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Strategies for Stability and Sustainability in Euro-Mediterranean Migrations

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In this article, the author provides a wide and vivid picture of the several dimensions of migration flows in the current global scenario and, in particular, in the Mediterranean. She proposes new interpretations of this complex phenomenon, analyzing its multiple aspects and characteristics and the push factors and policies and responses of the countries of origin, transit, and destination. She suggests new approaches and strategies to deal with the issue of migration, urging the EU member states and EU institutions to develop management policies for stability and sustainability that are welcoming and that respect human rights.

Migration is a natural and legitimate aspiration of human beings. Two thousand fifteen will be remembered in Europe as the year of the “refugee crisis.”¹ Yet, other parts of the world have been facing this phenomenon for a longer time and “with much greater intensity.”² The case of Europe, however, raises a fundamental issue, because the “refugee crisis” has touched some fundamental values and pillars on which the European cultural project has been based, and this is why it has been perceived as particularly significant.

Until the beginning of the “crisis,” migration to Europe was not considered a priority issue. Despite the obvious connection between migration and human rights, development, and security, migration policies continued to be of marginal concern at the EU level and were meant to be resolved internally by member states. The European Union has always maintained that human mobility and migration are phenomena that can be kept separate at the political level: the European Union would be responsible for migration within Europe, while international institutions would be responsible for the issue of human mobility on the global scale. This dual approach, without congruent coordination, often led to policy failure.

One example is the rapid crumbling of the March 18, 2016, EU-Turkey agreement designed to try to end irregular migration from Turkey to the European Union, which entailed a hoped-for exchange of returned irregular migration with legal procedures for the resettlement of refugees to the European Union. Instead, however, migration intensified, leading to profound disagreement between the member states and Turkey about migration policies.

The migration issue reveals deep divisions among the twenty-eight EU member states over the future of the European project.³ Migration became a defining issue in the United Kingdom’s June 2016 referendum on EU membership,⁴ and it was a dominant question in the electoral campaigns of Austria⁵ and Germany⁶ in 2017 and Italy⁷ and Hungary⁸ in 2018.

The current situation in the European Union presents an ironic contradiction: on one hand there are policy demands for pragmatic responses; on the other hand, the lack of

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effective policy responses has led to the expression of xenophobia for political and ideological purposes.

The political jargon recurs: Europe as a “fortress,” defending itself from invasion with “walls,” “fences,” and “camps” for refugees. A contrasting narrative refers to religious or moral values, using the theme “welcoming the needy,” which has been appealing to some sectors of the populace. These contrary visions expose the dichotomy between an open society and a closed society.

When Angela Merkel announced that Germany would welcome a million refugees in 2015, she articulated an ethical standard regarding refugees at a time when Europe risked losing its post–World War II standard criterion regarding respect for human rights. The plan that Merkel defined with the European Union became quite challenging, especially after Turkey’s turn to authoritarianism in the wake of the attempted coup on July 15, 2016. The Merkel plan as defined by the European Stability Initiative presented a different approach to the “refugee crisis,” transforming it into a geopolitical exercise that redefined the roles of strategic countries such as Turkey, while enhancing the German decision-making power within Europe.⁹ At the same time it imposed policies on transit countries while excluding a meaningful policy role for those countries, especially front-line countries such as Greece. In this new plan people have become pieces on a chessboard being moved and sacrificed by state actors. Despite the generosity of Merkel’s plan in welcoming a million refugees, most of those who have reached Germany are still sleeping in gymnasiums that have been transformed into dormitories. Also, a rise in extreme right-wing movements that oppose the plan allowed the populist radical-right Alternative for Germany (AfD) not only to enter the Bundestag, the German parliament, but to become the third largest political party, receiving a stunning 13.3 percent of the vote, an increase of 8.8 percent compared with the results of the 2013 federal election.¹⁰ Additionally, the ethical compromises involved in using Turkey as the key country in the process of migration management, with considerable compensation being promised to the Erdoğan government, needs critical examination.

Is Europe prepared to face this new sociopolitical scenario? What critical opportunities and challenges does migration create within Europe? And, can the dichotomy between an open and a closed society be solved?¹¹

The supporters of a European open society model—which include many left-wing, social-democratic parties, and center-right parties—maintain that migration should be welcomed but controlled principally for security reasons.

The alternative approach proposes a European closed society model, in which populist and nationalist parties use narratives related to the preservation of the “national” culture and the need to reaffirm the concept of nation-state within EU membership. This point of view, which envisions a generalized risk connected with Islam and Islamist movements, was widely expressed after the recent terrorist attacks within Europe. The proponents of this point of view often speak of the incompatibility of Islam with “European” culture, while claiming that Muslim migrants have failed to adhere to contemporary European values, especially regarding democratic practices and the hoped-for equality among genders.

Even before the 2015 “migration crisis” began, however, EU member states had tended to view large-scale international migration as a threat to the sovereignty of their national and regional borders, their economies, and their societies. For decades, the argument has been that states have always had a sovereign right to control who crosses their borders and that undermining that control threatens national sovereignty. According to this point of view, full sovereignty requires the full reassertion of sovereignty. Most member states have stiffened access to their territories, often using legal channels. These increased restrictions have not been effective, however, in staving off the influx of refugees and other migrants; instead, they

have resulted in pushing migration into clandestine channels, thus exposing vulnerable migrants to even greater physical and other risks.

