

LOOKING FOR AN AMBITIOUS EUROPEAN MIGRATION STRATEGY

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On the occasion of the presentation of its TGAE report "Think Global - Act European. Thinking strategically about the EU's external action", *Notre Europe - Jacques Delors Institute* organises, together with the EU Institute for Security Studies, a debate around the recommendations concerning EU migration policy addressed by the 16 European think tanks contributing to the report.

1. The international and European context of migration policy

Over the past few years the European agenda has been mostly occupied dealing with the euro crisis and its consequences. Yet the migration debate is set to become one of the hot topics of the upcoming 2014 European elections, and precisely so thanks to the economic crisis itself. "Fuelled by the sharp rise in unemployment, negative discourse around the issue of migration has intensified, leading to racism and xenophobia gaining ever more ground amidst the European public", explains António Vitorino, President of *Notre Europe - Jacques Delors Institute*. As the political climate deteriorates, such negative discourse has started having a negative impact on the freedom of movement of Europeans themselves. Indeed, the European and international context within which the migration issue is being shaped is of incredible importance to understanding its evolution, explains Yves Pascouau, Senior Researcher at European Policy Centre (EPC) and rapporteur of the TGAE report's migration chapter. Internally the rise of the so-called 'anti-anti' movement, anti-migration and anti-European, clearly identifies a situation where the European Union (EU) is blamed for the mismanagement of migration flows, an accusation that will most likely be used against the Union in the upcoming election. Notwithstanding, the demographic ageing of Europe's population poses a very real long-term threat to the EU's productivity and thus to its economic recovery¹. Externally, increased competition from new economic powerhouses as well as the evolutions in the Arab neighbourhood call for a more strategic and coordinated approach to European migration. "We cannot afford to shun this important debate", stresses António Vitorino.

We find ourselves at a crossroads of a new paradigm. The migration question has never been as important both politically and strategically as it is now and yet, it has never been so badly perceived by public opinion reiterates Yves Pascouau.

2. The struggle between perceptions and reality

"The public perception of migration is sorely negative, even when reality does not necessarily correspond to such perceptions", António Vitorino explains. As Florence Gaub, MENA specialist at the EU Institute for Security Studies elucidates, Europeans have the very clear impression of being 'invaded' by a growing Arab population, however to date the Arabs represent only just over 1 percent of EU population. Both reality and these perceptions must be addressed openly and courageously introduced into the public debate. Addressing these distorted perceptions is the first step to changing public discourse around migration. Jean-Christophe Dumont, head of division on International migration at the OECD, supports this view and stresses that continued transparency on the reality of migration is necessary, but incontestable truths alone, such as the demographic argument for migration, will not suffice to convince public opinions. Political courage is a prerequisite in order to tackle head-on the gap between reality and perception and the important role played by the media. This is all the more urgent as distorted perceptions lead to distorted agendas and policy priorities. A striking example is offered by António Vitorino, underlining the overemphasis placed on border control when considering that the vast majority of illegal immigrants are visa overstayers rather than 'trespassers'.

3. Be fooled not: the need for a European solution

The “Think Global - Act European” report² advocates for a more coordinated European migration strategy, identifying the need for greater integration and coherence across EU and member state policies. Yves Pascouau, presenting the conclusions of the report’s migration chapter, states that it is clear that the solution to Europe’s migration grievances lies in the EU. The management of migration flows within an “open borders” common space, can simply not be managed effectively at the national level. “The absence of even minimal coordination of admission and circulation policies within this context is close to being absurd”, echoes António Vitorino, who explains that “whilst it is understandable for member states to maintain control over their right of admission, an obligation laid out in the treaties, the reality remains that the present situation does very little to make the EU an attractive destination for economic migration”.

Other than being uncoordinated across member states, migration policy is also fragmented at the European level. Yves Pascouau denounces the absence of a “*chef de file*” for European migration policy. At a purely European level the sharing of competences between DG Home and DG Employment and Social Affairs provides for an unclear decisional structure, and greater coordination between the two is advocated. Indeed, the creation of a DG Mobility dealing with all aspects of migration from entry, circulation and residency, could prove to be a positive contribution to the coherence of migration policy. Jean-Christophe Dumont also warns against the separation of the external and internal dimensions of migration, the former traditionally managed by DG Home and the latter by DG Social Affairs and Employment, and commends the report for providing comprehensive solutions encompassing elements of internal as well as external policy. Indeed it is important to remember that as far as public opinion is concerned the external and internal dimensions of migration are one and the same, “Be it Moroccan or Polish immigration, it makes little difference”, Jean-Christophe Dumont clarifies.

