
Merkel Warns of 'Chaos' in Greece as Refugees Mass at Border

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The violence at Greece's northern frontier on Monday underscores the risk of a refugee bottleneck in a country that set off Europe's debt crisis in 2010 and made austerity pledges to win its third international bailout last year. In a television interview, Merkel said shielding Greece is on the agenda of a European Union summit with Turkish officials on March 7.

"We didn't keep Greece in the euro only to leave a country that's part of the euro zone and the Schengen area -- a country that has many problems -- in the lurch," Merkel said on ARD television late Sunday. Euro-area countries "fought to the limit" to keep Greece in the currency union and can't now stand by and "plunge Greece into chaos, so to speak."

[QuickTake Europe's Refugee Crisis](#)

Merkel's combative tone signaled her determination to keep Europe's borders open and avoid unraveling the so-called Schengen area of passport-free travel and commerce, which she says benefits Germany's economy. Finance Minister Wolfgang Schaeuble signaled Saturday Germany may be willing to give Greece some leeway as it struggles with the twin tasks of overhauling the economy and caring for an influx of refugees.

Two weeks before facing voters in three German states, Merkel stood firm in rejecting border closings, saying an open Europe is in Germany's interest. Last year's arrival of about 1 million refugees in Europe's biggest migrant crisis since World War II has eroded Merkel's approval rating, cut into her Christian Democratic Union's support and prompted attacks against her policy from the leaders of the other two parties in her coalition.

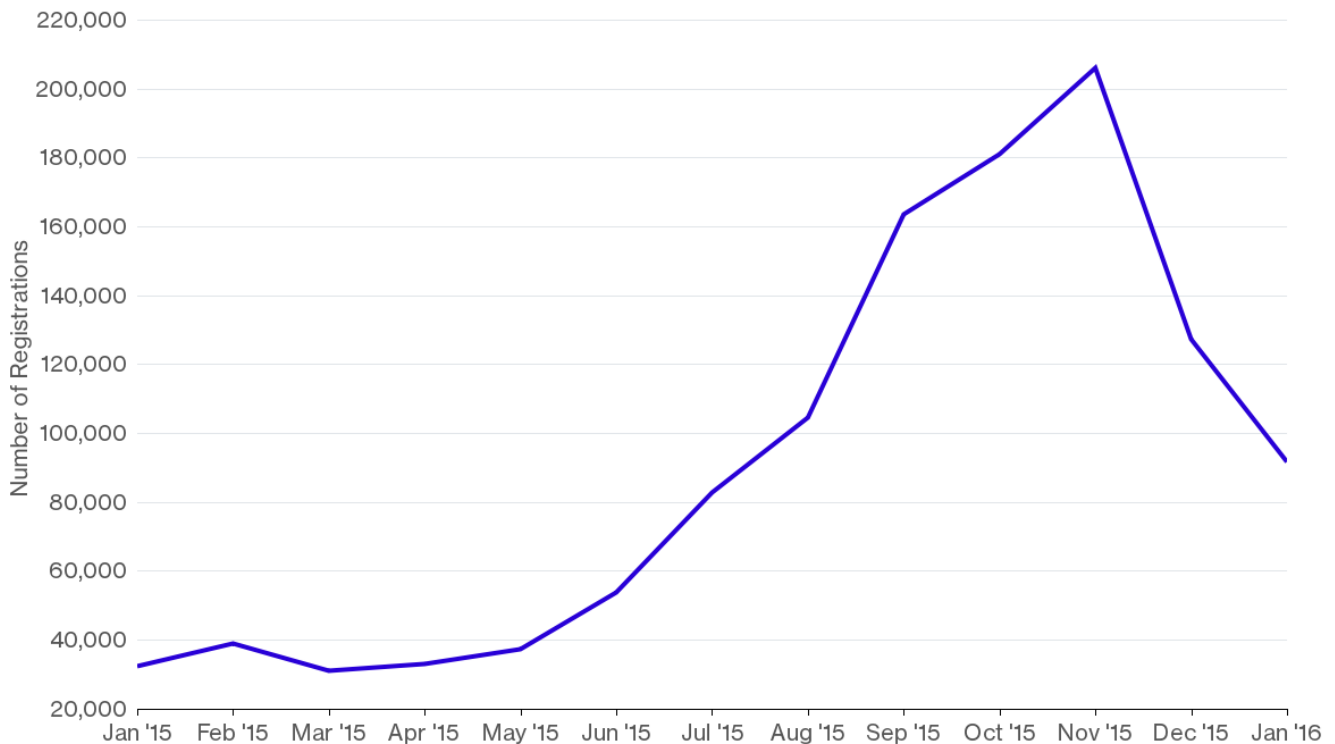
In another challenge to Merkel, Macedonia joined its northern Balkan neighbors and Austria last weekend in restricting the number of refugees it's allowing into the country. Macedonian police [pushed back](#) about 5,000 migrants on Monday after some broke through a border fence, police spokeswoman Dejana Nedeljkovic said by phone.

'My Damned Duty'

"It's a difficult path and it isn't easy," Merkel said. "It's my damned duty to do everything to see that Europe finds a common approach." A solution for Germany means thinking in terms of Europe and beyond. "Only if you believe in yourself can you achieve success."

German Refugee Influx Wanes

Number of monthly arrivals down 56 percent from November peak



Source: Federal Office for Migration and Refugees
Monthly registrations in the EASY database; missing and duplicate entries can't be excluded;
EASY registrations not the same as number of asylum seekers.

Bloomberg

Pressure on Merkel to restrict the influx at the German border is also growing in her own party. Four of five Germans say their vote in the state ballots on March 13 will be determined by parties' refugee policies, according to an Insa poll for Bild newspaper published Monday.

"I wish the chancellor lots of success at the summit in making European measures work, because otherwise we'll have to take national measures as well," Reiner Haseloff, a CDU member who's running for re-election as premier of the eastern state of Saxony, said in a ZDF television interview. Also going to the polls are the western regions of Baden-Wuerttemberg and Rhineland-Palatinate.

Borders Closing

Merkel upheld her effort to enlist Turkey in helping reduce the flow of refugees from countries such as Syria, citing signs of progress and warning that even the March 7 summit with Turkish Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoglu won't reduce the influx to zero. Merkel and Davutoglu spoke by phone on Sunday to discuss cooperation between Germany and Turkey, Hurriyet newspaper reported, citing Turkey's Anadolu news agency.

"I am deeply convinced that the path I've taken is the right one," Merkel said. "I am very optimistic that the European approach will succeed. This is not at all the time to think about alternatives."

Tensions in Europe escalated on Friday as Greece denied an Austrian request for talks after the Austrian government said it was introducing a daily quota on refugees. Greek officials have warned of the risk of a humanitarian crisis if migrants are prevented from heading north.

"The financial situation is difficult," Schaeuble told reporters at a Group of 20 meeting in Shanghai. "We are strongly fighting to combine the European tasks," he said of the refugee crisis and economic reforms in Greece.
