

By Mariyana Radeva Berket

The European Commission which assumed office in November 2014 is the very first to include among the Commissioners one for Migration. The appointment of Mr. Dimitris Avramopoulos is a clear statement that the topic of migration will form one of the priorities in the next 5 years. It comes as a response to the increased attention to the issue of migration, both at the national and European Union level. **Migration is a cross-cutting issue** – it is related to matters of social protection, organized crime, labour markets, integration, mobility, and the development agenda, among others. At the European Union level, migration policies have to combine looking outward towards migration from third countries, but also inward to intra-European mobility.

Migration topics often make headlines in the EU: media outlets are eager to report on the number of refugees making the treacherous journey to the EU. Just recently UNHCR announced that in 2014 over 3000 people have lost their lives crossing the Mediterranean¹ in an attempt to set foot in Europe – seen as a safe haven, far from the dire situations in their home countries. On the other hand, it takes effort and time to produce solid evidence of the valuable contribution that migrants are making to receiving societies, contrary to the general view that they are only accruing costs. One of the biggest challenges to a European approach to migration issues is indeed the **varied perception of this phenomenon across the EU Member States**. Member states commonly share different sentiments on migration than EU policy-makers. Juggling between fulfilling state obligations under EU legislation and keeping the

national population content is a daunting task for many national politicians. That's why better results would be achieved if EU policies, national policies and the willingness of the population to play along were reconciled.

Ensuring that all EU countries apply asylum rules in the same manner, by fully implementing the common European asylum system (CEAS).

It is recognized that there are **vast differences** between first point of entry countries (most commonly Southern EU Member States) and the destinations countries of most asylum seekers (typically North/North-Western countries.) These differences begin with the perception of incoming refugees and span to include the actual capacity of member states to accommodate the refugees, the due consideration of all asylum applications within a reasonable time and ensuring a smooth asylum determination process. The buzzword “burden-sharing” carries a strong meaning in this context. However, promoting the even application of the CEAS has to be complemented by awareness raising campaigns among the populations of receiving countries, in order to avoid negative sentiments.

Enforcing EU laws penalising human traffickers vigorously.

The European Union is proud to have a number of legislative documents that spell out the need for effective prosecution of traffickers and at the same time for adequate victim protection. Effectively prosecuting those who prey on the exploitation of vulnerable people, be it EU or non-

EU citizens, however, **remains a challenge** across all EU Member States, judging by the numbers collected by Eurostat.² Enforcing existing laws on trafficking in human beings can best be done by magistrates specifically trained to do so. The appointment of specialized prosecutors and judges in each Member State is a step in the right direction. Thus the EU should invest resources in building the capacities of relevant officials.

Protecting our external borders better by increasing the budget of the European border agency Frontex.

Increasing FRONTEX's budget cannot be a panacea for gaps in border protection. As increase in financial resources should go hand in hand with an increase in human resources, building the capacity of national border guards is of utmost importance. Here also comes in prioritizing the **prevention of instances of corruption** at the external borders of the EU.

Cooperating more closely with non EU countries to smooth repatriation of irregular migrants.

Readmission agreements with third countries are a **powerful political tool**, deployed by the European Union. The enhanced close cooperation with non-EU countries should ensure that the human rights of the returnees are respected at all stages of the return process. Similarly to other objectives of the migration policy, regulations on return procedures should be accompanied by adequate financial and human resources. Ideally, however, this cooperation with non-EU countries should also be applied to supporting the eradication of poverty and inequality – for as long as those persist, people will try to come to Europe in order to ensure the livelihood of their families. It is important for EU Member States to recognize the many **different facets of vulnerability** that could be exhibited by returnees.

Promoting the legal migration of persons with skills needed in Europe, through a review of the 'Blue Card' legislation.

The European Union is facing a demographic crisis, with some Member States feeling its effects already. Against this background, research shows that immigration into the EU is not a choice anymore, but a necessity, in order to maintain a European labour force to meet the requirements of current markets. Nonetheless, even within EU borders, tensions exist between the freedom of movement of goods and services and the more restricted freedom of movement of people (labour force). Two- or more-tiered labour markets are easily created as some EU citizens take up work in specific economic segments, usually at the lower end of the skills spectrum. Thus policies for the promotion of legal migration from outside the EU should be designed in coordination with ones fostering intra-EU mobility.

All EU migration policies should **ensure the respect of the human rights** of all migrants, regardless of country of origin or status in the EU.

It is also crucial that EU policy makers **enlist the support of other actors** in shaping the future of European migration policies. Relevant stakeholders include among others, local communities, educators, but also representatives of the private sector.

European migration policies constitute a wish list: protect the EU's borders, attract the migrants Europe needs, don't let the other ones in and at the same time make sure to protect everyone's human rights. It is a challenging endeavor, yet worth the effort in order to make the European Union a better place for all.

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1. <http://www.unhcr.org/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/search?page=search&docid=5486e6b56&query=mediterranean>

2. Eurostat, Trafficking in human beings, 2014 edition. http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/home-affairs/what-is-new/news/news/docs/20141017_working_paper_on_statistics_on_trafficking_in_human_beings_en.pdf