

Who is in the driver's seat? The EU migration crisis between hotspots, quotas and border management



Instituto Cervantes, Brussels, February 23, 2016

On February 23, 2016, CEIPA convened a roundtable discussion on the current migration crisis in Europe.

The event brought together over 70 participants from EU Member states, EU institutions, civil society organisations and academia. Discussions revolved around the ways European countries are coping with the influx of refugees and migrants. Moreover, Ceipa presented a proposal for an orderly processing and management of migrant arrivals.

The following is a summary from the event:

In his welcome address **Bob Taylor**, Ceipa Vice President, noted that much of the discussion on the refugee crises is about how to deal with third country nationals seeking asylum in Europe. Referring to the East European countries' claim of having no experience in coping with outsiders, Mr. Taylor reminded of their long experience with the Roma. He pointed out to the fact that up to 40% of the refugees and asylum seekers who arrived in Germany in 2015 were

from the Balkans, namely from Albania, an EU candidate country and Kosovo, where the European Union deployed its largest civilian mission launched in the framework of its Common security and defence policy to safeguard the rule of law. The democratic standards supposed to be applied in these country contradict alleged claims of persecution of their citizens.

Mrs. Roberta Metsola, MEP, EPP, Vice Coordinator of the Civil Liberties Justice and Home Affairs Committee, presented a strategic bi-partisan report for the parliament committee calling for a comprehensive approach to migration. The report is expected to be put to the vote in April or May this year. The report goes in detail on every aspect of migration, mapping out a vision on the best policy action in the immediate and long term. Whereas migration was previously framed in a development, security or funding perspective, this report aims at providing a holistic, all-encompassing response to the influx of migrants.

Today, not only Greece

and Italy are at the EU periphery, but Germany, Sweden and Belgium are all "at the periphery", given the number of migrants' arrivals. Because there are no quick fixes, EU member states must be urged to adopt a proactive response to the crisis. Each EU proposal should be based on solidarity, but its place in the JHA chapter is particularly important. Even if Frontex and navy operations such as Operation Sophia have played an important role in saving lives, we need to do more to rescue people and prevent loss of lives in the Mediterranean.

To ensure there is complementarity between integrated border management at the external borders and a high level of internal security, Frontex should be replaced by a European Border and Coast Guard. While Europe needs to step up its fight against smugglers and traffickers, people can't be blamed for resorting to their services in the absence of humanitarian visas and other legal ways to reach Europe.

CEIPA Round table

AGENDA

Moderator: **Mr Peter von Bethlenfalvy**, Executive Director, CEIPA

14.30 – 15.30
Welcome remarks **Mr. Robert Taylor**, founding partner of European Research Associates (ERA)

Opening: **Mrs. Patsy Sørensen**, Founder and Director of Payoke

Panel presentations (in alphabetical order)

Mrs. Roberta Metsola, Member of the European Parliament, EPP, and Vice Coordinator of the Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs Committee

Mr. David Reizenzein, FRONTEX Liaison Officer

Prof. Dr. Jan De Volder, Cusanus Chair 'Religion, Conflict and Peace' of the University of Leuven and Head of the Brussels office of the Community of Sant'Egidio

15.30 – 17.00
Plenary debate and end of meeting





No matter how difficult it is to manage migration, indifference is not an option.

Roberta Metsola MEP



When it comes to relocation of migrants every member state must play its part in a union where shared values mean share responsibilities.

The abolition of internal borders in Schengen has to go hand in hand with strengthening external borders, by way of supporting those countries with the task of protecting the EU external borders. With regard to integration of third countries nationals, those who qualify for international protection need to respect the values of the host member states. When it comes to return of those who do not fulfil the criteria for protection, so far only 36% of return decisions have been implemented, as it is hard to reach an agreement on what countries are to be considered “safe”.

