

The 'common' European border and the migration crisis as 'borderline' issue in the future of Europe*

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April 27, 2016

It is difficult to know what exactly is going to happen in next months and years to come as regards migration flows and related humanitarian emergencies. But one can easily foresee, depending on the European attitudes, capacities and policies to tackle with such phenomenon, that it is going to happen something which will affect, one way or another, the future of the European polity, together with the socio-economic environ for future generations here in Europe, as elsewhere nearby in the **Euro-Mediterranean area** widely understood in a meaning ranging from Middle East to North Africa, including sub-Saharan countries down to the Horn of Africa, as one of the most strategic areas in the worldwide balance of international relations.

Having in mind this scenario, it is just to acknowledge from the outset the **global dimension** of a phenomenon which can **no longer be looked at as a purely national responsibility**, but in a **much more comprehensive way** based on the assumption that **migration flows** will need to be tackled as **the 'new normal'** in this area: may be for a long time ahead.

What we are experiencing, when talking about migrants and refugees across Europe, is a phenomenon with **multiple actors** involved: national governments and European institutions alike, on one side, together with international organizations and humanitarian agencies, NGOs, voluntary associations, and religious authorities. On the other side, people seeking acceptance and assistance, one may say the victims, especially women and children, along with their exploiters, the smugglers, and possibly terrorists hidden in the mass of people arriving, in addition to official or de facto authorities along the way, from the sending to transit and receiving countries.

In this context, migration including both so-called '**economic**' migration, of those fleeing from hunger, poverty and social deprivation, and '**humanitarian**' migration, of those who flee war, violence and persecution, stands as a **central issue**, irrespective of the peripheries where it arises. This is so because of its root-causes as well as of its large-scale implications and effects on either bank of the Mediterranean, over the entire Euro-Mediterranean area: destined to become in the medium to long term one of the hottest areas of the planet. Not only from a climatic point of view, but also from the human and social side concerning, on the South bank, issues such as water and energy supplies, conflicts and political unrests, instability and economic underdevelopment, demographic growth, and, with regard to European countries, integration and security problems.

Here comes the question on **how to share the challenges posed by the migration crisis for a shared world of peace.**

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Without any pretension and not even any intention to address it, I will simply try to spot one point which seems to me to synthesize better a **core argument** and possibly a

* Text of the opening speech for the Inaugural Session of the International Seminar on "Migrants and Refugees across Europe: How to share the challenge for a shared world of peace" - Sala della Regina, Palazzo Montecitorio, 27 April 2016 ([see program](#)).

vision about the choices and responsibilities involved in the challenges before us. Precisely because of its far-reaching implications and due to its long-term effects, migration is a true '**borderline**' issue.

To explain this apparent calembour reference may be made to the **evolving concept of citizenship**, since when the **Union citizenship** has been introduced, thus establishing a **new paradigm** of socio-political membership, whereby, as it is stated in the EU Treaty, every national of a Member State shall be a citizen of the Union, in addition to national citizenship.

We are used to talk of the so-called **Schengen area** as an area of free movement without internal frontiers. But, plus Schengen, the EU Treaty states that: "The Union shall offer its citizens an **area of freedom, security and justice** without internal frontiers, in which the **free movement of persons** is ensured **in conjunction with appropriate measures with respect to external border** controls, asylum, immigration and the prevention and combating of crime".

What does it mean to **join together Union citizenship with Europe's external borders**?

Very simply, but not quite obviously yet, it means primarily that as well as every national of a Member State is also a European citizen, **every internal (national) border is also an external (European) border**. Therefore, when a government of a Member State decides to close its internal border, raising walls or deploying there military and police forces, the true effect of such decision is **to keep 'Europe' out of the door**, not only migrants and refugees from abroad.

We should be fully aware of this effect, if we want to take care of us and of our future as European citizens, while taking care of Europe's role and responsibilities in this area of the world. In other words, if we want to protect the rights of European citizens and, at the same time, to ensure the acceptance of immigrants.

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Indeed, to the extent to which we can speak of a **common European citizenship** so too we must speak of a **common European border**, in the only way in which this expression makes sense: that is, not only as a cartographic element delimiting a territorial line of inclusion/exclusion, but also as a political, institutional, cultural and social attitude to '**think European**' in terms of values, principles, interests, regulations, rights and duties that give shape to the European space of freedom, security and justice **common to all the people living in Europe**, including those ones who as migrants and refugees arrive here not even with a suitcase in their hands, if not with the only hope for a better chance of life.

This common attitude should support the efforts at any level, European, national and local, as regards the ways in which Europe and Member States alike should monitor, control, protect and defend the common border, precisely by **thinking European and acting local**.

When the EU Treaty states that the Union shall offer its citizens an area of freedom, security and justice, it speaks words of principle and value, but connected with other words of a more political and technical nature, referring to "appropriate measures" to be taken by or through European institutions, on the mandatory basis of "**the principle of sincere cooperation**", which means in turn **mutual trust** among Member States, with respect to external border controls, asylum, immigration and the prevention and combating of crime such as human smuggling and trafficking that account for a significant portion of irregular migration.

