report

MANAGING MIGRATION IN THE WESTERN MEDITERRANEAN

What can be done from the multilateral and regional perspectives?

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What can be done from the multilateral and regional perspectives?

26-27 October 2017, Italian Institute for International Political Studies (ISPI), Milan

Milan hosted an international seminar on migration management in the Western Mediterranean, organised by the MedThink 5+5 think tank network and coordinated by the IEMed, in collaboration with the Secretariat of the Union for the Mediterranean and the Italian Institute for International Political Studies (ISPI).

During the first session open to the public, participants discussed the flows of migrants and refugees in the Mediterranean that have intensified since the 2011 Arab revolutions as well as the challenges and opportunities they involve for the 5+5 Dialogue countries. The responses of national and European authorities to a crisis affecting the region as a whole, particularly since 2013, were analysed. Attention was also paid to the way in which the cities have managed the arrival of migrants and refugees in terms of integration policies.

The following sessions addressed other different aspects of migration management in the Western Mediterranean region. The first session was centred on assessing the destabilising impact that the flows of migrants and refugees in the Maghreb countries can have. Participants then focused on possible coordinated responses between the southern and northern Mediterranean states through mobility partnerships. Finally, the seminar closed with a final session on the various possibilities that Europe has to offer in order to facilitate migration towards its member states and thus avoid human tragedies at its borders.

Opening Remarks

During the welcoming addresses, Ambassador Senén Florensa, current President of the Executive Committee at the European Institute of the Mediterranean (IEMed), stated that in the current situation it is important to highlight that Europe has not always been a continent of destination for migration, rather the contrary. Especially in the late 19th century and early 20th, not only Spaniards and Italians migrated to America but also Germans, Irish and other European nationalities migrated massively to the New World and other territories. After the Second World War, southern Mediterranean countries such as Spain, Portugal and Italy saw many of their citizens migrating to central and northern European countries. This diminished after the global economic crisis in the 1970s. At the same time and after the independences of the Maghreb countries in the 1950s and 1960s, the south-north migration started.

In recent years, new patterns in this south-north migration have appeared: citizens of sub-Saharan African countries are increasingly reaching Europe through the central Mediterranean route. Those people often fall into the hands of mafias for opportunities that often do not exist in Europe. Another new phenomenon is the refugee flows coming from countries living a war situation: Syria is the best example.

The refugee flows coming from Syria and other countries like Afghanistan or Pakistan, combined with the economic migration flows from sub-Saharan countries, have been putting extreme pressure on Europe because they coincided with the European countries going through an economic crisis, which created massive unemployment and pauperisation.

These arriving flows had an impact on the national elections in many European countries with the appearance or strengthening of extreme right parties. This political outcome was often the product of fear of the unknown. Many of the people who arrived in Europe or who tried were those with more

resources, studies and networks, while the poorest remain in Syria suffering the situation. And many were refused entry to Europe.

Opening Session: The Role of Metropolitan Cities in Managing Migration and Refugee Flows

This session was attended by Luigi Vignali, Director General for Italian Citizens Abroad and Migration Policies at the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs; José Luis Pardo, Spanish Ambassador at Large for Migration; Marisa Farrugia, Special Envoy to the Secretary General of the Union for the Mediterranean; and Pierfrancesco Majorino, Council Member for Social Policies (Health and Rights) from the Municipality of Milan.

This session used many examples based in Italy as many of the discussants participating were from this particular country. In Italy, migrants are from sub-Saharan Africa, mostly western Africa. The impact of those migrants on the African economy is very important: remittances are estimated at up to $33 billion from around the world. It was stressed there is a need for private investment in the local economy and, therefore, the European Parliament and the Council have adopted the European Fund for Sustainable Development, which will contribute to energy development in Africa with €4.1 billion. Moreover, there is also a need to keep on struggling with the effects of irregular migration on a short-term basis and thus stop the smugglers who are causing a terrible tragedy as thousands of human beings lost their lives on the central Mediterranean route. We need to realize that nowadays 3% of the world's population is migrating.

