



New Perspectives on Migration Policies

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As I write this, the EU and its member states are in the midst of fighting the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic—a true ‘black swan’ event. The pandemic has engaged all of Europe’s attention and every resource available to our communities, both at the civilian and the governmental levels. Even as efforts to contain the coronavirus are ongoing, we can already see that the world after the virus will look different. But as much as COVID-19 is changing and accelerating certain trends in the world, other challenges must still be borne in mind: those that existed before the pandemic are still there and will remain if they are not tackled—regardless of COVID-19. Once we have contained the pandemic—and contain it we will—we should come back to a deep reflection on the longer-term challenges.

This issue of the *European View* is dedicated to one of these challenges: migration. Before touching on the migration topics that centre-right politicians and experts tackle in this issue, let me state some basic tenets for the EU’s approach to migration, as I see them. First, the EU and its member states have limited absorption capacity. This means that at the societal and administrative level it is simply impossible to admit an infinite number of people from third countries without risking social and political disruption. Second, refugees fleeing war and violence deserve our help and they should be able to rely on our assistance and legal protection: the Refugee Convention is binding. Third, the system should be set up so that our social policy systems are not abused. Those who are not refugees and whose skills are not needed for our labour markets should be disincentivised from coming to the EU. These tenets should remain unchanged even after the COVID-19 pandemic is beaten. Reflecting on the pandemic and its inevitable social, political and economic consequences, Europeans should resist the urge to turn inwards to the exclusion of the rest of the world. Nevertheless, as I write, people are being laid off, and it is quite likely that Europe will be facing higher unemployment levels in the near future. This is bound to decrease the need for labourers from third countries.

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How should the migration issue be tackled from an institutional perspective? The issue of immigration represents a common, communitarian challenge, not only a challenge for particular countries. This means that the answers to this challenge must be found together, at the European level, through close cooperation between the member states and the EU institutions. Management of immigration should be organised at the European level, by the EU institutions and the member states working together. This applies to border control, the repatriation of those not granted asylum or a residence permit, and also to cooperation with third countries on migration issues.

The competence of accepting or rejecting migrants and asylum seekers should remain at the national level, as this touches upon the issues of culture and identity as well as the needs of the national labour markets. Asylum procedure should be externalised as much as possible. This means that third countries (especially in Africa, but also in the Middle East and beyond) should be incentivised both to adopt functioning asylum legislation and to build robust asylum systems.

Even more importantly, and as a much bigger challenge, the EU should tirelessly work to stabilise countries in conflict, as well as work with third-country administrations to improve their governance structures and strengthen the rule of law. Therefore, the EU should adopt a comprehensive strategy towards Africa. This strategy should cover humanitarian, development, economic and security aspects. We should begin to understand that without comprehensive and multilevel partnerships with African countries and with the African Union, the goal of minimising the incentives for migrants and refugees to come to the EU will be difficult to realise.

On the internal front, the member states should be financially incentivised to accept refugees, but they should not be compelled to do so. The article by Greece's Alternate Minister for Immigration and Asylum Giorgos Koumoutsakos gives more insight into this issue. Yet, it is also important for Europe not to ignore those in real need. The article by Lena Düpont, MEP makes the point that the EU must distinguish between economic migrants and refugees in need of humanitarian protection, and prioritise dedicating its resources to those genuinely in need of safeguarding. Also, the EU (the member states and the EU institutions) should motivate and incentivise local and regional administrations, as well as non-governmental organisations, to prepare the infrastructure, but also public opinion, to accept refugees and migrants into local communities. The process of the integration of refugees and migrants must be organised from the bottom up, supported by national-level legislation. Countries such as Denmark offer examples to follow. More on this subject can be found in the article by Olgierd Geblewicz, President of the EPP Group in the European Committee of the Regions, and also in the one by Claudia Cajvan. Finally, the article by Tommaso Virgili examines the question of migration from the perspective of the migrants' long-term integration into European societies.

The current affairs section also includes articles on other topics. These include the EU's approach to the Western Balkans region, autonomous vehicles and hybrid threats. I hope that all the expertise provided here can help us to concentrate on the challenges ahead, once COVID-19 is contained.

Author biography



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