

**Report on the Round Table Discussion, Brussels, 30<sup>th</sup> June 2015:**  
**'The new EU Agenda on Migration: challenges and opportunities'**

The Centre for European and International Policy Action (CEIPA) held a round-table discussion on '**The new EU Agenda on Migration: challenges and opportunities.**'

A copy of CEIPAs proposal for the establishment of a European Agency for Resettlement and Migration Management was issued to all present and is available here: <http://www.renate-europe.net/wp-content/uploads/2015/07/Observations-and-Suggestions-for-EU-Policy-Makers.pdf>

Ms. Anne Kelleher, RENATE Communications Person, attended on behalf of RENATE Network.

The event was an open forum for opinion leaders, experts, academics and civil society to discuss and re-think the paradigms of short-term responses versus long-term strategies in migration management in light of the complexity of the new EU strategic approach adopted by the European Commission. The following panel of speakers each had fifteen minutes to share their views on the topic:

Mr. Jacopo Barigazzi, reporter for *POLITICO*.

Mr. Giles Merritt, Secretary General, Friends of Europe.

Mr. David Plunkett, Ambassador of Canada to the European Union.

Mr. David Reizenzein, FRONTEX Liaison Officer.

Mr. Marc Richir, DG HOME, European Commission.

Ms. Judith Sargentini, Member of the European Parliament.

Mr. János Szacsuri, Permanent Representative of Hungary to the European Union.

The rapporteur for the afternoon was Ms. Jelena von Helldorff, Senior Policy Advisor, CEIPA.

Discussions focused on coherent EU-wide approaches towards short-term life-saving operations at sea, long-term policies on international protection and the principle of solidarity amongst European Union Member States. Those present also considered ways to maximize the benefits of labour migration, and to a lesser extent, how best to boost the fight against smuggling and trafficking in human beings.

### **Responsibility and Solidarity**

The general view expressed at the meeting was that no country can handle alone the Mediterranean Sea crisis; that all have a collective responsibility. Yet countries seem to be reluctant to play their part. There was agreement that instead of crisis management, the Europe Parliament urgently needs to develop strategic policies which will enable the Community to plan ahead and proactively engage with member and neighbouring States on an ongoing basis, thereby pre-empting crisis situations from developing in the first instance.

It was felt that the absence of an agreed EU Policy on Migrants has left the concept of a 'European Union' vulnerable to dissention, with the danger that some countries will think only nationally instead of globally. On this note, Mr. János Szacsuri, Permanent Hungarian Representative to the EU and member of the panel of presentations, spoke in defence of Hungary's decision to act unilaterally to close its borders to migrants and asylum seekers.

Several contributors spoke of the attractiveness of Europe to people who are trying to survive in war-torn countries, with repeated reference made to Syria, Iraq and Libya, countries which are rapidly 'disappearing' as entities due to huge displacement of their populations. The UNHCR has asked European countries to do more on re-settlement of migrants and asylum seekers. It urges the European Union to devise a Policy on Migrants that is Human-Rights based.

### **Hot Spots**

The term 'Hot Spots' applies to designated geographical areas specifically dedicated to processing the identification of migrants who arrive into a new country. Processing is mainly in the form of taking

fingerprints but not every migrant is a willing participant in this process, with many migrants adamant that they do not wish to be identified. Images of Immigration officials struggling with unwilling migrants conveyed this message very clearly.

Because of such a delicate situation, officials are acutely aware that just one slip up could lead to a huge propaganda situation that would give ISIS an opportunity to appear to 'come to the rescue.' It was acknowledged that the situation is volatile, and not helped by the reality that the days are long gone since the EU could engage in sensitive discussions about migrants and asylum-seekers with non-EU countries such as North Africa and the Middle East. Respectful understanding and diplomacy in communications are called for and a rebuilding of trust in the EU is going to be essential for the long term future of the Community.

Attention was drawn to the need for sensitive use of language, with the suggestion that the terms 'burden sharing' and 'distribution quotas' be replaced with more open and respectful terminology such as 'distribution keys' because of with the implication of 'commodities' or an implicit understanding of a limit to numbers and opt-out clauses.

Many present thought that a review of the 'Dublin Agreement' (1990) would be helpful, with the specific priority to offer the possibility of choice of a country to migrants. While it may not always be possible to accommodate peoples' first choice, at least they would feel respected when their voices were acknowledged.

David Plunkett, Canadian Ambassador, shared the Canadian experiences in terms of re-settlement policies. Stating that Canada is a country which has evolved because of immigration down through the centuries, it has had to develop solid re-settlement policies. One in five Canadians were born outside the country and 80% of Canadians believe Immigration has a positive effect.