Do metropolitan cities have a role in managing migration and refugee flows? Participants agreed that much can be done on the local level. Qualitative and quantitative data about migration is essential in order to tackle the challenges, and the Data for Integration (DFI) programme funded by the EU is a very valuable source of information. Without knowledge there is no solution, nor without citizen awareness. At the local level, it is all a matter of "resistance": from the local communities hosting the migrants and from the migrants being integrated into the society hosting them. Logistics in reception and logistics in integration have a particular impact on how those "resistances" are shaped.

The city of Milan is confronting part of this complex global phenomenon. Discussion about migration requires a great deal of common sense and rationality and is therefore not a very popular issue. Milan has 261,000 foreign citizens who take part in the social and productive life of the city. It also has 125,500 refugees, 24,000 of whom are children. One of the main challenges in the current situation is how to teach those children growing up there to become Italian citizens. If this fundamental issue is not tackled correctly, there is a risk of those populations becoming second category citizens. Of course, the local, regional and national authorities have the main responsibility but the responsibilities of the European Union in the urgent situation of those refugees must also be taken into consideration.

Whether the management of migrant flows is discussed in the UN system with actors such as the UNHCR and IOM, in the EU (Valletta Process, Rabat Process, Khartoum Process, African Union – European Union Summit) or even in other regional fora (UfM, Council of Europe) at state level, managing immigration is equally complex because it is not just the responsibility of one ministry but of many of them (Social Security, Interior, Employment, Education, Economy…).

I. North African Stability and Migration Flows

There was a shared opinion among the discussants during this session: the 5+5 Dialogue framework needs to compare and discuss other examples of Mediterranean countries in order to tackle the migration situation. Indeed, the migration issue in the 5+5 region cannot be tackled only from that region even if the Western Mediterranean Forum is the best institutionalised dialogue in the Mediterranean.

irregular migration is caused by instability in North Africa and sub-Saharan countries and in turn it creates instability because the routes used by migrant smugglers in the central corridor towards the Mediterranean are also controlled by arms and drugs smugglers (sometimes they are the same). Stability is the question at the core of the migration challenge. There is now an awakening of European states that feel they can only solve this situation in the long run by addressing the root causes and consequences of migration. But the fact remains that Italy, the country most exposed to the central Mediterranean corridor, needs a short-term solution to stop irregular migration, which has reached unprecedented dimensions. The latter implies stabilising Libya, from whose coasts the immense majority of migrants have been arriving since the eastern Mediterranean route was contained.

To deal with this situation, the international community and, of course, the European countries with strong ties to Libya, some of which have a responsibility for the current chaos, should include the militias in the political peace process in Libya, an idea supported by Libyan Prime Minister Fayez Al-Serraj. This approach can contribute to Libyan stabilisation because it allows local actors to strengthen and create embryonic state institutions from the local to regional and then national level. Nevertheless, the migration issue must not be interpreted as solely located in Libya.

According to the EuroMed Survey 2016, Mauritania is also very concerned about migration because it is located on the western route to Europe through

Morocco. Although it is a country of transit, it is also a country of destination just as other countries of the Maghreb are becoming. The Euromed Survey 2016 also highlights that for many experts in the Mediterranean region, climate change is not seen as an important factor of migration (push-factor) for the next 10 years. This is an alarming piece of data because it means that one of the biggest threats to regional stability is not taken seriously by the actors that are able to make the difference.

Discussants also warned that reliable data is one of the pillars of correct management of the crisis. A good example is the 2015-2016 migration crisis when the eastern Mediterranean corridor through Turkey was allowing thousands of irregular migrants to bypass European frontiers without control. During summer 2015, there was in the media a "fear of the numbers" that pushed the European Union to accept an engagement with Turkey to stop the migrant flow. In that period, reliable data about the number of migrants and refugees aiming to reach Europe could have greatly helped the European Union authorities.

