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Let us help make refugees' countries safe to live in

Sir, The Special European Council Summit held in Brussels last week on the illegal migrant crises in Italy decided to triple the budget of the EU Frontex border operations at sea. But follow-up needs to go far beyond just dealing with the migrants as they come. Donald Tusk, Council president, rightly points out that the EU must “discourage the victims from putting their lives at risk”, which means finding sustainable long-term solutions in the countries of origin. Europe has already invested in security, focusing mostly on high tech surveillance for deterrence at the borders. But more sophisticated and expensive border control devices are unlikely to stem the flow of desperate people from destroyed states.

Along with Mr Tusk, many of the EU ministers have recognised the importance of stabilising communities immediately as hostilities cease. The UK and German development ministers note the lack of basic services in post-conflict countries as essential “security” concerns and have asked to “vanquish the causes of flight”.

So what are the causes of flight? Research by the Norwegian think-tank FAFO show that people living in insecure settings actually value food, health and employment more than shortlived peace agreements. What we need are solutions in the countries of origin. We need the many first rate EU institutions, experienced in these settings, to find innovative answers. For example, we could engage the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control, similar to the US CDC, to back up post-conflict disease surveillance.

We also need the humanitarian and development services of the EU member states to be drawn in explicitly in this discussion. Toppling unsavoury governments is not the end of the line. It is at best, a halfway point.

Peace dividends from these interventions must include the interests of the civil population and their basic needs. They must include ways to monitor emerging diseases, youth education and measures to discourage draining of professional staff.

Such actions in the countries of origin may indeed respond to Mr Tusk's appeal to ‘discourage people from risking their lives’. Refugees, like all of us, much prefer to stay home rather than undertake perilous voyages. Let us help them to do so.

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