

Kos, Bodrum: The Mediterranean's Desperate Refugees and a Dying Child

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Para gliders are flying over the stunning emerald sea. Summer hordes are descending on a Greek island of Kos from all corners of increasingly aggressive European Union. On the faces of visitors, there seems to be no regret, no shame, that Europe just raped and humiliated Greece, forcing its government to cancel democracy, instead succumbing to dictate of the mighty Germany and other dictatorial powers.

Tourists are busy frying themselves, stuffing their stomachs with seafood and boozing up in countless cafes, bars and restaurants of the old city. Hotels and eateries are packed. It is yet another hot and sunny day. Crisis? What crises? Yes, it is somewhere... there, maybe in Athens, or maybe just outside the city center.



These lucky few Syrians just given papers to go to Athens

A few minutes away, in a local hospital, which is part of Greek collapsing national healthcare system; an Iraqi child is suffering, perhaps dying, from cancer. He is only 3 years old. His

mother most likely passed away trying to reach Kos.

“We found him in a park”, explains Hara, a receptionist from Triton Hotel. “He looked terribly sick. We took him to the hospital, but there, nobody wanted to do anything. We had to scream and demand that this poor child would be attended. They put several IV tubes into his tiny body, and then... nothing else. We called *Medicine Sans Frontiers* in Athens, but they said they couldn’t deal with such a complicated case. We have no idea what to do. If action is not taken immediately, he will most likely die.”

In Kos, refugees are literally everywhere, but most of them are forced to sleep in the parks, or hide behind the bushes. There is no “official” camp here. Immigrants have been coming from Bangladesh, Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria and several other countries that got destabilized by the Western interventions, sanctions and foreign policy.



Refugees in Kos

At a provisory refugee center, based at a former hotel “Captain Elias”, several hundreds of mostly South Asians are now living in appalling conditions, with no drinking water and only on one meal a day. Here only 3 social workers come to help, for a few hours a day. Only one doctor pays regular visits to the facility where people suffer from countless serious diseases, as well as from exhaustion and constant stress.

“This is not a living”, I am told in one of big tents inhabited by several Pakistani men. “We don’t know how long it will take to get registered. I am already waiting for 15 days and it may take much longer. People here are desperate. There is hardly any help. We feel that we are on our own.”

Camps across the water, in Turkey, are much better and much more humane. They count with decent sanitation, food and water, even sports and recreational facilities. But these are

just temporary refugee camps, for those fleeing regional conflicts, not some “waiting rooms” for entering the European Union. For those who want to go West, Turkish refugee facilities are basically useless.

Tension in Kos is high. One taxi driver began insulting me, right after learning that I am heading for Captain Elias provisory refugee center. He obviously hated the idea that I will be exposing plight of the refugees. “Are you a journalist? You journalists already destroyed local economy!” Journalists? I wonder aloud. Not Germans, not the European Union? As far as he, and some others, is concerned, Kos Island should be only promoted, as a paradisiacal tourist destination; it should not be defined as yet another part of the country that is now heading for almost inevitable collapse.



Greek patrol boat returning to Kos

Some Greeks show solidarity, by bring food to the refugees, but others treat them badly, and even stubbornly denying that there are already hundreds, perhaps thousands of them on the island. In fact, around 7.000 refugees crossed the sea and landed in Kos in the first 5 months of 2015. More than 2.000 died or are missing at sea, trying to cross Mediterranean to Southern Europe, in the same period of 2015.

Stories told by the refugees are inconsistent, and each testimony different. Refugees are scared or desperate or both. Some say that police is harassing them but that local people are “not bad”, while others blame local people but insisting that police is “OK”, mainly because “it does nothing”.

Lena, a young Russian lady from the Altai Mountains who already lives in Greece for more

than eleven years, is working in a small inn located just down the road from the Captain Elias facility. She says that refugees who come to Kos are desperate, but decent human beings:

“There is no increase in crime rates since they arrived. We are not scared of them, but the entire situation is out of control.”



Battleship patrolling between Turkey and Greece

“Refugees are being smuggled by gangs, or they come on board tiny inflatable boats. When they are crossing from Turkey to Greece, they carry small knives. If intercepted by coastguard of police, they destroy their boats and jump to the water. Greek authorities then have to rescue them and to take them to the island.” Lena has a boyfriend who is a policeman; she is well informed.