For example, though the Balkan route was closed in March 2016, it has remained an important connection axis for migrants and asylum seekers and a significant issue for the countries it crosses, for the countries of destination, and for the European Union. The closure has had a significant impact on migrants and asylum seekers and the political issues related to the role and policies of the single countries and of the European Union.¹²

EU member states have made long-term legal commitments under international human rights and refugee law, most recently reaffirmed by member states in UN General Assembly Resolution 69/167 of December 2014, to protect and promote the human rights of all migrants, irrespective of their status.¹³ As signatories to the 1951 Refugees Convention and its 1967 protocol, these states accepted and agreed to provide international protection for people fleeing “persecution or serious harm.” The convention obliges its signatory states to grant refugees’ the right to work, to education, and to housing and judicial assistance, and it protects them from being punished for entering a country illegally. The principle of “nonrefoulement” in the convention is “a norm of customary international law and therefore binding on all States irrespective of whether they are signatories to the Convention.”¹⁴

At the EU level, a reference to the principle of nonrefoulement can be found in the provision contained in article 19(2) of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union that “prohibits to remove, expel or extradite an individual to a State where there is a serious risk that he or she would be subjected to the death penalty, torture or other inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment.”¹⁵ The EU position is different from that of other regional bodies, such as the African Union and the Organization of American States. The European Union does not have a unique directive on refugees or a fully integrated common asylum or migration policy. The current EU asylum system attempts to harmonize the rules and conditions that apply to asylum-seekers across all EU member states.¹⁶ The core issue, the number of migrants to be admitted, is a decision to be taken by individual member states, and there are extreme differences among these states with regard to the regulation and compliance with EU directives on asylum. Although the European Commission has put forward a number of proposals to enhance joint migration and asylum policies at the EU level,¹⁷ progress has been slow.

The European Commission is trying to take action to prevent irregular migration, especially maritime irregular migration, by addressing the root causes behind such migration in non-EU countries. The commission aspires to dismantle smuggling and trafficking networks and to define better procedures and policies for the return of refugees, but the road has been uphill. The problem is that the EU approach involves the reconciliation of the contrasting notions of “rescue” and “interception.” These dual objectives pose a conflict that needs resolution because “interception” requires border controls for security reasons while “rescue” insists on the need to safeguard human rights within international norms for migrants. The issue becomes even more complicated when we take into account that clandestine migration involves not only traffickers and migrants but intervening variables such as mixed migration flows, different destinations, and different migratory policies and practices within destination countries: the trip of the migrants on boats is the epiphenomenon of a huge process involving a large number of implications and aspects.

Values Implications

Three arguments against migration have become a mantra among populist politicians in Europe: because of the economic crisis with its high unemployment rates, European labor markets cannot incorporate immigrants; the resources required to deal with immigrant flows

are in short supply; and the integrity of the “European” culture and “European” values must be preserved. All of these expressions are grounded in fear.

The concept of protection related to migrants has become highly ideological, and it can be said that it oscillates today between two opposites: protection *of* migrants and protection *from* migrants. More rational reflections that are based on statistics point out that Europe is undergoing a labor shortage that needs to be filled by migrants. That is, according to projections, Europe needs more and more workers willing to accept low-wage work to cover those areas of the labor market that Europeans have left. Moreover, with birth rates in Europe at an astonishingly low rate, the demographic scenario for our societies is worrying. European populations are aging and migration may provide a correction to that deficit. Demographic studies foresee a situation in which a sizeable elderly population will need to rely on an infusion of laborers in younger age categories whose tax contributions can help support the social and economic needs of the elderly. The projected increase in the EU population by 2080 is misleading, because much of that growth will be among older people (with life expectancy also increasing). This increase will have a major effect on the workforce. EuroPop2013 projects an increase in age dependency ratios that will have serious consequences for public expenditure for pensions, healthcare, and long-term care.¹⁸

Enhanced migration has the potential to help an aging Europe. The case of Italy, which has the lowest birth rate in Europe, is illuminating because for years immigrants have been compensated for decreases in fertility in the birth rate; in 2015, for example, a decrease in the immigration contribution caused a decrease in the population.¹⁹

Despite rational arguments that support the positive impact of immigration, other points of view cannot be underestimated. Those who oppose immigration posit it as a hazard and promote the concept of “protection from.” They present the issue of immigration at a micro level, as a problem that affects individuals and communities, with a narrative that refers, for example, to one’s backyard. Would you want immigrants in your backyard? Or as next-door neighbors?

This criticism of immigration is characterized as a clash of cultures or lifestyles rather than as “racism.” Decades ago Robert E. Park, Ernest W. Burgess, and Alfred Shuetz wrote about the relation between strangeness and social tensions, pointing out that the process of understanding the migrant and the effects of his or her presence requires a moral and normative adjustment that should be oriented toward respect for diversity and human rights.²⁰ The fear of the “unknown” is still determining most social reactions. This hostility must be seriously analyzed because it is the expression of a social process, and it must be understood if governments are to create adequate policies that can reassure their citizens and allow integration and inclusion.

Causes of Migration

The current situation exposes several variables that may delineate a causal model. According to the UN Refugee Agency, more than half of the migrants and refugees who came to Europe between 2013 and 2017 fled from just three countries that have been ravaged by conflict: Syria, Afghanistan, and Somalia.²¹ There appears to be a correlation between conflicts, violence, and human rights violations and flight from countries of origin. These are significant push factors. Additionally, chronic poverty, inequality, and weak governance constitute constant push factors in many countries.