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But the complexity and the size of the phenomenon, together with the pressure posed by the emergencies, sometimes amplified by a sensationalist and emotionally conditioned communication in the media, is a fact that hits the public at large, causing alarmed feelings of concerns, together with contrasting and confusing views.

In the face of the large-scale migration flows that have poured over the Union's borders in recent times, Europe has had difficulty and finds it hard to present the welcoming face of who offers hospitality and hopes to people who come in need of help. Europe is giving instead the impression, which has become a dramatic evidence, of wanting to close itself within internal borders **as a fortress**, while the walls are back again, raised to mark other boundaries: mental, emotional, dictated by fears, insecurities, and xenophobic impulses.

It then happens that **anti-Europeanism** advances on the ground of nationalism and, even worst, of a populism with racist and discriminatory tones against minorities. But under attack there are fundamental principles and corresponding rights and duties that should be of everyone, and shared by all, such as the solidarity principle and the legal duty of asylum as the right of everybody to whom is denied in his country the good of personal freedom and security, at the base of the person's dignity.

To use the words of Pope Francis in his address delivered to the European Parliament (in 2014), solutions which do not **"take into account the human dignity of immigrants"** are deemed to fail.

But what we are witnessing today in Europe seems to be a prevailing trend to close borders to people seeking assistance and to use so-called 'hotspots' as prison-like centres. To counter this trend, Europe is called to keep faith and to give realization to its founding ideals, by taking decisions and actions in order to prove primarily to its citizens that **resolving the migration crisis with European solutions is possible**.

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It is up to the Union to take action and to put pressure in order to assign more structured objectives and to empower, with better performing tasks and greater resources, the role of its agencies and offices in charge of external borders management (Frontex) and asylum matters (Easo). To this regard it should be also mentioned the need to adopt the legislative package for a permanent **Border and Coast Guard**, such as proposed by the European Commission.

Moreover, it is up to the Union to put in motion a **revision of the Dublin Regulation** to ensure a fair distribution of refugees and migrants among all EU Member States in the spirit of a **true European solidarity**. In this way the Union will show to the world that, in the name of humanitarian values and respect for human rights, it can fulfil its duty to accept and integrate the number of people currently seeking protection in Europe, not abandon them to their fate of poverty and despair.

However, apart from humanitarian emergencies and urgent measures to be taken, everybody knows that the real problem with migration of any kind lies **in the countries of origin of the migrants**. To this regard Europe is called and should be committed to take "fair, courageous and realistic policies which can assist the countries of origin in their own social and political development and in their efforts to resolve internal conflicts" (again in the words of Pope Francis). On the other hand, it is **in the countries where the people who arrive want to live** there, for family or other valid reasons, that European policies, resources and means should be made available in a spirit of mutual support and true cooperation with national authorities as well as between Member States involved.

Many other tasks remain therefore to be fulfilled on the part of Europe.

It is up to European Union to act as main player in the Euro-Mediterranean area in order to contribute to create in the sending/transit countries viable **external conditions**, including 'humanitarian channels' and other solutions respectful of obligations under international law, together of course with a clear commitment to peace initiatives in all this world region.

And it is again up to the Union the task to engage with problems of **socio-economic and territorial cohesion**, and of **cultural integration**, on the basis of a far-

sighted strategy in terms of programs, projects, actions, especially at local level, in **the territories** where greater is the social and economic impact of migration, and where people's fears and resistances are stronger and widespread.

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For all of this the present crisis of migrants and refugees calls into question the issue of the **common European border**, thus becoming a true **borderline issue** between **two basic alternatives**.

To defend on the part of each Member State its borders as internal borders according to a securitarian political agenda of nationalistic closure affecting the very concept of European citizenship. In other words, to **stay divided** under the umbrella of a pretended union. Or, instead, to accept the idea of national boundaries as the internal side of a **common European border**, along which to deploy appropriate measures in matters such as the common asylum system, relocation as a concrete exercise of solidarity and burden sharing, economic, social and territorial cohesion, and moreover actions aimed at common security purposes. In other words, to **stay united** by interests and policies, as well as by values, rights and duties, shared in common in the so called area of freedom, security and justice.

I don't know which choice will prevail in the end. But it is an easy prediction that, should prevail the first one, the consequence will be a patchwork of national measures that will further aggravate the migration crisis and inflict another blow to the **credibility of European cohesion and integration**, affecting the **very concept of European citizenship**, and debasing the promise of an "ever closer union among the peoples of Europe", enshrined in the EU Treaty.

Therefore, a concluding remark here can be this one.

It is up to all of us to **take stand on this borderline issue**. Surely on the basis of a thoughtful if not of a scholarly approach to its multifarious and complex aspects. Yet having in mind that what it is really at stake, behind and beyond the humanitarian emergencies of our days, is **the future of Europe**. Not only as a project of peace and prosperity, but practically speaking as a concrete opportunity to give shape to a "**union**" **more like to a 'federation'** than to an 'association' of 28 Member States sovereign enough to be in disagreement between them, but not so much to resist alone the impact of a phenomenon having consequences for them all, and, needless to say, for **their nationals, also as European citizens**.