Meanwhile, there is also a lack of relevant research, studies and communication on south-south migration, which is increasing and is far higher than south-north migration. This asymmetry of communication should be balanced in order to allow a broader public to understand the complexity of migration and the fact that it is not solely focused on reaching Europe. South-south migration is to be seen as an opportunity for European leaders to redirect part of the migration pressure on European borders toward African regions such as ECOWAS, where economic development has to be encouraged by local and foreign investments, such as the European Fund for Sustainable Development.

Finally, there is no doubt that in any case Europe needs to see the migration flows as an opportunity and not only as a threat. The demographic growth in Europe is weak, if not negative in some countries, and does not seem enough to maintain the current economic and social system. Because of this, it seems that European demands fit very well with most needs of economic migrants and refugees. Such complementarities can pave the way for a win-win situation.

II. The Future of Migration Partnerships

In the current situation and since the second civil war in Libya in 2014, the EU has a problem defining who is a reliable partner when addressing the migration issue in Libya. In a country that is in fact a failed state there is a need for institution building and peace-building. The security sector is one of the fields where Libya needs more help to tackle the migration issue. Indeed, Libya needs to control its land borders (4,348 km) and coastline (1,770 km) but has only 6 million inhabitants.

The agreement between the EU and the Libyan transitional government, which established return to origin countries and retention centres for irregular migrants, does not address a human impact in these centres (torture, sexual exploitation, slavers and inhuman living conditions). There is an obvious lack of humanitarian consideration in this agreement. There is a need to see how to solve this situation from another perspective, which would be both more efficient from the human rights point of view and long-term perspective. Libya could become a destination country again as it was before the 2011 revolution, when three million non-Libyan Africans were working in the country. To some extent and if, of course, the institution building and economic development resumes in the country, it could even host up to 5 million migrants who consequently would not be interested in reaching Europe.

Regarding the countries of origin, such as Niger, it has been explained that EU strategies have to be holistic. This means that, for example, the EU cannot simply demand that Niger's government crack down on the smuggler networks in its northern region. If such a crackdown occurs, they would be destabilising the region because there is no alternative to the economy grown around the migration routes in that region. The Niger example is very significant to the complexity of the migration question.

Other countries, such as Algeria, also have their own specificities and limitations in dealing with EU migration partnerships because the priorities are simply not

the same. Whilst Algeria's priority in the partnership is human mobility, for the EU the first is security. The fact is that it seems that for Algeria and many other countries in the region this kind of partnership has no advantage. With sub-Saharan migration flows growing in the direction of Algeria and an internal economic situation worsening since the fall of oil prices, which will have an impact on the living standards, the country must now prepare for new migration challenges.

Nevertheless, those specific cases should not hide a broader view of the migration partnerships' more common problems in the region. One of the discussants argued that many mobility partnerships are just declarations that are often followed by disengagement. The "visa versus readmission" agreements are still under negotiation and are purely bilateral. The European Commission has no power to establish legal texts because it needs the member states' approval. This means that mobility partnerships content is not a real one, it is not to be used as a programming tool. Since the Vallette Summit in October 2015 and under the Austrian initiative, DCFTA (Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreement) and development aid are conditioned on the migration partnership, which is not contemplated according to EU rules. In view of that, it seems that for more pragmatic action by the EU it is time to forget the mobility partnerships model and to manage migration with third countries through concrete and reliable pacts, such as the EU-Turkey pact in 2015.

As emphasised above, addressing the root causes is also a priority. The EU is contributing to tackling underdevelopment in the origin countries thanks to the Emergency Trust Fund for Africa (€3.3 billion allocated for 5 years), which includes North Africa and Sahel countries. This fund was established at the Valletta Summit on 12 November 2015 to address the migration crises in the region of Sahel/Lake Chad, Horn of Africa and North Africa, encompassing a total of 23 countries.

