

The impacts of wall-building politics on international tourism flows: The case of Hungary

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Historical evidence suggests that economic differences between populations induce ethnic tensions and national rivalry which, in turn, trigger mass migrations. The building of walls for protection of citizens from such external threats has been a common political choice, specifically that of great empires. In modern Western societies, built upon democratic principles, however, wall-building politics to shut down the mass influx of refugees from conflict regions is in fundamental contrast with the unalienable human rights of free movement and non-refoulement. In 2015, global forced displacement of people hit the highest record since the United Nations Refugee Agency (UNHCR) records began, with a total of 65.3 million people displaced from their homes by conflict and persecution (UNHCR, 2016). At the same time, the definition of refugee has changed from being victims to a problem or threat that must be solved by – often less altruistic – government intervention (Peters&Besley 2015; Poku&Graham, 1998). With reference to the actual case of president-elect Donald Trump’s executive order to erect a wall on the US-Mexican border, the present paper addresses this issue by investigating and comparing the legal background of recently built walls around Europe. In the first instance, European and national laws will be compared in order to understand the legal base of these initiatives (Hungary, Austria, Britain-funded Calais in France, Norway and Turkey), as well as the potentially underlying ethnic and religious motivations. Second, in order to understand the impacts on international tourism flows, the case of Hungary will be used. The national laws applied on the justification of the 175 km-long safety border lock on the Hungarian-Croatian border will be identified and the related changes in tourism flows in 2015-2016 will be analysed.

Key Words : refugees, crisis, wall-building, tourism, Hungary

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