4. More coordination for better policies

Strengthening the channels for legal migration is identified by the TGAE report as one of the priorities for a more solid EU migration policy. The recently established Blue Card, EU’s response to the US’ green card, has generated little enthusiasm and is generally deemed insufficiently effective³. Yet Jean-Christophe Dumont cares to underline that more time and perhaps more indulgence are necessary in order to evaluate the Blue Card’s value added, “the initiative nevertheless represents important progress, for example in the establishment of the long stay residents directives”. The transition between student and working status and between temporary and permanent residency as well as intra-European mobility for both Europeans and third country nationals are nevertheless issues that need to be better addressed within the framework of Blue Card, the latter accused of providing an overly fragmented offer, “à la Frankenstein”, provokes Yves Pascouau.

Mobility Partnerships (MPs), similarly have been accused of being sorely ‘incomprehensive’, both in terms of the fragmentation of migration issues and with regards to their limited geographical applicability (these are bilateral agreements rather than European agreements), acknowledges Elvire Fabry, Senior Researcher at *Notre Europe - Jacques Delors Institute*⁴. Still, Emmanuel Mayer defends the flexibility of the Mobility Partnership tool, allowing for “member states to participate to different degrees according to their interest towards the MPs”. It provides a precious equilibrium for the interested parties that should not be underestimated. Yves Pascouau concedes that whilst legally the MPs are a ‘very weak’ tool, these are nevertheless very effective political instruments, providing for a framework for dialogue on all migration issues. “Take the example of Moldavia, 15 years ago a Mobility Partnership would have been unthinkable”, he concludes.

The report further stresses the importance of increased cooperation in the ambit of integration policy. Progress has indeed been achieved, particularly in the ambit of best practice exchange and integration policy is evolving at a very dynamic pace if one considers that it touches upon a number of sensitive areas of exclusive competence of member states (access to health, education and housing). Indeed taken singularly European integration policies are not fairing so badly, Yves Pascouau points out. Nonetheless he warns against the very real risk

of repeating the mistakes made with the Economic and Monetary Union. If coordination of integration policies does not keep up we risk having to deal with the consequences of a common migration policy coupled with a series of very loosely coordinated integration policies.

Highlighted by the debate is also the importance of the nexus between migration and development, a topic to which the TGAE report dedicates an entire paper defending the need for a new paradigm for migration⁵. It is true that co-development policies can only produce results in the long term and that partners' urgent needs and expectations create strong pressure towards short term solutions, nevertheless the development potential of remittances and diasporas cannot be disregarded. "There are possibly new channels to explore on how to incentivise development through remittances and diasporas as well as the developing south-south relationships", specifies António Vitorino. The link between migration and development nonetheless remains quite unclear, and at the European level in order to pursue effective policies this link must be defined. In the past there has been widespread consensus that development of countries of origin would decrease migratory pressure, "much to the contrary, we are experiencing a trend where the more educated a young population is, the stronger the ambition to leave the country of origin and seek opportunities abroad", explains Emmanuel Mayer. And yet the importance of avoiding brain drain remains a critical issue. Florence Gaub explains that indeed the Arab Spring was made possible thanks to "young graduates which pushed for a revolution thanks to a veritable intellectual movement that goes beyond and is well more complex than mere calls for ending poverty". Progress has been made. Initially in the sector of development there was a certain reticence to address migration issues, states Emmanuel Mayer, a delicate and often controversial topic, but the role of DG DEVCO has since evolved, acquiring a certain autonomy on the issues touching upon the migration-development nexus. Indeed the growing role of DG DEVCO vis-à-vis DG Home was clear by how the former managed to lead the EU's contribution to the UN High level dialogue on migration, advocates Emmanuel Mayer.