It is difficult to identify all the push factors that form the basis of an individual’s decision to begin the difficult process of migration, because many variables are involved: age, gender, country of origin, level of education, social status, religion, ethnicity, and personal aspirations.

Many studies have pointed out that analyses of migrations must rely on more qualitative approaches: M. Immacolata Macioti and Enrico Pugliese, for example, have presented a more inclusive approach that explores migrations from the perspective of gender and religion, analyzing the fact that for many migrant groups the first consistent waves were made up of women, as in the case of Capo Verde.²² They attribute great relevance to the narrative of migrants and their way of communicating. Simplification, as offered by the current narrative, has the merit of presenting to the public a clear-cut scenario.

The main areas of push factors conventionally referred to are conflicts and security, economic conditions, climate change, and life perspectives and aspirations.

Conflicts and Security

On-going conflicts have contributed considerably to the recent rise in migration toward Europe.²³ For example, the Syrian civil war continues, and there is no clear strategy for addressing social and political contradictions in Iraq. Where there is conflict in the Middle East, there seem to be only military responses. No consideration is given to reconciliation within the general population.

My field research in the Middle East and, in particular, among Syrian refugees in Iraq has revealed that the measures taken by the international community to help refugees have been directed largely to the construction and maintenance of refugee camps. What is needed instead is a complete change in the concept of emergency itself, especially when it lasts for years. After decades of international aid and interventions, with more and more conflicts producing a constant flow of refugees, it is the time to propose international standards for refugees.²⁴

Economic Conditions

Migration and poverty are linked in a complex relationship. Poverty may not be the sole cause of migration, yet certainly people move because they want to improve their economic conditions.²⁵ If economic conditions are not advantageous and threaten to deteriorate, individuals will consider migration to a more prosperous economy.²⁶ Migration appears, on balance, to bring an improved probability of survival and the alleviation of poverty. Generally, spatially static populations are likely to become economically stagnant.²⁷ John Kenneth Galbraith has captured the essence of the relationship between migration and poverty: "Migration is the oldest action against poverty. It selects those who most want help. It is good for the country to which they go; it helps to break the equilibrium of poverty in the country from which they come."²⁸ People migrate because of the prospect of higher wages and better employment opportunities and, often, because of a desire to escape the domestic social and political situation of their home country. Many "economic migrants" come from middle-income countries where the population is becoming increasingly well educated.²⁹ Salaries and wages, however, continue to be relatively low compared with those of individuals with a similar educational background in other, higher-income countries. Potentially, this disparity encourages some highly skilled individuals from developing countries to migrate to more developed countries.³⁰ Humanitarian migrants, asylum seekers, and refugees are not systematically included in internationally comparable national poverty surveys,³¹ and thus they are left out of efforts to track migration or levels of poverty. The growing scale and longevity of the refugee crisis has created an urgent need for data on refugees and migrants so that policies can be created to address poverty and development on one hand and humanitarian issues on the other.

Climate Change

The Fifth Assessment Report (AR5) of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, the most comprehensive and relevant analysis of climate change in the world, concludes that hundreds of millions of people will soon be affected, directly and indirectly, by climate change.³² It will affect access to resources and population movements, with global consequences. Indicators of climate change include desertification, lack of water, and flooding. The climate-related factor in migration issues is finally starting to be considered and analyzed in policy circles. In 2008 the European Commission defined climate change as a “threat multiplier” because it could be responsible for political and security risks affecting European interests.³³ As a consequence, we are now talking about the potential risk of “environmentally induced migration.” The European Council’s Conclusions on European Climate Diplomacy—adopted in June 2011 and ratified in February 2018—identifies climate change as “a global environmental and development challenge with significant implications for security and migration.”³⁴ Despite the political projections, it has been very difficult to predict the impact of climate change on migration. Studies based on probabilities state that there will be a movement of over twenty-five million people during the next decades who will be obliged to migrate because of adverse climate conditions. Whatever the real dimension of the impact, we must take into consideration the level of vulnerability for populations living in areas where the impact of climate change is already apparent. Adopting this “migration risk” perspective is imperative for rich countries because severe changes in climate can affect the human geography of a place, rendering people more vulnerable and restricting their freedom of movement and their ability to make decisions about their lives.³⁵

Dealing with climate change should be considered as priority not only because of the risk of migration but because the effects of climate change can kill social movement and initiative, perpetuate corrupted elites, impoverish the poor, and limit the development opportunities, with negative long-term effects for the whole planet.

Life Perspectives and Aspirations

Perceptions are important in understanding international migration. An increasing number of people entertain the idea of migrating because of the spread of mass communication and transportation possibilities. Also, marriage bureaus, international recruitment offices, and entrepreneurs who specialize in human smuggling facilitate migration.³⁶ In addition, the desire to emigrate may emerge from expectations of finding more coherent democratic practices and respect for human rights in Europe than in countries of origin.³⁷ Although the study of these particular aspirations and their effects on migration has been proposed and discussed, actual data to establish these correlations is needed.³⁸ In 2010 the European Union funded a project titled EUMAGINE: Imagining Europe from the Outside.³⁹ The subjects in this study were migrants to Europe. The researchers asked the subjects about their perceptions of democracy and human rights within Europe and their origin countries and it questioned the subjects about the relationship between their perceptions and aspirations and their decision to emigrate. The decision process for a migrant involves drawing from a multitude of information sources. Decisions are formed in a specific social and cultural context: the “emigration environment,” which includes, for example, ideas about how people live in Europe. “Geographical imaginations,” as introduced by Edward W. Said and further explored by Derek Gregory, refers to the “subjectivity of the human conception of locations, spaces, countries and the people inhabiting these physical places.”⁴⁰ In other words, people hold certain images of the world’s geographical regions and of the people who inhabit these regions. As Christiane Timmerman has shown, there are many differences between “the imagined regions” and the “real regions” that involve mythologies, utopian dreams, popular culture, selective perception, and prejudices about places and people.⁴¹ Notwithstanding, “geographical imaginations” are not fictitious; rather, they are cultural constructions with

