

# MORE EUROPEAN SOLIDARITY BEFORE MIGRANT CRISES

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**T**he tragic death of hundreds of migrants in the Mediterranean has triggered an uncommon degree of mobilisation in Europe, which came to a head at the special summit held on 23 April. In addition to the adoption of short term measures, this mobilisation has helped to impart a fresh boost to the debate on European solidarity in the face of these migrant crises, and it is worth exploring that debate on three complementary levels. Yves Bertoncini takes a stand in this Viewpoint.

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## 1. Geographical asymmetry demands European financial solidarity to tackle migrant crises

The creation of the Schengen area has led *de facto* to the mutualisation of common external border monitoring, yet in an asymmetrical context. While EU member states' air borders are all equally accessible, the land and sea borders of some of them (Greece and Italy, for instance) attract the largest influxes of migrants when chaos prevails in neighbouring countries, as it does for example in Syria and in Libya today.

A number of mechanisms evincing Europe's financial solidarity have been put in place to compensate for this asymmetrical situation:

- fiscal equalisation mechanisms, particularly in the shape of the "[Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund](#)" (AMIF), which has been funded to the tune of 2,4 billion euro for the 2014-2020 period; the AMIF is designed, in particular, to strengthen and to develop every aspect of the Common European Asylum System (CEAS), to promote third-country nationals' genuine integration, and to fund the return home of migrants not granted asylum on European soil; each EU member state receives a set amount from this fund in addition to a further share in proportion to its degree of exposure to migrant influxes;
- European financial solidarity is also expressed through the [Frontex agency](#), which offers technical assistance to member states having to cope with strong migratory pressure; this assistance has recently led to the funding of joint patrolling operations on the high seas off Greece (Operation "Poseidon") and off Italy (Operation "Triton"); it is only natural that the cost of such operations should be borne in full by the EU, while Operation "Mare Nostrum", launched by the Italian Government in

2013, [only received 20% funding](#) from the other EU member states;

- And lastly, European financial solidarity can lead to the despatch of "[Rapid Border Intervention Teams \(RABIT\)](#)" (for instance, in Greece in November 2010) consisting of border guards from some or all of the member states, acting under the host country's authority but funded by their countries of origin. Just like Frontex, so these teams too should point the way to the establishment of a fully-fledged "European border guard corps" funded by all of the member states.

## 2. European solidarity still falls short of the mark where migrant intake is concerned

While the massive influx of migrants in certain areas of our common external borders continues to be an exceptional event, it has often highlighted the deficit in European solidarity in the sphere of migrant intake; this is symbolically illustrated by [the way applications for asylum are handled](#):

- European solidarity could be expressed in the context of the "temporary protection" directive adopted in 2001, which specifies that if a country receives a larger number of applications than its intake capacity can handle, its neighbours may take charge of some of the asylum seekers involved; this directive should be applied this spring so as to pave the way for the temporary resettlement of asylum seekers from one EU country to another.
- on a more general level, the [number of applications for asylum handled by the EU member states](#) continues to vary considerably; Germany handled almost one-third (approximately 200,000) of all applications for asylum lodged in 2014 (625,000 in

all), followed by Sweden and then by Italy; Sweden is the country that registered the highest number of applications in proportion to its population, with 8.4 applications for every 1,000 inhabitants, as against 2.5 for Germany, 1.1 for Italy, 1.0 for France and an average figure of 1.2 for the EU as a whole;

- this variation is also striking in terms both of the acceptance rate for applications for asylum and of the number of refugees taken in: while the first-application acceptance rate stood at an average of 45% in 2014, the rate actually fluctuated between 76% in Sweden, 58% in Italy, 41% in Germany, 21% in France and 9% in Hungary.

Unfortunately, the final declaration issued by the special summit on 23 April confirmed this deficit in European solidarity, with the EU member states which consider that they do the most in terms of migrant intake likely to feel that they are being given the cold shoulder by the others. While the current influx of asylum seekers is uncustomarily high by comparison with previous years, it is still very limited by comparison with the influx seen in such countries as Lebanon and Turkey; it is, in fact, perfectly in line with the intake capacity and the humanitarian tradition of a continent with a population of 500 million, but on condition that a solidarity-based mechanism is set up to handle applications for asylum regardless of the migrants' point of arrival.

### **3. European solidarity and cooperation must be strengthened on a joint basis in the face of migrant crises**

The deficit in European solidarity in terms of the shareout of asylum seekers and of the handling of illegal immigration is at once the cause and the result of mutual mistrust among the member states, which is damaging to the EU as a whole.

This deficit in solidarity may lead to inefficiency in the monitoring of our common external border: either because the member states involved do not have the resources to tackle such massive migrant influxes; or because they do not have the political will to keep

in their country migrants who actually wish to reach other countries, when the "Dublin Regulation" rules precisely that immigrants presumed to be illegal have to remain in the country through which they first entered the EU. It would be helpful to review that aspect of the regulation, adopting the principle of a more balanced shareout in the handling of applications for asylum.

The deficit in European solidarity is also the result of (real or imagined) inefficiency in the border monitoring conducted by certain EU member states: Why and to what extent should we display solidarity in the face of an influx that we consider to be uncontrolled? If the assistance provided by "Frontex" and by other member states increases both in financial and in operational terms in those countries, then a sufficient degree of mutual trust could be restored and greater solidarity could be envisaged in the way the migrant influx is handled.

It is in the interest of the EU member states' governments to display greater solidarity over migrant crises, not only out of generosity but also for reasons of efficiency. And in any event, they should shoulder their responsibilities: on the one hand by making available the human and financial resources required for the common management of our external borders in both policing and humanitarian terms; on the other hand by avoiding systematically appealing to neighbouring countries' solidarity when they are faced with migrant influxes that are fairly limited by comparison with their overall population.

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Above and beyond the single issue of "migrant crises", the EU and its member states need to review the entire picture of their migration strategies. The EU is not Lampedusa, a small and poor yet generous island; it is a vast, wealthy area suffering from demographic decline, for which immigration cannot be perceived only as a threat but also as a contribution to maintaining and developing its economic and social model. The more the public debate shines the spotlight on such facts in the future, the more European solidarity will be able to develop over the coming semesters.

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