

WHAT MIGRATION STRATEGY FOR THE EU?

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This Synthesis looks at the chief elements in the debate on the issues involved in migration, which took place on 24 October 2015 at the Jacques Delors Institute's [European Steering Committee](#) meeting. The debate was introduced by Enrico Letta, vice-president of the Jacques Delors Institute and former president of the Council of Ministers of Italy, Daniela Schwarzer, director of the Europe programme at the German Marshall Fund of the United States in Berlin and António Vitorino, president of the Jacques Delors Institute.

1. A European migration agenda disrupted in the short and medium terms

The debate began with three preliminary considerations. First, we have reached a crossroads because when it comes to migration we are talking about life and death, which is rarely the case when we speak of the policies of the European Union (EU). Second, the nation state is making a comeback in a big way. And third, this is a challenge that will have a long-term impact, whether we are talking about relations between member states or about the EU's relations with its neighbours and with the rest of the world.

Today the issue has become more of a refugee crisis than a migration crisis. The number of refugees is higher than those who sought shelter between 1989 and 1992-3. But having said that, these figures regarding refugees should not make us forget that there is also going to be an economic migration problem that is bound to arise. That problem has existed in the past, exists today and it is still going to exist in the future. It is a long-term problem.

Yet we should realise that the crises are different; it matters whether we are talking about the situation in Syria, in Libya, in Afghanistan or in Iraq, or about the situation in the Balkans. Where the latter is concerned, a start has been made on finding a solution with a list of safe countries of origin.

On the ground, technological resources have had a major impact on the routes chosen by migrants. In 18 months, the percentage of refugees in Germany, Austria and Hungary has multiplied by two thanks to

a change of strategy, which has also led to a change of stance in the European Council.

Where grass-roots opinion is concerned, people have the feeling that there are numerous migrants. But the difference between their perception and reality makes it difficult to implement a public policy. The rift between eastern and western Europe, at any rate, is serious and is not the result simply of a left-right division, as we can see from Robert Fico's position.

Participants stressed that the member states are now aware of the fact that this is the most important issue, which was not the case in April 2015. The true change came at the end of August 2015 and Angela Merkel played a crucial role in that sense. She shouldered leadership and covered an "undecided" issue spawned by immigration policy.

This change is significant, particularly in comparison with the reactions that followed the tragedies of Lampedusa in October 2013. The conclusions of the October 2013 European Council meeting contained only one paragraph on the migration issue, and indeed even that paragraph had only been built in thanks to Herman van Rompuy. But the 2013 European Council's reaction was minimal and only based on an expression of grief.

The landscape has changed today and it also includes new opportunities, with the summit in Valletta and the creation of new instruments such as those proposed by the European Commission on 9 September 2015.



2. The European institutions in the face of the populist challenge and of their own ineffectiveness

The European Council on 15 October 2015 displayed a lack of ambition, an absence of guidelines and a dearth of vision. It showed that immediate communication takes precedence over substance. The European Council's three concluding paragraphs devoted to the issues of asylum and immigration were designed chiefly to send out a message to the people, to tell them: "We are here to protect you!"

The European debate right now is polarised in two directions: that of Marine Le Pen and that of Pope Francis. There is no political discourse midway between the two, and without a discourse, constructive criticism is hardly possible. Whose task is it to formulate this political discourse? Is it the task of national leaders, who are concerned exclusively with national issues for 29 days a month and with European issues only on a single day? Each member state has its own way of handling refugees. Also, the issue is not going to be settled by acting like "Le Pen, only not quite as mean". So we need to be bold enough not only to take on the populists and the rise in xenophobia, but also to attack the discourse of those political parties who depict migrants as a problem, as a "toxic" element.

While member states tell their citizens that they are on top of the situation, the citizens often realize that nothing could be further from the truth. The crucial thing must be to prove that member states have regained control over the Union's external borders and that those who are not eligible for asylum must be urgently sent home. Yet this policy is very expensive and therefore few are sent back. If member states fail to achieve that goal, public opinion

will be aware of it and will not wish to integrate the migrants. Today, where refugee status recognition rates are concerned, there are such huge differences that it is difficult to master the situation at the European level (Afghan citizens enjoy a 1% recognition rate in Greece vs. an 85% recognition rate in other member states).

