dynamics, and even daily life. A frontier constitutes a human reality, a social construction and a territorial entity that is defined and forged by complex security measures and by a national personality. Borderlands are geopolitical regions with independent life.

Throughout history, some of the fiercest battles and the most legendary victories over both real and fictitious enemies have taken place in the borderlands. These are therefore sites of intense patriotism and symbols of national unity. Most of the great historical agreements between European countries (Vienna Congress, 1819; Berlin Conference, 1884; Potsdam and Yalta Conferences, 1945) have defined the national and international borders that stand today. While these agreements have endured, antagonism between supporters and opponents of these borders has always been present.

Following Romain Roland (1866-1944), a French writer who promoted pacifist values in the early 20th century, the struggle for universal citizenship and internationalism did not reach a clear advancement until 1985, when a number of European countries agreed in the Luxembourgian city of Schengen to remove the border controls between them but to retain the controls on the external borders of the European Union (E.U.), separating the E.U. from the so-

called third countries. This agreement fully entered into effect in 1995 and has since then consolidated the shared space, known as Schengen space, where there is free circulation of goods and people entering from an external border or residing in one of the Schengen countries. As many as 26 European nations currently constitute this space of free movement, despite the challenges posed by the recent terrorist attacks in Paris (November 13, 2015).

Another milestone in the history of borders was the fall of the Berlin Wall on November 9, 1989. This event ended the Cold War and the confrontation between the great powers vying for world hegemony. That instant was immortalized in images beamed around the world: people dancing over the wall foundations and Berliners celebrating next to the Brandenburg Gate—pictures that would become symbols of the unbreakable will of humankind to overcome artificial divisions. From that moment on, it seemed that the world would change.

The beginning of the 1990s encouraged the collective illusion of having achieved a lasting peace and an ultimately pacified world. New values broke into the international scene, including the right of intervention for human security, and the responsibility to protect people. These settings concluded on July 17, 1998, with the creation of The Hague International Criminal Court, to investigate and judge genocides, war crimes, aggressions and felonies against humanity.

However, this progress cycle was bluffly closed with the rise of conservatism. The dream of non-existent walls soon faded. Today, rarely a month goes by without an announcement of new fences or walls. Thirty years ago there were only 16 walls defending frontiers in different parts of the world. Today there are more than 65, finished or in the process of construction.

These big physical partitions deepen the abyss between rich and poor, and try to contain or keep out racial hatred, terrorism, illegal immigrants, or drug or human trafficking in the context of a globalized world. Some examples include the walls and fences between Kenya and Somalia; Tunisia and Libya; Hungary and Serbia; Venezuela and

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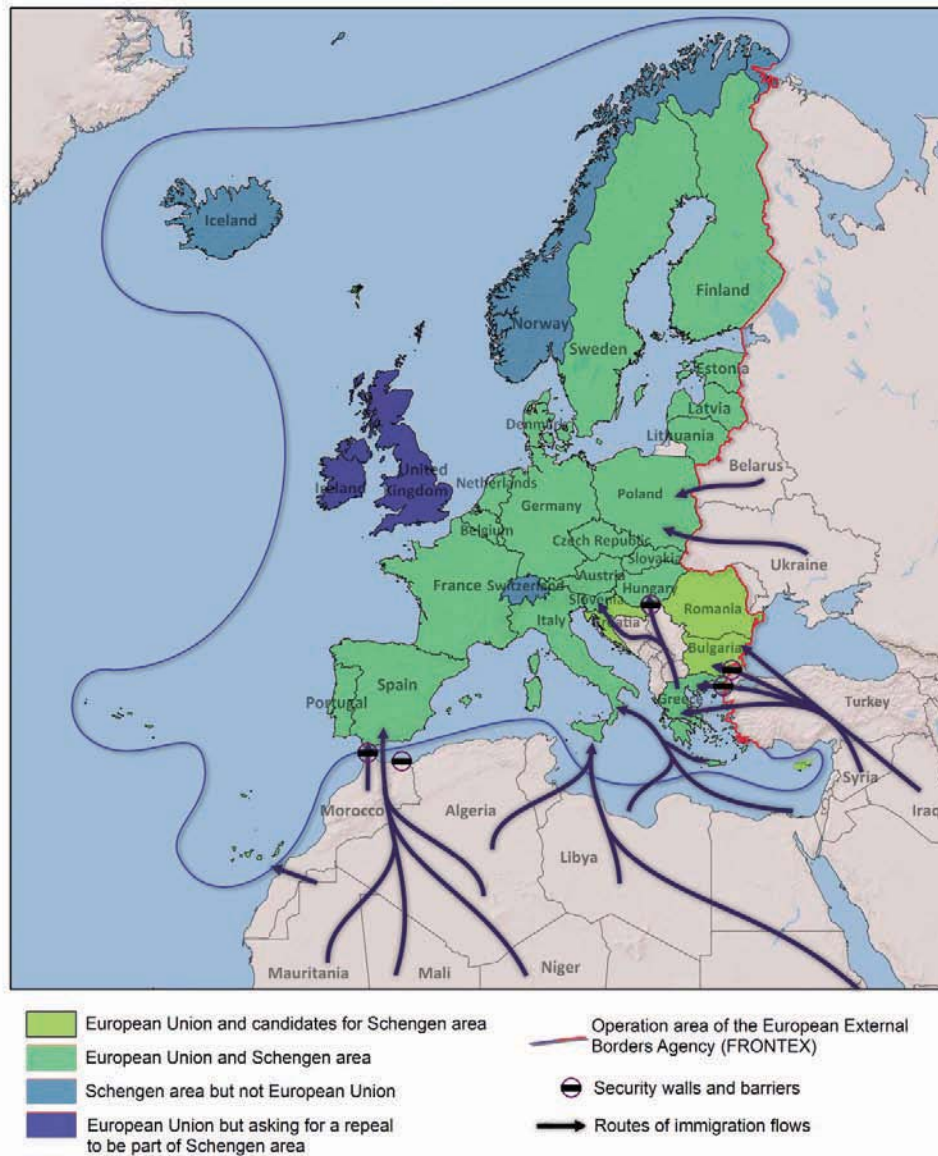


