

# Prague European Summit 2016 City Talks

## The Future of the Schengen Cooperation

The June edition of **Café Evropa** was rather special since it took place as one of the **City Talks under this year's Prague European Summit**. The debate revolved around The Future of the Schengen Cooperation. The panelists featured were **Vasillis Ntousas** (International Relations Policy Advisor, Foundation for European Progressive Studies) and **Krzysztof Bolesła** (Director of Research, Polityka Insight), with Martin Michelot (Head of research, EUROPEUM Institute for European Policy) moderating the discussion.

The debate reflected the uncertain, though probably dire, future prospects of the Schengen cooperation in the context of the ongoing migration crisis, which, according to Vasillis Ntousas, has **"acutely exposed both deficiencies and lack of solidarity at a European level"**. European solutions have widely been discredited as inefficient, in part due to lack of solidarity, which amongst the V4 countries has widely led to the perception that the brunt of the migration crisis is carried by countries on the external border, most notably Hungary. However, Ntousas pointed out that **Greece is one of the most affected countries by**



**"Migration crisis has acutely exposed both deficiencies and lack of solidarity at a European level."**



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**the refugee crisis, more than any V4 country.** Greece is still reeling from the financial crisis of 2008, having lost 60 % of its GDP, state employee salaries cut in half, all while watching the EU being unable to react timely and decisively. Given those circumstances and given the scale and intensity of the migration flows, Ntousas argued that **Greece has managed the crisis reasonably well.** "I would give it 5.5 out of 10," he said half-jokingly.

Bolesła echoed these sentiments, stating that **"solidarity has become an empty word that is used opportunistically; we ask for it when we need it, yet we do not give it when asked to"**. He further argued that politics have taken a turn to the cynical side as several European member states are leaning towards right-wing politics. In order for this to change, he argued, **a new paradigm in which Brussels and the EU is incorporated into and viewed as compatible with national politics needs to be adopted.** The consequences could otherwise be a fall of Schengen, which in itself would be a great loss, but more fundamentally a **"loss of trust that will take ages to recover"**.

Both panelists described **Schengen as the biggest success of European integration**, citing tangible economic benefits, even necessities, as no country can survive alone in a globalized world. However, there are also important social and human dimensions, which both panelists argued are too often ignored, pointing to the Brexit debates as a case in point. These dimensions are equally essential as the economic one, and resonate back to the aforementioned deficiencies and lack of solidarity, as the intensity of the refugee crisis has created a distorted, securitized debate between management of the crisis and European values, which has led to inhumane treatment of refugees. Lastly, both speakers **warned against the opportunistic capitalization on the crisis**, which most notably Hungary's Viktor Orbán has done. According to both speakers, the Schengen's future hinges on turning the tide of right-wing populists, which both argue is absolutely necessary; the consequences of a collapsed Schengen are too dire to contemplate.



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