The European Council displays a lack of vision and an obsession with immediate communication. The European Council cannot become the venue for daily communication, yet that is exactly what is happening. The intention is noble, the issue is important and it deserves to be debated, but it turns into a mere object of communication. It is the "Council-mania" virus. In addition to that, there is the phenomenon of the centralisation of the European Council's role and status by comparison with the other European institutions. But the European Council is an institution comprising people whose daily concern is not the European Union. If we wish to discuss major topics with these institutions and tools, then it is not the right choice.

Today we are facing the issue of our failure to complete the construction of Europe: the EMU yesterday, Schengen today. The small-steps method does not work anymore. While it may work on the technical level, it constantly comes up against the problem of sovereignty. There are issues regarding the institutional aspect, but the point is not having an institutional mechanism so much as having the ability and the will to define a policy.

The Commission is a venue where a voice can enter the debate. But if Jean-Claude Juncker is against it, then it is going to require a person capable of saying what can be done and also what cannot be done, in particular with regard to the following issues: the Dublin Regulation and procedures for examining applications for asylum; the return/readmission of rejected asylum seekers and of illegal immigrants; and the management of reception centres and their direct link with budget cuts. Grass-roots opinion sees reception centres which are like hell on earth and so their reaction is: "I am not safe in my own home". Here we need to "take out our wallets" and strike a balance between budget cuts and the cost of immigration.

The alternative is to head towards the creation of a comprehensive policy embracing development policy, crisis management, the Dublin mechanism, the handling of migrant reception and so on. The

management of migrant policies at the EU level is going to be crucial, so it would be worthwhile making a quantum leap in European integration.



3. Germany's pivotal role

In order to avoid overestimating Germany's role and capabilities in these successive crises - the euro area crisis and the refugee crisis - we need to gain a proper understanding of the differences between the two. Where the euro area crisis is concerned, Germany was able to dictate the pace and content of the decisions reached. It played an important role because it is a net contributor and it has the right of veto. But that is not the case in this present crisis. Germany's role has changed. From a player offering solidarity in the euro area crisis, Germany has become a player seeking solidarity in the refugee crisis. And besides, its allies have changed from one crisis to the other. They were in Eastern Europe in the euro area crisis while they are in southern Europe in the refugee crisis. And furthermore, the Franco-German tandem is weak at a time when a new leadership approach is required in the face of a crisis which has a major potential for tearing Europe apart (as we can see from the stance adopted by the countries in the Visegrad Group).

Germany's open stance on the refugee crisis can be explained by a number of different factors: the weight of history; the weight of the German Basic Law, which promotes a very liberal approach to asylum (along the lines of the Germans displaced after World War II); the discourse of the populist right with a more moderate approach due to local taboos; its open discourse, for some years now, on labour immigration; its stable social and economic situation; and lastly, strong political stability and major (if declining) political support.

Yet the situation is untenable in the medium term, and at this juncture the feeling of a "loss of control" is a growing risk. For example, a "Calais"-type situation in Germany would be considered intolerable. It was also pointed out that German civil society's commitment is very strong, particularly with regard to the welcome extended to asylum seekers and to refugees. Yet there is an ambivalence forming between the sentiment of openness and the feeling of frustration when actions undertaken do not work at the local level.

In this context, it is equally important to stress that xenophobic aggression is increasing. Future political deadlines also need to be taken into consideration. This concerns more specifically the upcoming elections in five Länder, two of which are situated in the east. These elections will constitute a fully-fledged litmus test for the government. In that connection, however, it was highlighted that the rift in the AFD (Alternativ für Deutschland) party this year was a "stroke of luck". Despite everything, it is a matter of finding out whether these political groupings are going to succeed in mobilising the electorate against the present government's liberal policy.

This is a historic challenge that requires a European solution because Germany cannot manage single-handedly. Germany plays a crucial role where the Balkan countries are concerned, but the Europeans need to act well beyond that limited horizon. And in any case, Germany and Europe need a good economic immigration policy because Germany is witnessing a partial decline in its labour force.

In conclusion, Germany is neither going to, nor should, resolve this crisis single-handedly. Angela Merkel should not have gone to Ankara on her own. Action needs to be shared and Germany has to be a factor - a player - in the consensus. For instance, it must succeed in building a stable consensus around the reform of the "Dublin Regulation". Angela Merkel, on the other hand, must maintain the spirit of openness that she displays because while we may criticize her approach in terms of its method, we cannot criticize its substance, even if her position may have seemed naive because it spawned a "pull effect" at the end of which most of the asylum seekers had miraculously become "Syrian".