real, material consequences. As such, this concept is pertinent for understanding a migrant's decision making: "Imaginations of the qualities of certain places in the world, the people inhabiting these places and the existing social, political and economic possibilities characterizing these places significantly contributes to the decision to migrate and where to migrate."⁴² These factors regarding perceptions and aspirations may therefore be a necessary condition for an informed migration policy in Europe.

Migration Routes and Consistency in the Number of Migrants

The migratory routes into the European Union, by land and sea, are diversified and subject to changes according to variables such as ease of crossing, agreements among criminal organizations engaged in human trafficking, state and EU legislation and contrasting strategies and polices, costs, countries of origin, and migratory chains. I have followed the stories of single migrants and families, including refugees, and have developed a typology of strategies that people implement to succeed in their migration project. Among these is the division of the family into smaller groups that leave on different vessels in an effort to increase the probability of success for at least some of their members. The division of the family often involves privileging one member of the family, usually a young male adult or a male adolescent. Another strategy involves having members of the family use different departure locations and using *passeurs* whose prices are cheap so the family can save money for a second attempt in case the first attempt fails. Yet another strategy involves sending one member when he or she has an opportunity to settle down. In this strategy, the concept of time in migration becomes subverted because migrants depend on *passeurs*, waiting lists, available economic resources, and even the weather. It is well known that often the difficulty of migrating forces migrants to create huge camps of people waiting for an opportunity to depart (for example, in Libya), with the consequence that they become extremely vulnerable, exposed to violence and abuse by traffickers. I believe, therefore, that the migration route includes not only origin and destination countries but countries of "temporary forced destination."⁴³

When migrants are about to cross, their vulnerability increases, because the vessels that are used are often unseaworthy and destined to sink; those who are saved at sea are probably only a small portion of those who have departed from the shore. In a personal communication, Pietro Bartolo, a doctor who has given medical aid to more than 350,000 migrants in Lampedusa in the past twenty-five years, offered me a shocking example: women who leave by sea, he says, are injected substances that prevent pregnancy or induce abortion.

Frontex, the agency of the European Union established in 2004 to manage cooperation among agencies that secure external borders, regularly produces data on the number of illegal border-crossings that have been detected rather than the number of persons trying to flee. Complicating the accuracy of such data is the fact that the same person may cross the external border several times. At the moment it is close to impossible to trace people's movements after an illegal crossing. The data reported by Frontex, therefore, can be used qualifiedly only as a measure of migratory phenomena.

The main migration routes and consistency of the flows, which have undergone significant changes over the past few years, can be schematized as follows: (a) a route that traverses West Africa and eventually reaches the Canary Islands; (b) a Western Mediterranean route originating in West Africa and reaching Morocco and Spain; (c) a Central Mediterranean route that traverses the Sahel and then reaches Libya and Tunisia and eventually Italy and Malta; (d) a circular route between Albania and Greece; (e) a Western Balkan route; and (f) an Eastern Mediterranean route through Turkey and Greece.⁴⁴

West African Route

Entry point: Canary Islands

Number of illegal border crossings in 2018 (Jan.–Mar.): 20

Top three nationalities of migrants: Moroccan (20)

This route was once the easiest and busiest irregular entry point for Europe. To access the Canary Islands, an archipelago located just off the southern coast of Morocco, irregular migrants moved to coastal towns such as Saint Louis in Senegal or Nouadhibou in Mauritania and from there to the Canary Islands. In 2006, a peak number of 32,000 irregular migrants arrived on the islands. Migrant smuggling became a serious business, involving dedicated Senegalese smugglers and businessmen. In 2007, because of growing law enforcement vigilance and bilateral agreements between Spain and Senegal and Mauritania, the number of irregular migrants started decreasing. Only 340 irregular migrants arrived in the Canary Islands by sea in 2011, and in 2012 there were just 170 arrivals. The figure remained stable for the next two years, though it rose to 874 in 2015 and then decreased again to 20 between 2016 and 2018.

Western Mediterranean Route

Entry point: Spain

Number of illegal border crossings in 2018 (Jan.–Mar.): 3,201

Top three nationalities of migrants: unknown (602); Moroccan (507); Guinean (498)

This route includes a sea passage from North Africa to Spain or a land route to the Spanish enclaves of Ceuta and Melilla in Morocco. It used to be the most popular route among Algerian and Moroccan nationals attempting to reach Spanish territory, with the intention of staying in Spain or continuing to another EU country. Since the late 1990s, however, increasing numbers of sub-Saharan Africans have also made use of this route. Migrants from Morocco to Spain typically seek economic betterment, hoping for jobs in Spain, France, and Italy. Because of cooperation between Spain and Morocco and stricter patrolling of the Strait of Gibraltar, the Western Mediterranean route is used less frequently by irregular migrants, and, during the past few years, Libya has emerged as an alternative.

