

The SENTINEL GAZETTE

Saturday Opinion Column: Two Ways of Seeing

By John News (Writing from Llançà, Catalonia)

CEUTA CRISIS

THE ANCHOR

Sitting by the quiet waters of the Cap de Creus on a mid-September morning, it is easy to indulge in peaceful abstractions. Yet, as a former correspondent who watched the Balkan borders collapse in the nineties, I know that order is rarely maintained by good intentions alone. Ceuta is not a mere geographical glitch on the North African coast; it is a test case for whether the European social democratic model can survive its own reluctance to enforce the law.

When hundreds of migrants, including vulnerable teenagers, scale the razor wire at Ceuta, the instinct of the traditional left is to turn the legal process into a sanctuary. But let us be honest: when democratic institutions refuse to manage their borders efficiently—preferring to drag repatriations through years of administrative litigation—they do not eliminate cruelty. They simply outsource it. They hand the narrative to the radical right on a silver platter, while leaving human traffickers to run the logistics.

In Denmark, the Social Democrats understood this painful paradox: if the moderate left does not protect the integrity of the state and its social contract, the public will eventually hire political arsonists to do it instead. Returning migrants—including minors, provided it is done in verified coordination with Moroccan family services—is not an act of hostility. It is the baseline of statecraft.

As George Orwell, a writer who understood both the left and the necessity of harsh realities, famously remarked in his essays: "We are all capable of believing things which we know to be untrue, and then, when we are finally proved wrong, impudently twisting what we said so as to show that we were right." The comfortably minded often pretend that ignoring border enforcement protects human rights. In truth, it destabilizes host communities and leaves the migrants themselves in a precarious limbo. To return someone to a stable, non-warring neighbour like Morocco is not a breach of human decency; it is the prerequisite for keeping our own societies whole enough to help anyone at all.

THE HORIZON

From the same privileged point in Llançà, watching the local fishermen mend their nets, one is reminded that a structure is only as strong as its weakest knot. If **The Anchor** reminds us of the necessity of state stability, **The Horizon** must ask a simpler, more uncomfortable question: what happens to a democracy when it decides that its own legal safeguards are merely "bureaucracy" to be bypassed?

The argument for rapid returns at Ceuta sounds entirely sensible when spoken in an air-conditioned office in Madrid or Westminster. Morocco is not at war, we are told; families await on the other side. Yet, anyone who has spent an afternoon in the dusty backstreets of Nador or Tangier knows that "stability" on paper does not equate to safety for a desperate seventeen-year-old. The legal hurdles built into Spanish law were not designed to frustrate the police; they were forged after decades of dictatorship to ensure that no individual—regardless of where they were born—could be processed like livestock.

To dismantle these safeguards in the name of efficiency is to step onto a very slippery slope. When we return minors without exhaustive, individual judicial reviews, we aren't practicing "pragmatic governance." We are engaging in an act of moral convenience.

The French philosopher Paul Ricoeur wrote that justice begins when we recognize the face of the "other" not as a statistic, but as a candidate for dignity. Once a democratic state decides that short-cutting human rights at its frontier is acceptable because the numbers are overwhelming, it alters its own moral DNA. The danger is not just that we fail those at the fence; it is that we train our own institutions to become indifferent. If we defend borders by abandoning the very principles that make our society worth defending, we have already surrendered to the cynicism we claim to fight.

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