Immigration: Let's Listen to What Our Southern Neighbours Have to Tell Us

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At the end of summer 2005, young people died outside Melilla as they were trying to get into Europe. One month later, other young people, this time born in Europe of immigrant parents, expressed their bitterness over the inequality of opportunity which still affects them a generation later, in riots which were to shake up the suburbs of Paris and other French towns for most of the autumn. On New Year's Eve, 2006, in the centre of Cairo, scores of Sudanese migrants met their deaths, outside the premises of United Nations Refugee Agencies (UNHCR) where, with three thousand of their fellow countrymen they had been trying to get their refugee status recognised.

On the outskirts of Paris, at the entrance of the Spanish enclaves of Morocco, or at the heart of the Egyptian metropolis, North Africans and Sub-Saharan people find themselves side by side. The region which extends from Morocco to Turkey, south of the Mediterranean, is one of the most active migratory areas of the world today. As well as being a major centre of emigration it is a passage well-worn by new waves of immigration, originating from the south and the east.

These migrations were a central subject of the "5+5 Dialogue" ministerial meeting (the countries of the western Mediterranean, with five from the Maghreb: Algeria, Libya, Morocco, Mauritania et Tunisia, and five from Europe: Spain, France, Italy, Malta and Portugal) organised in Paris on 9 and 10 November by the French Minister Jean-Louis Borloo, and later also of the summit conference of the Euromed Process, brought together in Barcelona by the Spanish prime minister, José Luis Rodriguez Zapatero on 27 and 28 November.

What are the levels and the trends of migrations, in origin, in destination, or in transit via the countries of the southern Mediterranean? What impact do they have on the development of the countries of origin? And on the country of destination? How do the states and societies respond? All these questions are the subject of a report published in October by the European University Institute, Florence within the framework of a project financed by the European Commission. *Mediterranean Migrations - 2005 Report*. The report covers the following countries, from West to East: Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Egypt, Jordan, Israel, Palestinian Territory, Lebanon, Syria, and Turkey. This 400-page report is the fruit of the labours of a network of thirty experts from the countries of the southern Mediterranean, demographers, economists, corporate lawyers and political analysts who are offering the first systematic inquiry into this question of great political urgency, and emphasises, once is not habit, the vision of the south. Here are some of the results.

The first result will not be a surprise. Despite the restrictions on immigration which are multiplied across the four corners of the world, emigration remains a major characteristic of the southern Mediterranean. Between 10 and 15 million first generation emigrants originate from this area. It would be unrealistic to offer a more precise figure, as the statistician was confronted with two contradictory realities: that of the country of residence and that of the country of origin, which do not include the same people in their calculation of numbers. Those of double nationality, citizens of their adopted countries, effectively always remain expatriates of their country of origin, and the same goes for their children. On one hand they are no longer immigrants, but on the other they are still emigrants. People of double nationality are not numerous enough, however, to account for the difference from single to double between calculations by their countries of residence and by the consulates of their countries of origin. Temporary migrants and those in illegal situations are another component. Because they are likely to offer protection to their expatriates who are in vulnerable situations, the consulates do indeed have contact with a part of this population which the current statistics are incapable of reaching.

Whether or not people like to hear it, emigration from the southern Mediterranean, which did slow down during the last two decades, is on the increase again. Morocco can be seen as an example. According to consulate registrations, the number of Moroccans living abroad went from 1.5 million in 1993, to 3.1 million in 2004, a 100% increase in twelve years, which represents an annual growth of 6.3% in the emigrant Moroccan population, against only a 1.3% rise in the total population of Morocco itself. France has gone into the lead with both the total number of Moroccan registrations (1,115,000 in 2004) and the supplementary figures

over twelve years (+435,000), followed by Spain (+360,000 in twelve years, being a total of 425,000 in 2004) and then followed by Italy (+210,000 / 300,000). The figures for Spain, more recent than those of the Moroccan consulates, show that the movement of Moroccan emigrants continues: from 420,556 to 31 December 2004, the number of Moroccans registered in Spanish communities went up to 511,294 as at 31 December 2005, being an increase of 21.5% in one year (www.ine.es).

Each on its own scale and with its own specific destinations, countries such as Egypt, Algeria, Tunisia and Lebanon show trends similar to those of Morocco. The continuation for yet another decade, of a strong demographic increase in these countries' numbers of young adults and their lack of prospects in local job markets, suggests that the pressure will go on for several more years. Only Turkey stands out in this group, thanks to spectacular economic success, which is beginning to create a country of return for some of its former emigrants.

The second result is less expected for Europe, which loves to see itself as the focal point of all migrants. It is not the only destination of emigrants from the southern Mediterranean, of whom it only in fact receives less than half. The Gulf Arab states and Libya also take as many, even though their politics, hitherto ultra protectionist, provide for a drastic reduction in employment accessible to immigrants, despite the spectacular revival of petrol income. Far behind, the United States and Canada appear to have become a new magnet. At the moment they receive less than 10% of the emigrants from the southern Mediterranean, but this is already more than 50% of the most qualified among them. While 66% of the first generation emigrants originating from the southern Mediterranean who are now in Europe have an inferior or rudimentary level of education, 58% of those who are in North America are university graduates. Such a difference between Europe and North America can be explained in part by the succession of generations: migration into Europe, an older concept, started in times when few young people from southern Mediterranean countries had access to secondary school or university, which has since become more commonplace. But it is also due to the contrast between the politics of economic immigration: North America is open, albeit selectively, whereas Europe is generally speaking, closed.