Greater commitment is needed to address the root causes of migration: war, poverty, climate change or a lack of economic opportunities. Regarding legal avenues to settle in Europe, each member state has a right to determine who enters its labour market. The EU Blue card directive designed to attract highly skilled workers has failed to be implemented evenly- out of a total of 19000 blue cards made available, Germany alone has issued 16000. Aside from highly qualified migrants, Europe also needs low-skilled migrants to offset current labour shortages. Filling the labor market gaps with third countries nationals may carry the risk of labour exploitation, especially in sectors like construction, agriculture and health.

Mrs. Metsola ended her

presentation with a positive note saying that no matter how difficult it is to manage migration, indifference is no option.

Mrs. Patsy Sørensen, Founder and Director of Payoke, deplored that there seem to be no lessons learnt from the war in the Balkans. She pointed to Calais, as an example, a city in the north of France, where for years politicians turned a blind eye to the conditions of thousands of migrants living in a makeshift camp. She painted a bleak picture of the past year, remembering events such as terrorist attacks in Paris and Brussels.

Since the start of the war in Iraq, refugees continue to arrive to Sweden and other European countries. Some wave black flags, a symbol of the Islamic State, a gesture that leaves EU citizens and politicians perplexed as to how to deal with migrants. Being only politically correct and understanding, without addressing certain threats, may result in major overhauls in our society, and call into question the notion of multiculturalism.

Although migration has been a thorny issue on the European agenda for years, a credible strategy is yet to be developed. Politicians, representative of religious communities and scholars all talk about solutions, while falling short of providing practical answers.

Europe is still the place where democracy, human and women rights are the best protected; our task is to preserve these values. Refugees

and migrants need to be catered for, but not at the expense of citizens in need.

Mr. David Reizenzein, Frontex Liaison officer, framed his intervention around three key topics: the political environment, operational response and border controls.

Over the past twelve years the discussion on migration management, border control and terrorism has become repetitive. Only after the last years' sudden increase in arrivals, the EU has started to get its act together. On 25 October 2015 the EU leaders, together with the Balkan countries along the migration route, agreed to the so called 17 point Action plan to tackle the refugee crises in the region, aimed to: improve cooperation and border management, step up consultations and exchange of information and improve reception capacities.. Since then, Sherpa video conferences with police experts in the field take place regularly.

At the summit in Valetta in November 2015 the EU heads of states and governments decided to further improve the exchange of information, optimise the border package and reform Frontex. At the same time the European Parliament has discussed how to significantly upgrade (in terms of staff and budget)-the capacities of Frontex and EASO to meet the challenges of the continuous migration flow.

More recently, on 18 February this year, in response to the record number of arrivals (in the first quarter of 2016, there have been 100 000 people in the Aegean sea who moved on across the Balkan route and 6500 from Central Mediterranean) the EU Council reiterated the need to implement the decisions made so far: restore order, apply the Schengen Border Code and better manage the migration flow.

In terms of operational response, Frontex has been present in all hotspots in Italy and Greece, more than 1000 border guards have been deployed at the EU external borders and NATO has been involved in activities aimed at surveillance and intelligence gathering. The result has been improved border surveillance capacities of EU external borders, better record in search and rescue operations.

Nevertheless there is still room for improvement, notably in security screening, registration and asylum procedures. Return of migrants who do not qualify for asylum is particularly challenging as countries often do not accept back their own nationals, let alone those who were transiting their territory.

To improve the joint European approach to the migration crisis, the EU should not only empower the EU agencies (Frontex, EASO, Europol, Eurojust) but also promote an open discussion on the contentious issue of state sovereignty and the principle of “ever closer Union”.

Prof. Dr. Jan De Volder, Cusanus Chair “Religion, Conflict and Peace” of the University of Leuven and senior member of the Community of Sant’Egidio outlined the main mission of the Sant’Egidio Community pointing to their activities in welcoming refugees and migrants, helping them settle down and integrate, but also, in some cases, return. In the current crisis the community volunteers have been assisting migrants in Lampedusa, Sicily, at the Hungarian border, at Calais and in many other places.

