



FRIEDRICH NAUMANN
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MADRID POLICY BRIEF

EU MIGRATION POLICY MAKING: DECALOGUE OF INTENTIONS OR REAL ACTIONS?

Odilia Abreu



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INTRODUCTION

The strengthening of legal pathways and cooperation with third countries are key elements for migration management in the European Union (EU), according to liberal policymakers and researchers.

The run-up to the 2024 European elections suggests that the EU will put migration issues at the centre of the debate with a special focus on the Mediterranean region, where the mainland entry points to Europe are concentrated. In this line, we have listened to some members of the Migration Policy Group of FNF Madrid who have shed light on the main challenges related to the migration topic.

About the FNF Madrid Migration Policy Group

Being aware of the multiple challenges posed by migration management in the Mediterranean region, the Mediterranean Dialogue project of the FNF project office in Madrid launched the Migration Policy Group in 2020. This initiative aims to bring together liberal policymakers and experts in order to harmonize proposals and political action addressing migration issues.

FNF Madrid has developed a wide array of activities in order to strengthen the Migration Policy Group as well as to stimulate the exchange of ongoing and upcoming initiatives between the EU and its Mediterranean neighbors.

Odilia Abreu
Senior Project Manager Mediterranean Dialogue
Friedrich Naumann Foundation for Freedom Spain, Portugal, Italy and Mediterranean Dialogue

SOLIDARITY MECHANISM: KEY TO THE COMMON AGENDA

The EU has started the year with a particular focus on migration issues. An interest reflected in an agenda focused on advancing the commitments expressed through plans and programs and in the long-awaited finalization of the Pact on Migration and Asylum. In February, a special Summit on EU migration policy was held in Brussels; and as a follow-up, a month later, the Directorate- General for Migration and Home Affairs (DG HOME) brought together ministers from Member States to discuss internal and external aspects of migration.

The preparations for the European Migration Forum, which is going to take place in Brussels, in the last quarter of 2023, reflect the EU's continued commitment to building a comprehensive migration and asylum policy, which entails strengthening spaces to achieve a common response by Member States.

However, these efforts do not seem to be producing the expected results. Despite the approval of plans and agreements, there is recurrent criticism in various social and political arenas.

The members of the Migration Policy Group of FNF Madrid, Jan-Christoph Oetjen, Member of the European Parliament of the liberal group Renew Europe; Milosz Hodun, International Officer of the Polish liberal party Nowoczesna; Amal El Ouassif, International Relations Specialist at the Policy Center for the New South (Morocco) and Xavier Aragall, Program Manager of the Euromed and Migration Survey at the European Institute of the Mediterranean (IEMed) analyze the issues that should be included in the migration agenda and the challenges that must be addressed in order to achieve an efficient migration policy that takes into account the reality of both shores of the Mediterranean.

Questioned about the mechanisms that it would be essential to activate in the field of migration, MEP Jan-Christoph Oetjen stressed that "the most pressing issues concerning migration is certainly the rising number of arrivals to Europe", it is essential to move towards the establishment of a "European solidarity mechanism for the distribution of migrants arriving in Europe. Without such a mechanism there is no way forward on the new pact for Migration and Asylum because this is the key to a harmonized European asylum system".

SOLIDARITY MECHANISM: KEY TO COMMON AGENDA

In this vein, Oetjen weaves a critique of the current EU solidarity mechanism, which he considers ineffective and insufficient "pledges from Member States for taking asylum seekers from the countries of first arrival often fail to be met because organizing such transfers is too bureaucratic and the Member States are hesitant to take in more migrants. On top of that, the reception facilities of Member States are under a lot of pressure due to the high number of persons fleeing from the war in Ukraine. This is why we need a real legal framework for solidarity instead of pledges and voluntary admittance".

The position expressed by Oetjen is in line with that presented by the Spanish researcher Xavier Aragall, who states that "the management of the entry of people into the EU is still the main problem. We are still far from regulating entry in an efficient and coherent way in the EU". The reasons for such ineffective management seem to be linked to the difficulty of managing migratory flows "the main issue here is to properly target the two types of migratory movements, namely irregular entry through the Mediterranean, on the one hand, and the processing of asylum applications, on the other.

In both cases, there are conflicts of interest between the Southern EU countries (Spain, Italy, Greece, Malta and Cyprus) and the Northern and Central European countries (Scandinavian countries, the Netherlands and Austria)", explains Aragall.

The Moroccan researcher Amal El Ouassif, recalls that the migration agenda should consider the effects of climate change on migratory flows. El Ouassif highlights that this "is definitely a type of mobility that deserves more attention from researchers and decision-makers and should be hence included in the debate, in the sense that the very nature and properties of this type of migration are still understudied and can be hence, neglected".

A NEW PARADIGM: COOPERATION WITH THIRD COUNTRIES

Many issues still seem to be on the sidelines of the migration debate in the EU. However, it seems to be clear that the need to strengthen cooperation between the EU and third countries, especially with its Mediterranean neighbors, is considered a fundamental issue to advance in the establishment of legal pathways.

In this sense, Milosz Hodun emphasizes that "one of the most important principles of the Pact on Migration and Asylum is the announced change of paradigm in cooperation with non-EU countries". However, Hodun qualifies that, although the intentions on the part of the EU are good, it is essential that "this cooperation is balanced, comprehensive and tailor-made, and mutually beneficial for all parties involved".

This mission seems to be the Achilles' heel of the EU Migration Policy, since strengthening cooperation with third countries "means that not only the objectives and interests of the EU, but also those of the partner countries must be taken into account. It is important that there are more than just good intentions, the concrete objectives must also be ambitious", as the representative of the Polish liberal party Nowoczesna argues.

According to the Moroccan researcher El Ouassif, there are relevant actions that will allow the strengthening of the migratory dialogue between both shores of the Mediterranean, "a better dialogue among partner countries is also a key element ahead of the adoption of the new pact. Finally, better and more equal access to legal mobility is another key element, in the sense that the pandemic has already undermined mobility and legal migration, which is the most relevant tool to limit irregular migration".

CONCLUSIONS

At the EU Justice and Home Affairs Council on March 2023, Member States Ministers reiterated their commitment to making progress on the Pact on Migration and Asylum and stressed the need to step up the implementation of action plans on the central Mediterranean routes. However, the impasse that seems to reign over the migration issue in the EU still leaves many questions up in the air, but the one that seems to repeat itself the most is what is expected and what should the EU do?

The four members of the Migration Policy Group of FNF Madrid who have been interviewed are unanimous in recognizing the fundamental role that the EU should play in migration policy.

MEP Jan-Christoph Oetjen is blunt when it comes to expressing what should be the priority in the liberal sphere "for us liberals, it is important to open more legal pathways to Europe. We need migration in order to meet the needs of the European labour market ". In this vein, Oetjen recalls the proposal for the establishment of a European Talent Pool, the aim of which is that "people from outside the EU can apply from their home country and Member States can decide to admit those persons to their labour markets", he explains. From his perspective, this tool would reduce the pressure on migration routes to Europe.

For Amal El Ouassif, Specialist in International Relations at the Policy Center for the New South (Morocco), there is "an emergent need for enhanced mechanisms of protection and human rights' respect, as to the role of the EU as a normative actor that acts on the promotion of values of human rights and equal treatment of all".

Along these lines, Spanish researcher Xavier Aragall states that "it is necessary to maintain an open channel for labor migration that responds to the growing demand for certain segments of the labor market that cannot be satisfied in the short or medium term with the EU population



