

MIGRANT CRISIS

PROJECT SYNDICATE

European solidarity in a world of crises



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Commission continues to support Greece's side with a new Structural Reform Support Service, as well as by providing technical assistance at every step of what is still a long journey.

At the same time, European solidarity continues to be tested by the refugee crisis. Earlier this year, the European Commission put forward a comprehensive migration policy and took immediate steps to manage the crisis. We tripled our presence in the Mediterranean Sea, helping to save lives. We fought back against the criminal networks of smugglers and traffickers. We showed solidarity by agreeing to relocate among our member states those people most in need of international protection.

We have now started resettling refugees from outside of Europe, and are working closely with Turkey, which plays a crucial role in the region. We have also launched a new partnership with Africa to address the root causes of migration. And our EU agencies continue to help the often-

on commitments taken at the highest political level has been so difficult.

For example, summit after summit, leaders say they will send border guards to help Greece protect our external borders, or financial aid to help our neighbours in Jordan, Lebanon, and Turkey cope with the large number of refugees there. Each time, weeks go by with targets unmet and commitments unfulfilled. Instead, we get a tired blame game pitting EU states against one another; a race to the bottom in which national governments downgrade their asylum systems to make them less attractive than those of the country next door; and politicians from left to right nourishing a populism that brings only anger, not solutions.

It is time we had a little more faith in Europe's ability to provide collective solutions to problems felt acutely and independently by each EU member state. Doing away with EU asylum laws will not take away national obligations to abide by

EU's external borders. Here, too, the solutions are necessarily European.

If I were to compare the timelines for the refugee crisis and the financial crisis, I would say we are now in February 2010, when European countries still thought that the tools they had at the national level were sufficient to address problems that we now know required a coordinated, European response.

European solidarity must prevail. The atrocious attacks in Paris in November were an attack on the European way of life. But we will not concede defeat. We will not give in to fear by rebuilding walls so recently torn down. We will not confuse the perpetrators of these heinous crimes with those fleeing in their wake.

Europe – the love of my life. This brave continent. This noble people. A place perceived worldwide as being safe and just. We will live up to that reputation. We will show our resilience.

European integration is a multifaceted

THE end of the year is always a time for taking stock. At the end of 2015, we can look back on a year when European solidarity – at the risk of sounding overly dramatic – withstood what may have been the greatest trials it has faced since the end of World War II.

European solidarity was severely tested through much of the year by the Greek crisis – the economic and social impacts of which continue to be felt in the eurozone and throughout the European Union. Since the start of the year, the talks on Greece have tried the patience of us all. Much time and trust were lost. Bridges

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Europe can't avoid dealing with the refugee crisis.

PHOTO: AFP

were burned. Words were spoken that cannot easily be taken back. We saw Europe's democracies being played against one another.

Collectively, Europe looked into the abyss. And it was only when we were at the brink that we were able to step back. In the end, the EU's member states stood by Greece, commitments were made, implemented and adhered to, and a new programme is now in place. European solidarity prevailed, and trust has started to recover. The key now will be delivery on reforms, and the European

overburdened national authorities in the most affected Member States identify, screen and fingerprint incoming migrants, speed up the processing of asylum-seekers, and coordinate the return of those who do not qualify.

If it seems as though the EU has all the solutions for its troubles the reason is that, in theory, we really do. The reality, however, is somewhere further afield. I may sound like a broken record, but I am still at a loss as to why following through

the humanitarian principle and requirement under international law to offer asylum to those in need. On the contrary, it is a common standard for the way EU countries treat asylum requests that creates a fair system and prevents people from flocking to one place.

Similarly, a European Border and Coast Guard that does not rely on individual states' willingness or political opportunity to commit resources will enable us to restore order and effectively manage the

and often complicated affair. We do not always get it right the first time. But if I could describe Europe with just one word, it would be "perseverance." Collectively, we are stronger than the challenges that confront us. Together, we will unite in the face of that which seeks to divide us. We will persevere in 2016. And we will thrive.

The writer is President of the European Commission. Copyright: Project Syndicate, 2015. www.project-syndicate.org (Exclusive to The Daily Star)