

Time For A Euro-Mediterranean Migration Policy

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The current European Commission Joint Consultation review that seeks to establish a New European Neighbourhood Policy towards the Mediterranean must aim at launching a comprehensive Migration Policy that addresses the multifaceted humanitarian plight of hundreds of thousands of people. The ENP Review offers an opportunity to map out a more action oriented and more target focused agenda that seeks to manage and decriminalize this phenomenon.

In the first decade of the new millennium the Mediterranean has increasingly moved into the international spotlight as a front-line area for irregular migration from the African continent towards the European Union. Since 2002, the central Mediterranean has experienced a growing influx of migrants predominantly from the Horn of Africa, practically all of which have departed from the Libyan coast towards Europe. Even though, in absolute terms, the total number of sea-borne migrants crossing the Mediterranean has not constituted a massive exodus from Africa, the continuous flow of migrants has become a permanent feature of the security challenge landscape.

The upheavals across the Arab world since 2011 have increased the urgency to deal with the movement of displaced persons in a more concerted manner. Given the indivisibility of security in Europe and the Mediterranean, the EU must continue to adopt a more proactive stance when it comes to influencing and managing the international relations of the Mediterranean area. When it comes to identifying a way forward

to enhancing regional cooperation in the Mediterranean both the European Union and the Arab world need to conduct a critical reassessment of regional cooperation. Regional cooperation is not an aim in itself. It has to be pursued with a clear strategy, clearly defined objectives and instruments to advance long-term objectives, and a clear sense of priorities. What sort of regional cooperation makes sense? Where is there a chance of advancing?

The priority of the European Union at this critical juncture in Euro-Mediterranean relations should be to ensure that the Mediterranean does not become a permanent fault-line between the prosperous North and an impoverished South. The key development to watch in the emerging Mediterranean in the next decade will be to see whether the European Union is prepared to seriously support the process of reform underway across the Arab world. The EU must realise that there is an urgent need to promote an effective development aid policy aimed at addressing the root causes of migration.

If such an opportunity is not grasped, political paralysis coupled by economic stagnation could lead to a scenario where a clash of cultures takes hold and disorder dominates Mediterranean relations. Such a scenario of instability and uncertainty will stifle the economic growth and political stability that is necessary to improve the standard of living of all peoples across the Mediterranean and avoid an exodus of people seeking a better standard of living.

Any analysis that focuses on the main challenges facing the international community in general and the European Union in particular to manage illegal boat migration from the African continent must focus on the following main areas of immigration policy: detention policy, integration policy, return and readmission policy, EU burden-sharing, maritime patrols, and development cooperation as a means of addressing the root causes of migration. Thus far, the European Union has not yet developed any real comprehensive policy on the integration of immigrants. For the last few years it has tended to turn a blind eye to what happens to these individuals after their period in detention. But the reality is that the numbers living and working (or wanting to work) in communities across the EU are growing.

The porous nature of borders in the post Cold War world dictates that the European Union come to terms with the fact that illegal migration is a problem that will continue to dominate security patterns of interaction between the northern and southern shores of the Mediterranean. In the past decade the launching of the Frontex mission in the Mediterranean raised expectations that illegal migration would be dealt with in a credible manner. This has not materialized. The most serious shortcoming of Frontex's operation in the Central Mediterranean has been its failure to engage EU member states and Arab states to work collectively to combat human trafficking.

At the moment there are no elaborate mechanisms to contend with maritime security challenges in the Mediterranean. An accidental collision at sea between transport tankers crossing through the choke points of the Mediterranean basin, such as the Straits of Sicily or Straits of Gibraltar would wreak havoc upon the economies in the vicinity of the disaster. Further, very few practical

measures are being taken to tackle the alarming rate of degradation that is currently taking place in the marine environmental sector. As a result, marine biology and everything linked to maritime activities, including tourism, is suffering more and more year in and year out.

Two other sources of instability that have benefited from the maritime security vacuum that exists are traffickers in drugs and human beings. The ever increasing proliferation of drug consignments which are reaching ever deeper into the civil societies of the Mediterranean and the accentuation of illegal migratory flows from south to north have already negatively affected the lives of millions of people in the Euro-Mediterranean area and risk destabilising the legal structures of all ENP states.

If changing the perception of illegal migration in a more positive direction is to be achieved it is essential that everyone seeks to generate positive perceptions in the media and elsewhere. Every effort should be made to encourage politicians on a bi-partisan basis, Church leaders and opinion formers to take the lead in counter-acting racist and xenophobic tendencies in society. The European Union should take the lead in dispelling the negative myths about migrants and highlight the positive contributions they are making to all of our societies.

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