



WHAT FUTURE FOR THE EU'S MIGRATION AND ASYLUM POLICY?

Summary of the conference of Tuesday 17 December 2019

In the last few years, migration flows have tested the unity of our continent. The European Union struggled to deal with the consequences of this phenomenon and a completely functioning European-wide strategy is still to be conceived.

In the last parliamentary term, the European Parliament proposed a reform of the current asylum system, but this was watered down, due to the inability of member states to find a compromise.

- ? In a close future, will Europe find a way to secure its borders, without outsourcing this task to neighbouring countries?
- ? A reform of the European asylum system. How should it look like?
- ? Is the integration of newcomers a solution to Europe's aging population?
- ? What are the ways to strengthen the EU-Africa partnership?

We tried to answer these questions with the help of:

Fabienne Keller, French MEP of the Renew Europe's group. She is the former mayor of Strasbourg and she is currently sitting in the Committee on civil liberties, justice and home affairs

Anne-Sophie Pelletier, French MEP of the Confederal Group of the European United Left/Nordic Green Left (GUE/NGL). She is also sitting, as a substitute member, in the Committee on civil liberties, justice and home affairs

Mounir Satouri, French MEP of the Greens/EFA group, he is member of the Subcommittee on Human Rights and of the Subcommittee on security and defence

Catherine Delcroix, Professor of sociology and director of the project "Migreval"

Samuel Boutruche, spokesperson of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees





All speakers stated that the so-called “migration crisis” should be put into perspective. **Mounir Satouri** did so by presenting some figures; the European Union is a common space that guarantees peace and prosperity to 500 million citizens. In 2015, the year of the “great migration crisis”, 1 million migrants arrived in the continent, i.e. the 0,2 per cent of the European population. In 2016, the migration flow amounted to 300 thousand people, i.e. 0,07 per cent of the European population. In 2017, figures were even lower, with a total of 170 thousand migrants, which accounted for the 0,03 per cent of the overall population.

Samuel Boutruche completed this picture, recalling that Europe is far from being the country that welcomes most of the asylum seekers. Turkey is the country that is welcoming the highest number of refugees in the world. But also in Lebanon the situation is striking; one person out of five is a refugee.

The misperception of the crisis goes hand in hand with the urgent need to reform the current European asylum system, based on the infamous Dublin Regulation, which determines that the asylum request by a third country national is to be presented in the first European country a person arrives in.

Talking about the failed attempts to reform the Dublin system, which marked the last parliamentary term, **Fabienne Keller** noted, “Member States did not dare to use qualified majority voting in order to impose the reform of the Dublin regulation, because they were afraid of encouraging the rise of populism in the continent and of giving even more arguments to those movements that capitalise on the fear of migrants. Interestingly, countries like Hungary and Czech Republic, where populists are strong, welcome very few migrants. What scares people the most is not the reality in itself but the way in which it is represented. In particular in Hungary, where freedom of the press is under threat, this dynamic can only worsen. Therefore, we need to shift from the imposition of a welcoming policy approach to more consensual practices, based on the agreement between Member States and the EU and in line with the Geneva Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, which sets out the rights of individuals who are granted asylum”.

On his side, **Samuel Boutruche** condemned the agreements with neighbouring countries that were made at the peak of the crisis. “The agreement with Turkey has no legal basis, it is indeed just a press release and, what’s worst, it does not solve the problem. Migrants continue to arrive on Greek islands, where the situation is hopeless. These people are really in danger, as the 80 per cent of them comes from Afghanistan, Iraq and Syria, three places that have been labelled as countries at risk”.



We need to shift from the imposition of a welcoming policy approach to more consensual practices, based on the agreement between Member States and the EU



What about the European promise of safe and legal channels of migration? For the moment, it remains on paper only, denounced **Anne Sophie Pelletier**, who lamented that in 2016 France delivered just 4000 humanitarian visas.

However, for the European asylum system to work properly, it is also necessary to envisage a solution for those illegal immigrants who do not manage to acquire the right to stay. Current European regulations foresee for these people a “humane and effective return policy”.

Is this working? “I agree with the idea that people who did not manage to integrate in the European society and have not the right to stay should return to their country of origin. The problem is that nowadays illegal immigrants often are sent back to the countries of transit and these places, like Libya, are unanimously recognized as dangerous. Do we really have the right to send people in countries where we know that they will be persecuted?”, argued **Mounir Satouri**.



He went on by outlining some of the guidelines that could inspire a new attempt to reform the EU asylum policy, by stressing the importance of “allowing asylum seekers to go and settle in those countries where they have cultural, historical or family boundaries”. “We should also start to take into account the notion of climate migrants, because we cannot affirm that there is a climate emergency and at the same time do not consider that one of the consequences of this climate crisis will be the arrival of climate migrants”, continued Satouri.

Another aspect to consider is the aging of the population in Europe, a demographic phenomenon which already took a major importance. Since 2010, people that retire are more than those who enter the labour market and it is expected that, in the next 50 years, the active population in the EU will decrease of 42 million units.

Could migration be a solution to the aging of European population?

Professor **Catherine Delcroix** replied that, “in the medium and long term, migration is not really a solution to the aging of the population but rather an opportunity to enrich a country and improve the openness at different levels”. According to Professor Delcroix, “The rate of population aging is linked to social policies, that influence the possibilities of families to grow their children in a good environment. Germany understood this, it put in place several family policies and now it is performing much better. In this dynamic, the German effort of integrating migrants can be seen as short-term attempt to avoid a too fast aging of the population”.

Professor Delcroix went on comparing French and German welcoming policies, noting that in France migrants can more easily move across the country but encounter more difficulties to have their asylum request to be processed, while in Germany they are obliged to stay in the place where they are registered, but the integration process is showing positive results, with migrants that are given a concrete opportunity to contribute to the development of the country.

“**We need to take into account the notion of climate migrants, because we cannot affirm that there is a climate emergency and do not consider that one of its consequences is the arrival of climate migrants**”

It is widely recognised that development cooperation could be the key to improve the situation in the countries from which immigration comes and, in this way, reduce migration flows.

Intervening on this topic, **Fabienne Keller** said, “It’s not good that, in some countries that are sources of migration flows, Europe supports development aid programs without talking about migration issues. This subject should be treated at diplomatic level and not as a separate issue. More in general, I believe that we should not have a negative look on migration. Positive exchanges are possible”.

On the perspective of positive exchanges, **Mounir Satouri** advanced a proposal that could reconcile development and climate goals, “Electrifying Africa is an absolute priority. Africa has a huge asset: the sun. We should start reflecting about the possibility to develop a partnership between Africa and Europe to create a gigantic system of solar energy production. Sun power is a renewable energy. It could provide Africa with the energy necessary for its development without contributing to global warming and this could even help Europe to shut down coal power plants and avoid to embark in the extremely dangerous business of nuclear energy. Moreover, by exporting solar energy, Africa would acquire its own resources and no longer need development aid, that too often goes in the hands of corrupt dictators.”

The partnership between Africa and Europe would, finally, be on an equal footing.



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