Today it is considered good form to deplore the brain-trade. Let us be careful not to get mixed up. The countries of the southern Mediterranean are not those of the southern Sahara. In Egypt, Algeria, Morocco or Tunisia, it is a long hard road for the cohorts of young graduates: firstly there is unemployment, which affects this category more than all others, sometimes lasting many years; then often there is disappointment, when a job is finally found, but at a level and with wages well below initial aspirations. In these conditions, the circulation of skills is not a trade, but the free choice of responsible men and women. Rather than stigmatising it, we should organise it so that it is beneficial to all parties.

How do the governments of the southern Mediterranean view the emigration of their citizens? Employment is their main priority. Even if they recognise that emigration can alleviate the pressure on the work market no-one would recommend it as a solution to unemployment. On the other hand everyone notices their diasporas, that is to say the results of former emigrations, as a resource that it is proper to cultivate. An economic resource, as the money sent by emigrants (to the order of 20 billion dollars a year for the whole of the southern Mediterranean!) contributes towards the stability of balances of payments heavily in deficit, and allows the conditions of existence of the families of migrants to be improved in their regions of origin, and these are among the poorest people, and the money is primarily invested in housing, health and education. It then becomes a diplomatic resource, because the confidence displayed by the diasporas is a guarantee of the opening up of their country of origin, and thus an asset in attracting foreign investment.

One after the other, all the countries of the southern Mediterranean have thus established institutions, often ministerial departments, to handle the affairs of their expatriates. These institutions follow three lines of policy: the maximisation of economic benefits drawn from the diasporas, the protection of their rights in their countries of residence, and the preservation of their cultural identity. The first line is conveyed by a modernisation of banking and fiscal systems, the second by a development of the rule of law, and the third by the extension of activities, notably religious, organised from within the southern Mediterranean countries and directed towards second generation migrants.

These three lines leave many questions unanswered. Primarily, what is the sustainability of development supported by the transfer of savings of emigrants? The savings which an emigrant is likely to send to his country of origin follow a cycle: they increase at first, as fast as the problems of settling in will allow, then they decrease, as the migrant progressively ceases to feel like an outsider, and builds a new life in the place where he lives. To maintain a regular flow of savings transfer, there needs to be a regular flow of new emigrants. Temporary migration is the scheme best suited to this objective. Secondly, are the countries of origin ready to grant to their emigrants the same rights as those they intend to defend for them in their country of destination? Apart from Algeria, no country of the southern Mediterranean has to date, for example, recognised the principle of political participation of diasporas. Thirdly, are the policies of defending identity followed by countries of origin entirely compatible with the effective integration of immigrants into their new society of residence? This is doubtful when the new society, as in France's case, is reluctant to tolerate the development of communities and relies on powerful instruments of cultural homogenisation, the most obvious example being schools.

The third result of this enquiry is that the southern Mediterranean is far from being just a region of emigration. There are in fact 3.6 million residents who were born abroad and 2.1 millions of non-nationals. Apart from the "traditional" migrations in the region of the Near East (Jewish immigrants and Palestinian refugees) all sorts of immigration flow is recorded of varying size and legality, such as Sub-Saharans in the Maghreb, but also Sudanese in Egypt, Syrians in

Lebanon, Iraquis in Jordan, Moldavians and Georgians in Turkey, or even Filipinos and Sri Lankans in all the countries of the Arab East. The transitory migrants, those en route for Europe (or for other continents) who find themselves stuck in the southern Mediterranean having failed to reach their initial destination, do not form the majority of the flow, far from it, even if current events in Europe only hold them back. All these countries possess legislation, or else policies, which allow them to give status to foreigners and to define their access to certain rights and responsibilities. But only Morocco (2003) and Tunisia (2004) are equipped with laws specifically to manage the entry and stay of foreigners with the view of fighting illegal immigration and penalising those who practise or facilitate it. In Morocco, the law of 2003 has even given rise to a lively debate lasting several months, truly democratic, on the appropriateness of alienating neighbours from the south Sahara by trying to please those of the northern Mediterranean, or of trampling on the human rights which state that "everyone has the right to leave any country, including his own" (art. 13) by preventing illegal migrants from leaving Morocco.

It would be wrong to always limit the prevention of illegal immigration to being a service to Europe. In the southern Mediterranean, plagued by an unemployment rate in the double figures, the response is also possibly primarily out of concern for protecting nationals in the job market. Even if they do not adhere to all the methods recommended by some European governments for controlling illegal migration, such as the establishment of camps for the separation and removal of immigrants from their territory, the countries of the southern Mediterranean share the primarily security-based approach to this problem. The question upon which points of view diverge from one Mediterranean shore to the other, and this is where the European governments ought to listen to their southern partners, is that of economic migration and the global approach which the south is calling for. We cannot concentrate effectively on the repression of illegal immigration if we do not tackle its prevention by development, and by recognising that development is achieved through the organisation of legal economic migration.

References

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