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Bodrum, Turkish luxury resort and a historic city, shows no signs of economic hardship. It is well-organized, beautiful and confident city.

Just half an hour from Kos on board a Turkish high-speed catamaran (or one hour sail using slow Greek ferry), Bodrum is elegant, even hedonistic.

Bodrum does not have any refugee camps either, but many immigrants use it as a departure point for the European Union, namely Greece.



Could this really be a refugee camp in EU

Turkey is flooded with refugees, who are coming from all over the Middle East, destabilized or outright destroyed by the West. Many immigrants are travelling all the way from Bangladesh, Pakistan, India, Afghanistan and numerous other places. Officially, from Syria alone, there are almost 2 million refugees on the Turkish territory. Refugee camps are located in the Southeast of the country (near Hatay), in Ankara and other areas, but not in and around the tourist centers like Bodrum.



Refugees transiting in Bodrum

At Bodrum central bus station, on the second floor, several Syrian, Bangladeshi, Afghani, Pakistani and other immigrants now inhabit almost entire market area. These are those who had chosen to go either to Greece/EU or to Turkey's largest city - Istanbul. Turkish police is closing its eyes, or it simply does not know what to do.

"Here in Turkey we can easily register and get help", explains an Afghani man in his early 30's. "But then we would have to go to one of the official camps, and stay in Turkey."

Alternatives are horrific: unsafe, mostly nocturnal travel over the sea to Greece, to one of the 15 islands that are near the Turkish coast.

I am told that the going rate per person/crossing is around 2.000 euro, and if one wants to travel all the way from Pakistan to Germany, the price could easily go as high as 5.000 to 6.000 euros. Some economic refugees get backing from their clans and villages back home, but for genuine refugees escaping war in places like Syria, such prices are simply astronomical.

I am then told a story: several Afghani and Pakistani refugees tried, recently, to cross from Bodrum to Kos. Their flimsy boat was intercepted by Greek armed vessel. I was told that the boat belonged to coastguard and that the refugees were pulled on board and attacked, severely beaten.

"They beat us up, hit our faces, and kicked us all over. Then they demanded 100 euro from each person. "



His back was kicked



They say he was beaten by Greek coast guard

A man had exposed ugly bruises on his arms, legs and back.

I have no way of confirming the story. Was it really Greek authority or some maritime mafia that attacked the refugees? It is a testimony of several people who tried to cross, but did not make it.

I know that they will try again, soon.

Is it worth it?

“Many of us prefer to stay in Turkey,” I am told. “They treat us much better here.”

But others are not giving up. To some, Europe means money. To others it means safety and future. They are trying; they are getting caught, trying again. Reception they get in Europe, not just in Greece, is horrific. But they are still ready to go. Back there, where they come from, there are burned villages and nightmares, wars, conflicts, destitute.

Whole countries, entire regions, are destroyed, ravished, by the West. Syria is at war provoked by Washington, London and now fed by Ankara and other NATO and regional allies of the West. ISIS armed and supported by the West are on insane rampage. Pakistan and Bangladesh are economically and socially ruined. Afghanistan and Iraq destroyed by direct attacks and occupations of both the United States and members of the European Union.

Most of inhabitants of Kos do not seem to understand the concept. Or they don't want to. They see their own hardship, that of Greece. There is very little space left for suffering of others.

Flying from Kos to Athens, a Greek traveller had been reading my piece from his back row seat, shamelessly. After landing, he began protesting:

“Bodrum is a Greek city, not Turkish!”

Then he went further:

“You write about the refugee crises? So why don't you give us some solution?”

“Because I still did not finish my piece”, I tried to be patient.

“So what is the solution?” He insists. It all feels rough and confrontational.

“The United States and European Union should stop murdering people all over the Middle East and elsewhere. Then the refugees would have no reason to come!”

He does not understand the concept. He does not know what am I talking about:

“But as it is, Europe has no more space for the refugees!” he protests.

