



EDUCATIONAL OBSERVATION DOSSIER THE FRENCH-ITALIAN BORDER

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SANTIMIGLIA 8.5 SP 1

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Mentone

Catalan Commission for Refugees and
SOS Racism Catalonia

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EDUCATIONAL OBSERVATION DOSSIER. THE FRENCH-ITALIAN BORDER

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1. What can we use to work with students through the analysis of the refugee situation on the French-Italian border?

In May 2018 a team of human-rights observers from the Catalan Commission for Refugees (CCAR) and SOS Racisme visited the French municipal areas of Menton and Briançon, and the Italian areas of Ventimiglia, Claviere, Oulx and Bardonecchia. The aim of their mission was to directly observe, first hand, the management of migratory controls and the situation with respect to international protection at land-based entry points on the French-Italian border.

This material was supplemented with previously-made reports to assess the border and report any human rights violations that occurred within European territory. An observation report and the following pedagogical dossier arose from the facts learned about these situations.

The following contents and those basic skills required at secondary and baccalaureate level can be worked on using this educational dossier [1]:

Contents:

- The causes of forced displacements
- Human rights and needs
- The rights of refugees
- Empathy and dialogue
- Concepts: migrants and refugees
- Vulnerable groups
- Empathy and dialogue
- Stereotypes, prejudice and rumours
- A critical view of the policies

Basic Skills:

- Communication, language and audio visual
- Social and citizenship public awareness
- Knowledge and interaction with the physical world
- Independence, personal initiative and entrepreneurship

[1] For more teaching activities about refugees, see the Refugee Briefcase: www.maletarefugi.ccar.cat

2. What is happening at the French-Italian border?

On 11 June 2015, France unilaterally restored border controls with Italy and other countries. From that moment on, the small town of Ventimiglia, on the Italian side of the border, became one of the border points with the most conflict within the EU in terms of human rights. People arriving from countries in the Middle East, the Maghreb, Eritrea, Nigeria and Somalia were added to those who were made to stop there. When they were not allowed to cross the border, they constructed improvised settlements, and despite being dismantled by the police on several occasions, these structures became part of the landscape on the outskirts of the town. Meanwhile, between September 2016 and August 2017, up to 15 people died in accidents, whilst trying to cross the border.

Due to an increased number of arrests and returns on the French side of the border, refugees have been forced to find alternatives, and now use more dangerous routes in the north, basically in the high Alpine regions. In Briançon, the local council estimates that since July 2017 there have been around 3 thousand illegal immigrants (59% of whom were underage). Unfortunately, the number of news items concerning those who have gone missing or who have died on their journeys, which are often in vain, has also increased. Many do not know that, under the Dublin III Regulation, asylum seekers whose fingerprints have been taken and registered in Italy may automatically be returned to that country for their request to be considered.



Outside of an improvised reception center in France. Photo: Fotomovimiento

Unit 1. French-Italian Routes

1) Concept

Although European external borders have been the focus of attention in the eyes of the international media in recent years, the situation on the dividing lines that separate the states themselves from the European Union has been somewhat ignored.

2) Situations:

•The Routes between France and Italy

- From Ventimiglia to Menton

According to the records provided by the charity organisation 'Caritas Intemelia', it attended 2,898 people between February and April 2018. 90% were men and 21% were children.

- From Bardonecchia to Briançon

This route, which connects the Italian Susa Valley with the French Alps, crosses the mountainous Alps region via Col de l'Échelle. In winter the temperatures are extremely cold (-15 / -20°C) and the region's peaks reach heights of over 1,700 metres.

- From Oulx to Briançon, via Claviere

This route, which is longer (some 8 to 12 hours) but a little less hazardous in terms of safety, runs overland between Bardonecchia and Briançon. Migrants continue to arrive from different points of Italy, in buses, cars or trains.

3) Activity. Would you leave your own home?

Recommended activity for high school and adults. Briefly explain what refugees are, and describe the various routes and situations that they have to face trying to cross the border between France and Italy.

Watch the following video, where reporters from Sinfiltros.com talk about the conditions facing refugees on the Alpine routes:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EYOJ9vP7WNc>

Then begin the game entitled Would you leave your own home?: CCAR Teaching Briefcase (Page 41)



Improvised reception center in France. Photo: Fotomovimiento

Unit 2. The Rise of the Far Right

1) Concept. Hate Speech

Despite the frequent use of the term, there is no universally accepted-definition of "hate speech" as such. Although many European states have passed laws that prohibit it, their definitions differ slightly in determining that which is being prohibited. The Committee of the Council of Europe of Ministers has defined hate speech as being "understood as that which covers all forms of expression that propagate, incite, promote or justify racial hatred, xenophobia, anti-Semitism or other forms of hatred based on intolerance, including xenophobia expressed by aggressive nationalism and ethnocentrism, discrimination and hostility against minorities, migrants and people of immigrant origin." In this sense, hate speech covers those comments directed against a person or a specific group of people [2].