Central Mediterranean Route

Entry point: Lampedusa and/or Malta

Number of illegal border crossings in 2018 (Jan.–Mar.): 6,542

Top three nationalities of migrants: Eritrean (1,552); Tunisian (1,190); not specified (484)

The Central Mediterranean route refers to migration movements from North Africa to Italy and, to a lesser extent, Malta. Migrants arriving in Italy from Libya are predominantly from East Africa, West Africa, and Syria, though the numbers from Syria fell during 2015 and 2016. There are several major routes to Libya. Migrants from Eritrea, Ethiopia, Somalia, and Sudan travel from the Horn of Africa to Khartoum and then to Libya via Kufra, in southeastern Libya. Another migratory route is through Niger to Sebha, in southwestern Libya. Nigerian, Malian, and other West African migrants arrive first in Agadez, Niger, and then take established routes to Libya or Algeria. There is also a route from Egypt to Libya via Salloum that is taken by fewer migrants. Egyptians, Eritreans, Ethiopians, Sudanese, and Syrians use this route.

The main departure points from Libya in 2014 and 2015 were from beach towns within fifty kilometers of Tripoli, especially Zuwarah and Zawiyah. Other migrants depart from Benghazi, but that requires a longer voyage to Lampedusa. In 2015, the number of arrivals in

Italy by the Central Mediterranean route fell for the first time since 2012, in large part because the Eastern Mediterranean became the predominant route for Syrian migrants.

Circular Route between Albania and Greece

Number of illegal border crossings in 2018 (Jan.–Mar.): 684

Top three nationalities of migrants: Albanian (634); Syrian (9); Afghani (8)

For many years, circular migration across the land border between Greece and Albania was one of the most significant irregular migratory flows across the European Union's external borders. In 2008 and 2009, almost 40 percent of all detections of illegal border crossings to the European Union, involving nearly 40,000 irregular migrants, occurred between Albania and Greece. In 2010, this number decreased significantly to 35,300. And in 2015 it dropped to only 8,932, representing only 4.5 percent of the EU total.

Since being granted visa-free travel to the European Union in late 2010, Albanians have started crossing the border legally. The reduction in illegal border crossings has allowed Albanian border-control authorities to refocus some of their surveillance efforts on other cross-border criminal activities, such as smuggling of goods, resulting in increased cannabis seizures.

Western Balkan Route

Entry point: Balkan Peninsula

Number of illegal border crossings in 2018 (Jan.–Mar.): 950

Top three nationalities of migrants: Afghani (340); Pakistani (232); Kosovar (68)

The Western Balkan route entails two main migratory groups: nationals of the western Balkan states (Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Kosovo, Macedonia, and Albania) and predominantly Asian migrants who initially entered the European Union through the Greek-Turkish land or sea borders and then moved through the western Balkans into Hungary or Romania.

Irregular migration trends in the western Balkans region changed significantly after the introduction of visa-free travel within the European Union in 2009 and the gradual economic and political stabilization of the area. The western Balkan region shifted from an emigrant-sending region to a predominantly transit area of irregular migrants coming from Greece. The Western Balkan route was officially closed down in March 2016.⁴⁵

Eastern Mediterranean Route

Entry point: Greece, Bulgaria, or Cyprus

Number of illegal border crossings in 2018 (Jan.–Mar.): 7,837

Top three nationalities of migrants: Syrian (2,882); Iraqi (1,782); Turkish (806)

This route, which refers to entry into Greece, Bulgaria, or Cyprus from Turkey, has become an important entry point to the European Union since 2010. It largely comprises Syrian, Afghan, and Iraqi migrants. In 2015, it totaled 885,000 detections, a dramatic rise from previous years.

According to the most recent data, East Africans and West Africans paid between two thousand and three thousand euros to travel across this route. Greek authorities concur, suggesting that the trip from Turkey to mainland Greece may also cost between two thousand and three thousand euros.⁴⁶

Both push and pull factors underpin the growing popularity of the Eastern Mediterranean route. Human smuggling has developed into an important industry in Turkey, with networks

active in Istanbul, Izmir, Edirne, and Ankara. The nationalities of human smugglers vary, frequently mirroring the nationality of their customers.

Data on the consistency of the flows demonstrate that irregular flows of migrants are decreasing. The decrease in arrivals in Europe—and particularly in Italy and in Greece—noted in 2017 was influenced mainly by bilateral agreements between African and European authorities and between Ankara and Brussels. After the implementation of new policies that resulted in apprehensions on the sea and support provided to the coast guard, the numbers decreased from an average of more than twelve thousand monthly arrivals in the second quarter of 2017 to fewer than six thousand arrivals a month in the second half of the year.

The Case of Italy and the European Union

Italy has been on the frontline in the Mediterranean in rescuing migrants and securing them within the European borders. On October 18, 2013, in the aftermath of a tragic shipwreck in Lampedusa, the Italian authorities launched operation Mare Nostrum, a vast search-and-rescue operation aimed at preventing the deaths of the thousands of migrants who make the journey from Africa to Europe every year. Mare Nostrum involved the Italian Navy in an operation called “Constant Vigilance.”⁴⁷

In October 2014, Mare Nostrum was replaced by the Frontex Operation Triton, which ended in January 2018 and was replaced by Operation Themis.⁴⁸ Themis is continuing to include searches and rescues as “a crucial component” of the operation, though, according to Frontex, it has “an enhanced law enforcement focus, so it won’t have to stick to the privacy rules when it comes to sharing the personal data.”⁴⁹ The security component of Operation Themis includes intelligence gathering and other steps aimed at detecting foreign fighters and other terrorist threats at the external borders of the European Union. Its operational area spans migrant routes in the Central Mediterranean from Algeria, Tunisia, Libya, Egypt, Turkey, and Albania. Because of the drug routes that originate in Albania, this operational area now includes the Adriatic Sea.

