

Professor Reiterer, Immigration policy in Europe: between demography, values and war
Saturday, 12 March 2022

Question by Omi Hatashin

RE the geopolitical instrumentalization of the principles of the refugee convention by Belarus to force an EU member state to suffer dilemma of accepting or rejecting apparent asylum seekers ultimately from Syria across the boundary.

The priority of media attention seems to have overtaken by the Russian aggression in Ukraine from the disturbing images of barbed-wire fencing on the Polish border with Belarus and violence against seemingly helpless people on the Belarus side of the border. You rightly condemn the instrumentalization or weaponization of refugees. It seems to me to be the case that Vladimir Putin has been exploiting Western norms of the free press, human rights and democracy in order to subvert and undermine these norms and institutions, generally, and for decades. What I am asking is whether there is a smart way of safeguarding the Western values against Putin's weaponization of these values for his subversive, aggressive and imperialist purposes.

Suppose that there is a group of Syrian women and children, who are helped by the Russians and the Belarussians to escape from their well-founded fear of persecution and imminent threat to their lives in Syria, placed on the Belarussian territory adjacent to Poland, and encouraged to cross the border to seek asylum in Poland. Suppose that they all fully satisfy the criteria of being a refugee under the Status of Refugee Convention. Suppose that they have no ulterior political motive in seeking asylum. Only the Presidents of Russia and Belarus have such motives. On what ground can Poland refuse to recognise them as refugees?