Despite the impact this and other financial instruments developed by the EU can have in addressing the root causes of migration, there are reasons to believe that

this is not enough and that the problem is not taken as seriously as it should be. There is a need to highlight what the priorities for the EU are. The migration issue, which has already been used to undermine EU unity and solidarity, has not triggered the same responses that existed for the economic crisis, which was also a serious threat to the existence of the EU. Basically, whilst the latter was tackled in many countries with billions of euros for bank rescues, the former has not triggered the same common and powerful responses. The conclusion is that there is a lack of political forces concerned with the migration issue: it seems that there is no (or little) concern for the root causes of migration. Even if the readmissions are necessary and the “open door” policy is excluded, there is a need for more funding for development.

III. Third Session: Europe, Looking for Legal Alternatives for Migrants

As warned in the previous sessions, the problem of irregular immigration is far from being solved. Firstly because for the majority of North African or sub-Saharan African citizens there is a lack of opportunities that pushes and will continue to push young people towards Europe. This lack of opportunities is above all the result of imbalances in the distribution of wealth but also of the asymmetry of development between regions. Secondly, cooperation with the EU is also problematic. In the past, this cooperation has already proved incomplete and unsatisfactory. At the time of the Barcelona Process in 1995 there was a question of creating an area of "shared prosperity", and it is clear that by 2017 the gap between the south and north of the Mediterranean has widened.

Faced with this evidence and taking the example of the EU-Tunisia case, there is no reason now for much more optimism. On the one hand, the negotiations of the DCFTA (Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreement) are far from being completed and they arouse the scepticism of many Tunisian economic circles. On the other hand, the mobility partnership with the EU does not seem to be evolving towards a new model compared to the previous ones, since the return-visa conditionality is still the cornerstone. Thus, even though this partnership envisages a visa regime that is more flexible than before, it only concerns the most favoured social classes (businesspeople, students, doctoral students, researchers, etc.). This situation is not limited to cooperation between the EU and Tunisia; bilateral agreements between Tunisia and European states are also at an impasse.

The bilateral agreement between Italy and Tunisia, which was negotiated between 2004 and 2007, raised hopes for the visa regime but ended up with disappointing results. The same process began with France in 2008. In both cases, the initial hope was to obtain a determined visa quota, which was finally not implemented. Secondly, with Switzerland and Germany there is always more and more talk of approaching the security aspect almost exclusively

without worrying about human mobility. It is therefore clear that migration agreements, whether with the EU member states or with the EU, are all shaped in such a way that return and readmission affect the rest of their content. Because of this, there is a feeling of collective and transversal injustice in Tunisia (and not only in this country) that opposes this conditionality, which seeks to have return and readmission accepted in exchange for an increase in the visa quota (or an improvement of their regime) that will only favour an elite.

One way to unblock negotiations on mobility partnerships between the EU and the Maghreb countries would be to integrate them into the DCFTA negotiations. Since the aim of the latter is to secure the free movement of goods and capital, it seems natural to include the freedom of movement of human beings. This should eventually include not only favoured socio-professional categories but also low-skilled jobs and the unemployed in the future. Another discussant, considering that the emphasis on multilateral European agreements is not working now, pointed out that the first stage for every European state is to create its own regulation for working immigration and then for immigration in general. The second stage, once this effective state regulation could be implemented in each country, is to agree among European members on a common regulation in agreements with third countries such as Tunisia.

Other alternatives to legal channels such as those that have just been described cannot be considered sustainable in the long term. Negotiating pacts with states or militias that control parts of failed states is not a coherent solution to stem the flow of refugees: it is always a fragile and temporary compromise, costly and deeply pernicious to the image of the EU or its member states. Moreover, this kind of arrangement places the EU in a weak position vis-à-vis these “dirt” countries, which may therefore condition the continuity of their role on benefits agreed by an EU that considers itself between a rock and a hard place.