In contrast, it appears the European Union as a whole is not acquitting itself very well when it comes to public perceptions on migrants. In Dec. 2014, statistics indicate that 57% of EU citizens expressed negative feelings towards migrants to EU countries, with another 45% expressing negative feelings about migrants 'taking work' from nationals. Concern was raised about the possibility of an increase in propaganda against migrants which can coincide with statistics of this nature, with great sensitivity being called for when communicating such data. All present agreed that now public opinion is more sympathetic to migrants and asylum seekers as the public in general appear to accept that this is a humanitarian crisis of epic proportions.

### **Pathways**

On reflection, Mr. Giles Merritt, Secretary General, friends of Europe, laid the responsibility for the current Mediterranean crisis firmly at the door of the EU. He shared the belief that there were two key policy failures, which saw Europe less than alert to what was simmering on its doorstep:

1. Failure to look at migration as an economic necessity.
2. Failure to capitalise on 'The Arab Spring.'

He suggested that the EU should have advanced two parallel programmes as follows:

1. Provide an economic assistance programme to Iraq, Syria and Libya in the early stages of their political unrest.
2. The EU should have underpinned the above with a really good security framework, where people are forced to dialogue, share security issues and concerns.

He suggested that addressing economic neglect in large parts of North Africa and spearheading efforts to improve the economic viability in home countries, would deter indigenous peoples from migrating in the first place.

Presenting an economic rationale, the European Parliament has indications that by the end of this century, there will be insufficient workforce numbers to sustain the pension requirements of an aging population

with longer life expectancy. Working from the correlation between the growth of a workforce and the growth of national GDP, there are rational economic arguments for welcoming skilled immigrants who can make meaningful contributions to an economy. Thus, it is incumbent on countries to consider labour migration more favourably.

It was acknowledged that all people deserve the right to travel for work, to earn a fair wage and to improve their circumstances. However, countries need to be cautious not to become exploitative of migrants' vulnerabilities, as EU member states could very easily find themselves in situations where migrants do menial tasks for lesser wages than nationals.

### **Safe Return**

There were mixed views about imposing 'Safe Return' on migrants. There was consensus that social responsibility must come into play in the case of safe return and that returnees should be supported for at least a year after their return home, so they can find gainful employment or possibly create an enterprise themselves.

### **Migratory Routes**

It was generally agreed that realistically, there are no 'safe routes' for migrants or asylum-seekers. Those present agreed that opportunists are present in every walk of life and are ready to prey upon the vulnerable, who have huge fears, sometimes language difficulties, little or no money and often displaced from family members, thereby making them appear more vulnerable to traffickers.

### **Mediterranean Sea Route vs. Balkan Route?**

Mr. János Szacsuri informed the meeting that the Balkan route is as active as the Mediterranean Sea route, but not as life threatening and consequently not receiving as much media attention. The profile of the migrant through Hungary is largely one where people 'walk across the border,' unlike the risky boat journeys undertaken on the Mediterranean Sea route. He spoke of the massive impact on the social, economic and cultural life of Hungary and defended the countries recent decisions -however unacceptable- as the government comes to terms with the discrepancy between public expectations and what can be realistically achieved by a poor economy. Against the backdrop where Hungary's asylum system is designed to cater for a maximum of 2,500 asylum-seekers in any given year, so far this year, Hungarian border patrols have 'apprehended 67, 000 irregular migrants since January 2015 alone.' Hungary simply does not have the resources to treat, identify (by finger printing) and offer support to such volumes of people. The Hungarian delegate stated that there was little value in the current thinking on 'Hotspots.' Mr. Szacsuri suggested 'Hotspots' would be more effective if placed in the countries of origin, acting as a deterrent to people leaving in the first place.

He was adamant that Hungary has taken its share of migrants and that economic migrants seeking a better life should not be allowed to take advantage of an already flawed system, which has no policy or framework in place for overall guidance.

As the afternoon drew to a close, Mr. David Reizenzein, Liaison Officer with Operation Frontex, spoke about the work of Frontex, created to implement EU policies on migration. But effectively what he is doing is overseeing a 'Search & Rescue' operation in the Mediterranean rather than what was envisaged originally, i.e. devise and implement new standards in Border management. He called for a co-ordination of the rescue efforts at sea, where efforts are problematic in the absence of co-ordination.

### **Conclusion**

Mr. Peter von Bethlenfalvy, Executive Director CEIPA, concluded proceedings by extending his appreciation to the panel of speakers. He acknowledged the importance of the afternoon's discussion towards helping EU member countries appreciate the necessity for wider understanding and in order to be in solidarity to address humanitarian crisis matters on the 'doorstep' of the EU and within EU member states.

Anne Kelleher, RENATE Communications Person