Frontex’s role is key to ensuring effective border control in the Mediterranean region while providing assistance to persons or vessels in distress. Frontex is entrusted with providing member states with increased technical assistance at the external borders, taking into account that some situations may involve humanitarian emergencies and rescue at sea.

It is worth mentioning that since May 2015, when the European Commission presented the European Agenda on Migration,⁵⁰ several measures have been introduced to deal with the immediate challenges of the 2015 crisis and equip the European Union with tools to better manage migration in the medium and long terms, such as ensuring strong borders, fair procedures, and a sustainable system able to anticipate problems and supporting partner countries in their efforts to fight smugglers and tackle the root causes of irregular migration. What is still needed is the adoption of the proposals of the European Commission by the co-legislators and the full implementation by the member states of the collective decisions that have been taken. Since the Juncker Commission took office, twenty-three main legislative initiatives have been presented by the European Commission to the European Parliament and the Council of the European Union: of these twenty-three initiatives, nine have been adopted by the member states, but there are still fourteen commission legislative initiatives on the table that the European Parliament and the European Council need to adopt.⁵¹

In December 2017, under the leaders’ agenda for the December European Council, the European Commission held a thematic debate on migration with the aim of proposing a political roadmap to reach a comprehensive agreement by June 2018 on how to pursue a sustainable migration policy.⁵² It was an opportunity to reflect on how to pursue such a policy

for the European Union and to give a strategic orientation on the key policy suggestions set out in the commission's communication.

Over the past three years, a new EU approach to managing migration has emerged, supporting the member states most exposed, strengthening the protection of the European Union's external borders, and reinforcing the cooperation with partner countries. But a comprehensive EU political response to the issue is needed, and the member states need to make more efforts.⁵³

Managing migration is a major challenge that requires financial investment. Toward that end, since 2015, the European Union has increased the Asylum, Migration, and Internal Security Fund by almost 75 percent. Now EU leaders should reflect on how to guarantee funding for the external dimension of migration and how to ensure rapid mobilization of resources to address the root causes of migration and ensure the protection of refugees and migrants.⁵⁴

To discourage irregular migration and break the business model of human trafficking, the European Union needs to offer an alternative to perilous journeys by opening safe and legal pathways for those in need of protection. As President Jean-Claude Juncker and the European Commission pointed out, doing so will require member states to resettle a further fifty thousand refugees by May 2019.⁵⁵ At the same time, member states need to deliver on swift and efficient return and readmission of those who have no right to stay in the European Union. By the end of 2018, member states should ensure a fully functioning return capacity within the European Border and Coast Guard Agency and increase the number of returned migrants in operations organized in cooperation with the agency by 50 percent compared with the number in 2017.

The external dimension of migration policy needs to be consolidated: the European Commission is pushing to ensure the full implementation of the EU-Turkey agreement⁵⁶ and stronger engagement with third-country partners and UN agencies.⁵⁷ Additional resources for the EU Facility for Refugees in Turkey need to be mobilized.⁵⁸ The strategic partnership with the African Union and its member states should be reinforced.⁵⁹

Despite the measures already taken, the migration crisis has demonstrated that the current border management and asylum system in Europe is no longer adequate and a new approach is urgently needed. Addressing these issues will be crucial in managing the short-term crisis and developing a longer-term, sustainable solution. European leaders need to implement common European solutions to the refugee crisis, because only joint solutions can credibly and effectively reduce the growing human suffering and social and political turmoil. European countries have had time to analyze and assess the challenges caused by the current crisis. Now it is time to act, and the twenty-eight member states should operate not individually but jointly and in the spirit of European solidarity.

The member states of the European Union need to improve their use and coordination of information technology systems and technologies for dealing with asylum administration and visa applications, and for sharing information among national authorities about people or objects that may present a threat. In addition, Frontex (or its successor) will need better access to operational intelligence on migrants to strengthen its role and impact. Data must be available for analysis, because, increasingly, border control agencies, police, justice and immigration authorities will need to analyze data as nearly as possible in real time.

The European Union should develop a system that distributes a larger number of refugees across Europe, directly from the hotspots in the European Union and neighboring countries. A new fund for European solidarity should be created to manage this system.

Efficient and incisive action to cut down human trafficking and smuggling will also be important. Such action includes gathering and sharing information on the modus operandi, routes, and economic models of trafficking and smuggling networks; enhancing EU police

and judicial cooperation; using military and police intervention to identify and arrest smugglers; bolstering prevention measures and assistance to vulnerable migrants (e.g., public information campaigns in third countries to communicate the dangers and risks); and, strengthening bilateral and regional cooperation with third countries.