Finally, it is important to keep in mind that EU action also manifests itself through a series of informal channels, creating networks and fora for communication and best practices exchange across member

states. Indeed harmonisation is not only achieved via directives but also and perhaps most importantly via reinforced dialogue, the conditions for which are put in place by the EU. This said, coordination efforts must not falter as the absence of a coherent European migration policy has a deep impact for the EU's external action, effectively neutralising the EU's external ambitions in terms of migration policy and strategy. In order to exercise a competence externally the EU must have exercised it internally and as of present this not being the case, the Commission has no mandate to negotiate migration agreements with third countries, this power remains in the hands of member states.

5. More vision and ambition for the EU migration strategy

Elvire Fabry laments that Europeans' migration policies are suffering from the erosion of trust of not only their citizens, but of their partners too. The latter criticise the EU for the overly securitarian approach adopted in their migration policies. Particularly in the neighbourhood, the impression of our partners is that of a Union which has been far too complacent towards authoritative regimes in exchange for ensuring strictly controlled borders. Florence Gaub concurs that the problematisation of security in the Maghreb has turned migration into a purely securitarian challenge rather than a socio-economic one. An attitude, she explains, that is not helping foster the attractiveness of the Union. Indeed, she points out the Arab world's most educated emigrate to the US, certainly not the EU, and when they do they seek out opportunities in the UK above any other member state. The structures for the necessary rebalancing act between security and mobility are in place, what is lacking is the political will, what lies ahead is a political not a structural challenge. Jean-Christophe Dumont, whilst not convinced about the EU being insufficiently open or attractive, stipulates that rather the EU has many assets at its disposal but what it is lacking all too often is "vision and ambition". The balancing of a "home affairs" versus a "foreign affairs" approach nevertheless remains to be addressed. Indeed a stronger "foreign ministry" European External Action Service outlook to contrast the often aggressive home affairs approach could be expected to better support a more comprehensive understanding of migratory challenges and opportunities, better complementing wider foreign

affairs objectives with the EU's security needs⁶. Jean-Christophe Dumont himself agrees that the relationship between migration and diplomacy is strong and should be better managed and fostered by European authorities. "Migration is not only an economic issue but also and especially a geopolitical question. Under this aspect Europeans need to evolve and understand that we can no longer negotiate with China, India, Brazil or Russia the same way we have negotiated with our African neighbours for the past 20 years".

Conclusion – Where there is a will there is a way

Migration falls into that category where the risk or the temptation of viewing the EU as a panacea for all problems is very present. Jean-Christophe Dumont explains that "the EU cannot do it all, and if we portray this image we will fuel resentment and dissatisfaction towards the Union". If we consider that the EU must acquire new ambition and vision in its migration strategy, then these must be built first and foremost at the national level. António Vitorino also cares to stress that the solution truly lies within the realm of political will and consciousness, recalling the successful introduction of the principle of integration at European level in 2004 despite the clear absence of a legal basis within the treaties. "When there is a political will there is always a way... even to go beyond what was envisaged by the treaties", he concludes.

1. Hans Martens (EPC), "Migration: a neglected challenge for saving the European welfare state", *Policy Paper No. 73, Notre Europe – Jacques Delors Institute*, February 2013.
2. Elvire Fabry (dir.), "Think Global – Act Europe IV. Thinking strategically about the EU's external action", *Studies & Reports No. 96, Notre Europe – Jacques Delors Institute*, April 2013.
3. Andreas Ette (PISM), Roderick Parkes (SWP-PISM), Alicia Sorroza (Elcano) and Carmen Gonzales Enriquez (Elcano), "The EU performance in the global competition for highly-skilled migrants", *Policy Paper No. 75, Notre Europe – Jacques Delors Institute*, February 2013.
4. Thanos Maroukis and Anna Triandafyllidou (Eliamep), "Mobility Partnerships: a convincing tool for the EU's global approach to migration?", *Policy Paper No. 76, Notre Europe – Jacques Delors Institute*, February 2013.
5. Ruby Gropas (Eliamep), "The migration-development nexus: time for a paradigm shift", *Policy Paper No. 77, Notre Europe – Jacques Delors Institute*, February 2013.
6. Sergio Carrera, Leonard Den Hertog and Joanna Parkin (CEPS), "EU Migration policy after the Arab Spring: The pitfalls of Home Affairs Diplomacy", *Policy Paper No. 74, Notre Europe – Jacques Delors Institute*, February 2013.

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