Prof. De Volder outlined four main flaws of the EU asylum system: 1. People fleeing wars and conflict need to come to Europe to be able to lodge their asylum claim. 2. The Dublin system places too heavy a burden on periphery member states, without providing for resettlement among EU member states. It therefore needs to be revised by strengthening the principle of solidarity 3. There are no legal avenues for migration for those seeking a better life-even though everybody has a right to pursue happiness, without being accused of “abusing the system”. Those who are refused the asylum status risk deportation, but often end up staying as undocumented migrants, causing a problem for themselves and the society. 4 The EU lacks the ambition in its policy toward EU neighbourhood countries, especially in Africa, to create better living conditions for the population.

Together with the Federation of Evangelical churches, Sant’Egidio has launched a

self-financed project of sponsorship to bring a thousand of vulnerable migrants to Italy on humanitarian visas. The initiative has been undertaken following the dramatic events in the Mediterranean where a large number of migrants perished. It was also guided by the European Commission’s recommendations to use all legal avenues to help persons in need of international protection. Following a protocol signed between the Community Sant’Egidio and the Italian MoFA and MOI, a thousand of extremely vulnerable persons will be allowed entry to Italy (from Lebanon and Morocco). If this test phase proves successful, the project will be extended to asylum seekers from Eritrea and Somalia, totaling 1000 humanitarian visas to be delivered this year.

While respecting specific criteria for selection (vulnerability, the situation in the country of origin, family ties in Italy) those allowed entry will receive support and residence permits for a reasonably long stay in Italy. The aim of this project is to establish a “good practice” model that can be replicated elsewhere in the EU. The initiative was strongly supported by the EU Commissioner Avramopoulos and the UNHCR spokesman.

Mr. De Volder ended his presentation by praising the Ceipa proposal aimed at setting up a mechanisms for processing asylum requests and selecting economic migrants outside the European borders.



To improve a European approach to migration, the EU should not only empower the EU agencies but also promote an open discussion on the contentious issue of state sovereignty and the principle of “ever closer Union”.
David Reizenzein,
Frontex

**Centre for European and
International Policy Action**

www.ceipa.eu

To receive invitations to CEIPA events,
please join our mailing list:
events@ceipa.eu

[CEIPA proposal for the
establishment of a an extra
territorial approach to refugee
protection and orderly
resettlement](#)

by Jelena von Helldorff



Debate

During the discussion some participants deplored the lack of an EU clearing house which would allow for a better strategic planning. Mr. Reizenzein answered by pointing out to the Frontex forward looking analyses regarding border management and Europol risk assessment analyses in the field of crime prevention.

On the question of implementation of the EP report, Mrs. Metsola criticised member states for not doing enough, especially with regard to the Eurodac fingerprint database. She emphasised the EC achievements such as the EU Agenda on Migration, the initiative to review the Dublin system as well as the

revision of Frontex mandate, expressing hope for future positive development. Asked about the Ceipa initiative on the streamlining of asylum procedures by processing applications outside the EU, Mrs. Metsola expressed doubts about the willingness of third countries such as Turkey, Lebanon and Jordan to implement such mechanism. She mentioned an annual cost of 11 000 € for providing the basic services for each refugee (300 000 € for hosting a family).

Some participants asked about the role of the EU Agencies in the current migration crises. Mr. Reizenzein explained the role of each agency, adding some details about

the recently established European Migrants Centre within Europol. He mentioned that more personnel would will be deployed at the Hot-spots, together with Liaison officers being posted in Ankara. The question about who is the maker of the boat life jackets used by migrants, the panelist answered that 90% of the vests are produced in China, whereas Tunisia ensures the supply of the flimsy wooden boats used for sea crossing.

About CEIPA

Founded in 2011, the Centre for European and International Policy Action (CEIPA) is an independent think-tank committed to promoting public debate on major European and international policy issues.

No topic of legitimate public concern, however uncomfortable, is off-limits. Participation in any and all of CEIPA's activities is free of charge. CEIPA events bring together stakeholders and civil society representatives from across the EU and beyond. They seek to increase transparency and access to information as well as to raise public awareness, understanding, participation and commitment.