Italy has always supported a shared approach to finding solutions to common problems, which it views as necessary to promoting stabilization and development in the Mediterranean basin. Despite changes in the political spectrum, the objectives of Libya and Italy, for example, in the area of migration, have remained unaltered. Two important events marked the consolidation of Italian-Libyan agreements on migration in 2012. During a meeting on January 21, Italian prime minister Mario Monti and his Libyan counterpart, Abdurrahim El-Keib, discussed the possibility of collaboration on an electronic integrated border control management system to be manned and operated by the Libyan authorities.⁶⁰ On this occasion, the two parties signed the Declaration of Tripoli, which reportedly encompasses the main provisions of the treaty signed previously by Silvio Berlusconi.⁶¹ In a follow-up visit on April 3, the Italian minister of the interior Annamaria Cancellieri signed the *Processo Verbale* (verbal trial) on migration control. This agreement entails providing training programs for the Libyan police, establishing centers for naval training, developing measures for the detection of false documents and the detention of migrants. More important, training was targeted to the police to ensure control over Libya's coastal borders.⁶² Similar activities are to be found in Italian-Tunisian relations, and Italian-Egyptian negotiations in the field of migration also display significant continuity before and after the Arab Spring revolts.

The European Union should work to improve the living conditions of refugees, while accelerating their social and economic integration. That means, for example, providing the legal means to participate in the labor market; recognizing existing educational and professional competency; providing education and training; working with employers to match skills and boost employment opportunities; and supporting migrants in learning local languages, understanding local services, and entitlements. For children, it includes providing an early transition to the education system and ensuring that schools have the resources to help migrant students learn the language of their host country while overcoming the trauma of displacement. In the long term, these measures will reduce the need for state support and contribute to economic growth.

Strategies for Stability and Sustainability

The equation "migration = security risks" has become a convention in the public discourse in Europe to underscore the fragility of the Union, though it has been addressed by several adequate and functioning policies and strategies.⁶³ The debate on the migration-security nexus tends to focus on a variety of aspects related to national security, understood as the protection and promotion of the well-being of the citizens and legal residents of the state and its territory.⁶⁴ Such perceptions also emphasize threats to the social and economic fabrics of countries of destination. Migrants are also seen as different: they bring new lifestyles and languages, traditions and values.

The process of understanding the migrant and his or her impact on the community of destination requires a process of moral and normative adjustment that should be oriented toward respect for diversity and human rights. Nevertheless, the differences in lifestyles and ethos between migrants and host societies are one of the most difficult contradictions to resolve because of the fear of the unknown.

What is important is that policies are not restricted by the exploitation of fear as an easy argument in political or media discourse. Restrictive policies have proven ineffective and have failed because they create a short circuit that increases the costs and risks for migrants,

exposing them to exploitations of all sorts along the entire route. Migrants' reluctance to leave the place where they settled as immigrants for fear of not being allowed to reenter can also be exploited.

The internalization of the concept of shared development is the first step to be taken. The Migration Partnership Framework (MPF), introduced by the European Union in June 2016, is aimed at deepening cooperation with third countries of origin, transit, and destination. The MPF has started with five priority countries with which the European Union intends to strengthen cooperation: Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, Mali, and Ethiopia. Since its launch, EU institutions and member states have taken strategic actions to ensure its success. In the past months, political leaders of member states and members of the European Commission, backed by technical missions of senior officials of EU institutions and member states, have visited priority countries in Africa.⁶⁵ Furthermore, the European Commission has proposed key initiatives, such as the External Investment Plan (EIP) to encourage investment in Africa⁶⁶ and the EU Neighborhood and the proposal for a Union Resettlement Framework (URF) to ensure orderly and safe pathways to Europe for persons in need of international protection.⁶⁷

The first results of the EU intervention in the priority countries can be seen in Niger, which has taken action to combat migrant smuggling and has set up an institutional framework for managing the migration dialogue with the European Union and its member states. Furthermore, strengthened operational cooperation is being put in place with Senegal and Mali (with the latter, standard operating procedures are being finalized).⁶⁸

Negotiations on a "readmission agreement" with Nigeria were opened in October 2016.⁶⁹ Actions with other partner countries have continued in 2017 and 2018. The European Union has stepped up its support through its Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) missions,⁷⁰ its technical assistance and financial tools, in particular, the EU Trust Fund for Africa.⁷¹ Under the EU Trust Fund for Africa, contracts in support of the actions foreseen in the Valletta Action Plan⁷² were signed for almost four hundred million euro.

While this approach, which focuses on development in third countries, is intended to foster recognition of the interdependency between countries of origin and countries of destination, many doubts have been raised about its real effectiveness and its agenda. These doubts are based on the charge that by proposing up to eight billion euro for the development of the selected countries of origin, the European Union is actually rechanneling the funds to measures of border control and migration management. Moreover, the funds will be distributed to countries where the governments, according to Bob van Dillen, are regimes responsible for serious violations of human rights, such as Eritrea and Sudan.⁷³ The positive aspect of the MPF is that it provides a great number of opportunities to individuals through micro-funds and promotes the development of women's resilience. But the MPF does not take into account the qualitative aspect of the partnerships to be established, which are related to the complexity of migrations and personal motivations and aspirations, recognizing migrants as citizens, agents of change, and members of global communities. Furthermore, the categories of migrants and refugees do not include the great number of variables implied. The countries of origin should be called to focus on these aspects, and the European Union should cooperate with them on an equal footing and with a long-term perspective, aware of the interdependence between all actors. I maintain that this cooperation cannot be realized unless there is a real paradigm shift in the perception of migration, from problem to opportunity. This shift would encourage the production of structural solutions rather than emergency responses. The fundamental actor in this process is the civil society that is emerging more and more as the most effective social agent.⁷⁴