Fig. 15, Map of The European Fortress, 2016. Technical work by Tanausú Pérez García based on data compiled by Josefina Domínguez-Mujica and Ramón Díaz-Hernández.

Colombia; Turkey and Syria; Turkey and Greece; India and Bangladesh; and between Ceuta and Melilla (part of Spain's sovereignty) with Morocco.

The last and most powerful walls are today being built out of the jihadist threat subsequent to the September 11, 2001, attacks in New York, as a way to prevent the possible reaction to the international coalitions fighting and defending Afghanistan and Iraq from radical

Islam. Other factors include the Arab Spring and its consequences; the endless duel between Israel and Hamas in the Gaza Strip; the Syrian conflict and the refugee drama; and the international mobility of the destitute migrants. These have encouraged a number of walls around the world, such as the fence separating Mexico from the United States (U.S.), and the one dividing the West Bank and Israel. Other less-known walls separate Greek Cyprus from Turkish Cyprus; Catholic Ireland and



Fig. 16, People atop the Berlin Wall near the Brandenburg Gate on November 9, 1989. Photograph by Sue Ream, licensed under Creative Commons Attribution 3.0 License.

Protestant Ireland; Saudi Arabia and Yemen; Botswana and Zimbabwe; North Korea and South Korea; India and Pakistan; Thailand and Malaysia; Kirgizstan and Uzbekistan; Morocco and the refugee camps of the POLISARIO Front; and Spain and Gibraltar (United Kingdom). Most recently, new walls are being built to separate Serbia and Hungary, and Greece and Bulgaria.

Furthermore, these boundaries which were once simple partition lines, flexible and porous in the past, have become increasingly harsh and aggressive in the era of globalization. States have found in the new boundaries the best formula of national reaffirmation and fortress demonstration. We must ask if these theoretically

impenetrable frontiers, which are built to convey a sense of confidence and to reinforce the concept of internal and international security, are of good use and at what cost.

New obstacles at the borders, working to enforce yet shield the limits of states, have sophisticated means of observation and very expensive set-ups: radars, sensors, drones, barbed wires, concertinas of cutting blades, flooded pits, landmines, etc., and in spite of all these, a doubtful effectiveness. A large number of migrants cross these barriers every day, and smugglers with banned drugs and cigarettes do not stop supplying their regular customers on the other side of the wall. However, the risk is significant, and an increasing number of people die

while trying to cross the border, fleeing persecution, war, injustices or just hunger. At the same time, the benefits defended by the promoters of walls are not clear, with the exception of electoral gains (to attract the most reactionary social sectors, indulging their security fears and their racial hatred).

Barriers are increasingly valued by those governments wishing to cultivate an image of security and firmness against immigration. This is the case of the concrete wall that the Israeli government built in the West Bank, forcing Palestinians to wait in daily humiliating queues to cross check points controlled by the Israeli army—causing a disorder known as the '*maladie du mur*'. This is also the case with the barrier built by India at the border with Bangladesh, and other countries such as Kenya, Saudi Arabia and Turkey, which permanently reinforce their frontiers with walls and with soldiers to avoid jihadist incursions from their neighboring countries of Somalia, Yemen and Syria, respectively.

During the month of July 2015, the Hungarian government built a barbed wire entanglement with concertinas four meters high along 175 kilometers of its border with Serbia, to stop and prevent the flow of refugees fleeing the armed conflicts in Syria, Iraq and Afghanistan. This wall is very meaningful, given that Hungary is a member of the E.U. and a signatory country of the Schengen agreement, and that Serbia is a candidate to become an E.U. member.

After the Paris attacks on November 13, 2015, the E.U. has decided to reinforce its external frontiers, and xenophobic messages have multiplied in the discourses of the most right-wing parties. This moment is especially

dramatic given the thousands of refugees from Syria, Afghanistan, Iraq and Libya that have since the end of the summer paid large sums of money to human traffickers and completed dangerous journeys by sea and land. A large number of these refugees have died, and others are waiting for a resolution to their asylum applications and to their distribution across the different European countries.

This initiative to reinforce the external frontiers of the E.U. cannot make us forget that the European fortress must not be armored against refugees escaping from religious extremism and terrorism, or from indiscriminate attacks from the Russian Federation, the U.S. or France. Until the conflicts in many Arab countries come to an end, and peaceful coexistence is restored between the different Islamic factions, the priority must be to protect the lives of civil people. In the short term, Europe has a humanitarian duty towards displaced people and asylum seekers. Since the start of the Syrian conflict in 2011, neighboring countries like Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey have hosted a very high number of refugees. Europe must not lag behind, and the construction of new walls is not the answer. The most viable alternative to reduce the movement of refugees is to search for a lasting solution, and a peace to the armed conflicts in Middle Eastern countries which guarantees decent living conditions for all their populations.

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