“Other countries do not have patience tolerating Western invasions”, I reply. “Refugees are coming only because their nations were ruined by the US and Europe! Before that, Syria, Libya and Iraq were rich countries. They were absorbing migrant workers from the entire region.”

Greece, itself battered, damaged, humiliated and destroyed by the European Union, does not seem to be able to translate its own experience to some global context.

Few hours earlier, a lady receptionist in one of the hotels in Kos suggested, “several leaders in the Middle East should get assassinated by Europe or the US.” That was her idea how to end the refugee crises.

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Children refugees

On June 15, 2015, the UN Refugee Agency UNHCR produced Briefing Notes:

UNHCR is stepping up its field presence in the eastern Aegean islands of Greece where in recent weeks sea arrivals from Turkey have been averaging some 600 people a day, straining limited (and in some cases non-existent) local reception capacities.

In the first five months of 2015, over 42,000 people arrived by sea to Greece, most of them refugees. This is six times the level of the same period last year (6,500) and almost the same as the total for all of 2014 (43,500).

More than 90 per cent of the people arriving are from refugee-producing countries, principally Syria (over 60 per cent of arrivals this year), Afghanistan, Iraq, Somalia and Eritrea.

All countries mentioned in this briefing are either totally destroyed or economically and socially damaged (often through crippling sanctions) by the West.

It takes great discipline not to see who is responsible for this crisis.

Greek people were, for years and decades, bombarded by mass media propaganda. Like most of their counterparts in Western Europe, they are now conditioned to blame victims, not the real perpetrators.

Even in the neighboring Turkey, there are loud and clear voices declaring: "We wanted to be 'big boys' of the Middle East, we helped to damage our neighbors, then it is now our responsibility to feed those who were forced to leave". Editorials like this are all over Turkish newspapers.

Most of Greeks that I encountered do not see such connection: NATO - EU - and destruction of countless countries that is triggering the refugee crises.

They should see. Greece is still both NATO and the EU member. What was done to Greece, very recently, only shows that it is both a victim and a victimizer.

As a victimizer it has to take full responsibility for those whose lives were damaged by the "organizations" of which it is a full member.

As a victim, it should raise and fight against those who insulted and harmed it (and many others) - the EU, the NATO, the IMF - instead of throwing its wrath and spite against some poor, defenseless people who had lost their country, their home; everything except the bare lives!

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Great cultures are not only based on their past. Great cultures have to be great now, and to be built on true internationalism, on humanism, on solidarity, generosity and compassion.

This little Iraqi boy, fighting for his life in the hospital in Kos, should be a rallying cry for the Greek humanists.



3 years old Iraqi child Mohammed going to Athens after all!

He should be helped by all means, instead of being abandoned to his terrible fate. But until now he is receiving very little help! He should be assisted especially now, when the Greece itself is in distress. Solidarity is the most precious during the most difficult times!

Wake up, people! The boy is not just some "Iraqi refugee": he is a fellow human being. He is just 3 years old boy, damn it, and he is suffering from terrible pain, and soon he may die.

Battle for his life would be the real battle for great Greece; a country that could show how big is her heart, elevating herself well above that morally declining West!

As a child lies in agony, thousands of tourists nearby are downing expensive food and drinks. While the Greek social net and medical system is basically collapsing. Something is breaking right in front of my eyes, breaking irreversibly. What is left of "Western culture" is smashed to pieces. Europe, how dare you, shame on you!

Remember, this "Iraqi" boy in the hospital, he is your child too, Greece. But if you don't act, he will turn to your specter!

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Andre Vltchek is a philosopher, novelist, filmmaker and investigative journalist. He covered wars and conflicts in dozens of countries. His latest books are: "[Exposing Lies Of The Empire](#)" and "[Fighting Against Western Imperialism](#)". Discussion with Noam Chomsky: [On Western Terrorism. Point of No Return](#) is his critically acclaimed political novel. [Oceania](#) – a book on Western imperialism in the South Pacific. His provocative book about Indonesia: "[Indonesia – The Archipelago of Fear](#)". Andre is making films for teleSUR and Press TV. After living for many years in Latin America and Oceania, Vltchek presently resides and works in East Asia and the Middle East. He can be reached through his [website](#) or his [Twitter](#).

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