4. A predictable crisis, but a crisis that can be overcome at the European level

“Was the crisis so unexpected?” Several participants voiced their astonishment over the massive lack of foresight displayed by the institutions and wondered how it might be possible to acquire a capability for foresight. When Kofi Annan addressed the European Parliament at the ceremony for the Sakharov award in 2003, he was already saying back then that what we are witnessing today was bound to happen: “In view of the state of the world, it is to Europe that migrants are going to come”. Yet it would appear that the member states have brought the crisis to a head, in particular by slashing funds pledged to United Nations agencies.

There was a sequence of shocks, but without any truly comprehensive response, from the outset. In Greece in October 2010, the problem was Greece’s. Lampedusa was the moment of denial. Where Syria and lack of foresight are concerned, the member states refused to see the 2.3 million Syrian refugees in Turkey and the 1 million refugees in the Lebanon because the issue was presumed to be “toxic”.

Two obstructive factors were mentioned and they need to be addressed: Turkey, which has no wish to cooperate with the EU; and Greece, which has no wish to monitor its borders because it is only a transit country. Lessons need to be learnt from the past and we need to follow the example of what Spain has done with Morocco: Spain has struck a bargain with Morocco, a bargain that comes at a cost, but works at the very least. If the bargaining partner is unreliable,

however, it does not work. There have been mistakes in the management of the crisis, particularly with regard to Turkey, but it is necessary to keep mobilising with regard to this key country

The crisis can become an opportunity that must allow the EU to address issues hitherto swept under the carpet, and to put an end to the member states’ refusal to consider migration issues as European issues. This crisis is an example of the need for European action. While it is important not to foster excessively high expectations in relation to a situation which has plummeted to such an appalling level of deterioration, the role of an organisation such as the Jacques Delors Institute is to propose long-term visions rather than solutions restricted to the next European Council meeting. These visions include the issues concerning the manner in which it is both possible and necessary to address immigration taking the demographic aspect and economic differences into account. And the debate must also take into account the identity aspect, the will to live together.

Europe’s member states have demonstrated their inability to instinctively share their responsibilities both in the euro area crisis and in the refugee crisis. In good weather things go swimmingly, but the moment a storm arises things become more difficult: it is necessary to agree to further transfers of sovereignty. In that connection, it was underscored that Mrs. Merkel is right when she speaks of a common asylum policy, but that that is going to require further transfers of sovereignty.

But then, it is necessary to highlight the current limitations in the responses given to date, for example by pointing out that in the summer of 2015 only 10% of those who reached European soil were registered. Issues regarding “mixed flows” are not regulated and human traffickers are increasingly effective, while dismantling their networks is a task fraught with difficulty.

It is also necessary to put an end to the current asymmetry which leads to divisions, including of a moral nature: so-and-so is “nice” while so-and-so is “nasty”... It is important to redistribute the burden because, apart from Italy, the countries worst affected are also the poorest. The shortcomings of the Dublin Regulation are common knowledge, but it is very difficult to modify the system.

A favourable political dynamic can be implemented thanks both to the existence of a more proactive Commission today than there was back in the days of the euro area crisis and to a more vociferous European Parliament, backed up by the four main political groups, which would allow Donald Tusk to overcome the antagonisms within the European Council. But then, a European solution has begun to be drafted on the basis of a few clear principles: making a distinction between refugees and asylum seekers; establishing a genuine European border and forming a European Border and Coast Guard, an issue hitherto much disputed; and preparing a genuine EU migrant policy. It is necessary to start by making better use of the European political initiatives already adopted.

It is crucial to act at the source, in other words in the Middle East, and it is necessary to manage the situation with Turkey better. It is a matter of implementing an external European strategy combining foreign policy, development policy, immigration policy and defence policy. It is necessary to create new instruments (such as a EU body in charge of processing asylum applications lodged in the EU), to work on the borders and to decompartmentalise policy (CFSP/ESDP) because the EU has remained silent and powerless in the face of the Syrian crisis.

All in all, Europe's leaders must make an effort to review the script of a bad film, for which they need to write a "happy ending" on the basis of the following factors: showing that the external borders are effectively being monitored; seriously increasing the rejected asylum seekers' and illegal immigrants' return rate, raising it to at least 60%; using every aspect of Schengen (including the temporary resealing of internal borders); acting on the root causes of the migration phenomenon through foreign policy and through aid to countries of origin in order to allow would-be migrants to stay in their own countries; changing their political vocabulary and setting aside the language of fear; and preparing to integrate refugees because that is the start of the transformation of our open societies.



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