The negative portrayal of migrations must be deconstructed so that the measurement and analysis of issues can be based on concrete research results. If the "crisis" is not manageable,

what is manageable? The answer to these issues must be found in focusing on the diachronic development of the “crisis,” breaking it down into its many variables and approaching them one by one within a comprehensive framework. Solid research is needed and must be disseminated to avoid manipulation and ideological misuse.⁷⁵

Seeing migrations as a challenge, however, can be a catalyst to strengthening the role of the European Union and its global influence and to negotiating with world power centers and international organizations, and at local level. As the European Agenda on Migration states, it is urgent to save lives and improve the life chances of the refugees currently hoping to enter the European Union, whose numbers are probably increasing, and to maintain and develop a long-term vision of the European Union as a safe, prosperous, and diverse continent that values human rights and freedoms.⁷⁶

The security aspect of migration is very important. Irregular migration is still a significant phenomenon and the current policies are proving ineffective and thus are risking the implementation of conflicting strategies in destination countries and weakening the sense of a common approach. Preventing irregular entry is a priority for most states, because conditions at the borders of many countries of the European Union render control operations difficult.

A coordinated EU approach is needed to ensure multilateral arrangements with countries of origin, respecting the specificity of destination and transit countries that experience different migration patterns and impacts. Again, sound research is necessary, especially on the impact and effectiveness of the measures at all levels along the routes. Unreliable data cause mismanagement, high costs, and other problems. The approach must be widened and must include concepts such as “circulation,” not just migration, because the aspiration to return is strong and must be favored through appropriate measures. Circular migration should be embedded in mobility schemes that provide options for different types of migration: seasonal and temporary migration and migration that involves the possibility of becoming a permanent resident in the receiving society. Circular migration will be effective only if it is accompanied by measures that ensure the option to return to the country of origin, while retaining the residence permit in the receiving country. In this sense, Albania is an example of good practices, because its law on return is proving effective.⁷⁷ As Yannis Ktistakis maintains, the call for an appropriate mix of repatriations and actions aimed at the disruption of the criminal businesses that encourage and profit from irregular migration comes from many actors, as well as the suggestion that increasing the risk of economic loss inherent in the individual choice to migrate would make the journey more difficult.⁷⁸ It is clear too that cooperation against the criminal networks by all countries involved in the migratory routes is vital.

The change of perspective in the approach to migrations must also include more involvement by the communities of the diasporas, whose role is crucial in family reunification flows, a highly sensitive issue for EU policies. The European Union must establish strong cooperation with the diasporas, which can help in designing welcoming strategies.⁷⁹ Integration and inclusion are other important keywords. Integrating migrants, though this concept is inflected in different ways according to single member-state traditions, can help reduce discrimination and xenophobia by transforming migrants into active members of society.⁸⁰

Furthermore, migrants are actors in the development of their countries of origin because they produce remittances, whose transfer should be facilitated and made safer, more transparent, affordable, and convenient to ensure that those sums of money are productive. Governments and donors, in concert with migrants and diaspora associations, should use institutional funding and aid to leverage remittances in order to invest in long-term economic, employment, and income-generating projects.⁸¹

These suggestions all find a common denominator in the protection of human rights. There is a risk, however, that in the name of protecting against security threats or other such weak arguments, respect for human rights becomes a flexible practice. The European Union and all the other countries involved in migrations must defend and protect human rights with no margin for interpretation. Migrations are a challenge but also an opportunity to redefine their “value identity” and the sense of human rights.⁸²

Reestablishing a proper interaction between decision makers and the local communities is vital and could continue to produce positive outcomes as it has always been, with communities rapidly developing creative and innovative positive solutions for the integration and welcoming of migrants while the policies had yet to be defined, and policies being defined and giving positive directions while communities were still trying to understand the phenomenon in front of which they found themselves unprepared. In the end, the migration “crisis” is making the European Union and its citizens reflect on the sense of belonging, the sense of difference, and the sense of sharing, reestablishing the appropriate bidirectional relationship between leadership and population. Migrants are the catalysts of a true stable and long-standing European social and political reform for the future of all.

The recent movement of people toward Europe should mark the beginning of a new approach that takes into account the motivations of migrants and that starts producing structural solutions rather than emergency responses. The implementation of such an approach can only occur if we avoid using the categories of migrant and refugee because they do not take into account the great number of variables that oppress individuals.

Since the objective is stability and sustainability within a security framework, what is needed is a complete change of perspective for Europe and its international partners: it is time to work for structural and long-term responses based on a shared development.

Notes

¹ A note the use of the terms “migrant” and “refugee”: “Migrant” is a broad term encompassing “immigrant” and “emigrant” that refers to a person who leaves one country or region to settle in another, often in search of a better life. As G. Bonacquisti, Nicolamaria Coppola, and R. Cramerotti point out in “Glossary of Keywords, Issues, and Policies Regarding Migrations and Refugee Issues,” in *Pursuing Stability and a Shared Development in Euro-Mediterranean Migrations*, ed. Emanuela C. Del Re and Ricardo R. Larémont (Rome: Aracne Editrice, 2017), 399–400, the concept of migrant is included in the broader concept of migration. There is no universally accepted definition of migration. It applies to a relatively settled population and refers to a form of spatial mobility that shows the change from one geographical area or residential unit to another. Since the phenomenon is time and culture specific, there is also no universally valid theoretical formulation. The 1951 Geneva Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees defines a “refugee” as a person who, owing to a well-founded fear of persecution for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinions, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country.

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