Road linking France and Italy. Photo: Fotomovimiento

2) Situation

In France, despite efforts to link the terrorist attacks of 2015 and insecurity to refugees, extreme right-wing parties and associations, such as the Front National (renamed as the Rassemblement National [3]) or Génération Identitaire[4], do not receive the majority support of the French population. However, the numbers of those who sympathise with these organisations has increased, which is evidence of the polarization of public opinion. This is a trend that we are seeing repeated in our studies of different countries in the European Union [5].

[2] Weber, A.(2009). Manual on Hate Speech. Council of Europe:
https://en.europenews.dk/_ws/mediabase/_ts_1434707046000/archive/files/Manual_on_Hate_Speech.pdf

[3] For more information: <https://www.rassemblementnational.fr/terme/internet/>

[4] For more information: <https://generationidentitaire.org/>

[5] European Social Survey (2017). Attitudes towards Immigration in Europe: Myths and Realities:
https://www.europeansocialsurvey.org/docs/findings/IE_Handout_FINAL.pdf

In the case of Italy, we have especially witnessed the rise of parties or associations of the extreme right, the policies used against the reception of asylum-seekers in European territory and the tough rhetoric used by the main political actors in the country against rescues and NGOs present in the Mediterranean.

On 1 June 2018, Matteo Salvini, the political leader of the Liga Nord became the new Interior Minister and Vice President of the Council of Ministers of the Republic of Italy. In a matter of a few days, the consequences were catastrophic in terms of human rights. On 18 June, 630 people arrived at the port of Valencia on board the ship 'Aquarius', as, after having been rescued, they were not given permission to disembark in Italy [6]. A few days later, 224 people rescued and described as "human meat" by Salvini, received the same response from the Italian Government [7].

At a local level, the results of the Liga Nord show an alarming increase in the amount of supports in those Italian regions where reception or transit takes place. In Ventimiglia, the party's voter numbers (298 votes in 2013) multiplied by twelve in the elections of March 2018, to reach 3,343.



Beach of Ventimiglia. Photo: Fotomovimiento

[6] El País (2018). Los 630 del 'Aquarius' reciben un permiso especial de residencia de 45 días: https://politica.elpais.com/politica/2018/06/17/actualidad/1529260520_318470.html

[7] El País (2018). Salvini redobla su desafío y cierra los puertos a otro barco con 224 migrantes: https://elpais.com/internacional/2018/06/21/actualidad/1529585899_085787.html

3) Activity. Would you leave your own home?

Recommended activity for secondary school students. By adapting the terms used in the students' age group, explain the concept and the scenario behind the surge of extreme right-wing popularity in both France and Italy. Then begin the game "What are they saying?" from the educational briefcase of the Catalan Commission for Refugees (page 30 of the Refugee Briefcase of the Catalan Commission for Refugees).

Unit 3. Public Support

1) Concept

Defining the concept of "public support" is more complicated than it may seem at first. When you ask your class to define it, terms such as kindness or altruism are likely to be included in most responses. However, the degree of involvement that people who lend their support to such issues may also be a topic for debate.

2) Situation

Despite not representing a real threat to their integrity (in the words of some refugee-aid workers), some of them receive insults from some inhabitants of Ventimiglia. These facts, which might be considered as isolated, contribute to an increased sense of rejection towards those working in the region. There are also difficult situations for local establishments that have shown support towards migrants, this is the case of the Hobbit Bar, which is today boycotted by locals from the town.



Provisional help offered by Red Cross (the Alps). Photo: Fotomovimiento

3) Activity. Class debate

Briefly explain the concept and situation behind the shows of support manifest on the border between France and Italy. Next, watch the following video from Doctors without Borders that covers the events at the Hobbit Bar in Ventimiglia.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Djxbz3If5rY>

Create a space for debate and reflection in the class:

- Did you anticipate the boycott of the Bar Hobbit?
- Have you heard about public support in your own town or area?
- What do you think we should do at a local level? Awareness-raising, volunteer work, etc.



Owner of Bar Hobbit. Photo: Fotomovimiento

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