

## BLOG POST

# A PACT IN LAMPEDUSA

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Dear Sir, resolving the immigration issue must be Italy's prime objective as the new European legislature gets underway. Over the last few years, the inept EU immigration policy has created deep divisions and had a serious impact. The Mediterranean has become a cemetery and this will go down as shameful in the history books. This absence of policy has resulted in developments formerly regarded as unthinkable, ranging from Brexit to the emergence of a broad-based xenophobic, populist current and notably in Salvini's Italy.

Why has Europe failed to create an immigration policy able to conciliate human rights concerns with managed control of migrant flows at the frontiers? Four years after the peak in 2015, why are we still torn between 'closed doors' and 'let them all in'? If we don't answer these questions, the debate will remain incoherent and the populists and xenophobes, stirring up fears and offering simplistic explanations, will win out. That we face a short circuit of this type is made clear by the European Commission's (unacceptable) use of the expression 'protection of our life style'.

I would like to make a suggestion that I hope will pave the way for a genuine immigration policy. Given the intensity and duration of this crisis, purely national solutions will not suffice. It is only on the European level that we can muster sufficient critical mass to ensure radical change.

What has failed and how can we change things? The EU has tried to deal with the crisis using outdated instruments and has lacked the strength to renew them owing to national egoisms and the vetoes employed by Hungary and other member states. The Dublin Treaty – whereby the country of first entry bears the entire weight of inflows – is a device created decades ago as a function of other scenarios and prior to the instability and movements of people stemming from the Arab spring.

To change things, we need to speak with one voice and despite its efforts Italy has consistently failed to win over the most reluctant parties. It is paradoxical, by the way, that it is precisely the most reluctant countries, with Hungary in the first place, that have become Salvini's allies.

Given the impasse, it is clear that 'unanimity' will have to be ditched. The Hungarian veto is an obstacle and migrants are continuing to perish at sea. In the meantime, public opinion is turning against Europe and Brussels and not against those using their veto. We should not be afraid to consider a temporary exit from the EU treaties. This is a radical but necessary move. Not an unparalleled one, however, as seen on at least two occasions: for Schengen and for the creation of the state bailout plan, in which the UK and the Czech Republic did not participate, and which played a key role in resolving the financial crisis.

We need a new treaty amongst the remaining European countries. On the basis, however, that the majority vote is accepted and individual state responsibilities are assumed. This new Treaty – a signature in Lampedusa would send a very strong political signal – would replace the Dublin Treaty, notably eliminating the norm of full responsibility for the country of first arrival.

The Lampedusa Treaty should contain new instruments on migrant reception and equal distribution of the burden between signatory countries. We must create automatic procedures that eliminate the disagreeable downward bidding as seen over the last few years on the arrival of each new ship. France takes twenty, Spain fifteen, Poland zero etc. with unacceptable cynicism and hypocrisy. No, this to-ing and fro-ing has clearly undermined the EU's image! This must stop and be replaced with an automated setup with allocations governed by a central European authority, equipped with suitable powers and authorized to apply humanitarian criteria, such as the reunification of families.

With centralization a different management of asylum seeker/economic migrant flows will be possible. At the same time, migrants will have their duties (particularly, learning of the local language). Amongst other issues to be dealt with: control of the EU's external borders, relations with third countries and coordination as regards standards on saving lives at sea.

In this respect, experience teaches us that, as with Mare Nostrum, the Italian humanitarian military mission that saved lives and at the same time resulted in the arrest of many traffickers must be a duty reliant on state or interstate measures. The unacceptable criminalization of NGOs in the Mediterranean, also severely criticized by Zingaretti, is contradictory above all. They are attacked because, as far as they can, they are fulfilling duties which should fall to those states abstaining from doing so.

And Hungary? Don't those who brandish their vetoes end up the big winners? Does this not paradoxically end up by playing into Orban's hands? In answer to this, I appeal to the principle of realism. Owing to its small size, Hungary, even if it agreed to accept migrants, would only receive a token number. This would not make a big enough difference. Conversely, it has been decisive in the last few years in blocking collective progress. Somewhat similar to the UK on economic and monetary issues, with the difference that London agreed with the others to accept the state bailout fund in 2012. So courage is what we now need. Italy must be in the front line: who better than us and Germany? The country with largest intake of migrant flows and the country of largest final destination? Conte and Merkel should prepare a response to share with France and



Spain, above all, and then with the others. The Commission should be involved in the initiative as the central instruments that that would derive from the Commission must be of course be tied to it.

An initiative of this type needs the backing of civil society, however, especially the young. To this end, we will launch the Treaty of Lampedusa project at Cesenatico where the academic year opens today, the fifth for the School of Politics. An initiative founded specifically to give young Italians scholarships a feeling for sound politics and to ensure their understanding of institutions.

With the new government in Italy, this proposal is no longer utopic. It could mark the turning point in European immigration policy. The Mediterranean's role as a cemetery will remain an indelible blot. But the future could be a very different matter.

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