

Autumn Academy 2016: Strategic Options for European Agendas

Integration Action Plan

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I would like to thank both COMPAS and Global Exchange on Migration and Diversity for organising this conference which has offered the chance for a much needed discussion amongst academia, civil society and policymakers on strategic approaches to facilitate better migrant integration in Europe.

Integration is not primarily an EU competence however the EU plays an important role in supporting Member States to facilitate better integration. This is done in three ways:

- 1) through key EU funding
- 2) action plans which act as a set of key recommendations for Member States, and;
- 3) EU legislation on migration and asylum

The European Parliament plays a crucial role in shaping strategic operations in the EU policy agenda in this area: by scrutinising key dossiers and actions plans, secondly in its role as co-legislator negotiating with the Council and the Commission. This conference offers the chance for a timely debate, particularly bearing in mind the ongoing legislative work of the Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs committee in the European Parliament relating to migrant integration in Europe.

Integration covers a number of areas relating to the work of the LIBE committee highlighted in our work on migration and asylum. We have played an important role in establishing EU policies to facilitate better integration of third-country nationals as can be seen in our work on the Common EU asylum package, legal migration dossiers such as on seasonal workers, as well as for students and researchers, in addition in our annual report on the situation on fundamental rights in the EU. These are key building blocks to support integration. Given the refugee situation in Europe, the political dialogue urgently needs to be on how to improve the strategic approach on integration. With this in mind, **for my contribution I will focus on key issues arising on the EU policy agenda as well as the way forward** with regards to ensuring an organised and compassionate response to the ongoing refugee crisis in the EU.

Key issues now arising on the EU policy agenda

EU Common Asylum Package

The Common Asylum Package was seen as a major achievement of the last mandate of the European Parliament, particularly following the Lisbon Treaty which gave Parliament its new role as co-legislator.

Despite the establishment of an EU framework for asylum there has been a **lack of implementation by Member States of the EU asylum package**. Last year alone, the Commission launched infringement proceedings for over 15 Member States concerning EU asylum law. Despite the lack of implementation the Commission announced proposals to reform the EU's asylum acquis in response to the refugee crisis.

The LIBE committee's work on the reform of the Common Asylum Package is well underway on Dublin IV, the EU Resettlement scheme, improving EASO as well as the Qualification Directive and Asylum Procedures Directive.

On an EU Resettlement scheme

As you know, in July the Commission announced plans for a common EU resettlement scheme, a **welcoming step which signals a commitment to developing safer and legal avenues for migration to Europe in light of the ongoing refugee crisis**. Work in the European Parliament has already begun on this file and as Chair of the Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs committee in the European Parliament I will keep this file as a key priority on the committee's agenda.

With regards to the content of the resettlement proposals, the European Parliament will work towards providing **more clarity** by amending the proposals in **order to not tie the EU's humanitarian obligations to improve global refugee protection with reducing irregular migrants in the EU**. In addition, the Parliament will aim to **strengthen accountability** by ensuring more of a role for the Parliament with regards to the adoption of the annual resettlement plan as well as the adoption of targeted resettlement schemes.

As part of the European Parliament's work on the Resettlement proposals, I will lead the LIBE committee delegation to Lebanon later this month where we will visit refugee camps and meet with key NGOs on the ground such as the IRC and the UNHCR which will tie into our work on improving the existing resettlement proposals. In addition, the LIBE committee will also participate in the UNGA High-Level Meeting on Refugees and Migrants in New York later this month.

On the revision of the Dublin regulation

The ongoing migratory pressures faced by Member States on the periphery such as Greece and Italy draw attention to the failures of the Dublin Regulation in promoting solidarity amongst Member States which **the European Parliament has warned of for a long time**. The Slovakian Presidency of the EU Council has prioritised this file which is a welcome sign that Member States will not 'drag their feet' on this key piece of legislation.

However, it is worrying that the **narrative towards asylum-seekers in the majority of Member States appears to focus more on punishment which is also reflected in the current proposals for the Dublin Regulation**. For example, in the current proposals, there is **limited time for asylum-seekers to appeal their case** (7 days to appeal despite the CJEU ruling on Samba Diouf in 2011 that 14 days minimum is needed for an appeal). In addition, **Member States first have to check if an application is inadmissible on 'safe third country or 'first country of asylum' grounds before making a decision** on a case or applying rules of responsibility for applications.

As co-legislator, the European Parliament has the responsibility **to defend the right to asylum in the proposals; we will push to have in place an asylum system which respects international law and human dignity for every individual**. As indicated in the LIBE committee's report on the holistic approach to migration which was adopted earlier this year, the **majority of the political groups are in favour of having in place an asylum system based on solidarity among EU member states**, to enable them to manage applications effectively. The Rapporteur of this file has indicated that she will aim to present her draft report on the reform of the Dublin proposals in the coming months.

Legal Migration

Legal migration is a very important tool that can foster better migrant integration in our societies. A healthy labour market is crucial for the successful integration of refugees and migrants in the long-term. Therefore policies and investments aimed at quality job-creation and economic growth must remain a priority. This was highlighted in the Banifei report of the Social Affairs and Employment committee on the social inclusion and integration of refugees into the labour market which was recently adopted by the parliament.

I welcome the Commission's proposals on the revision of the Blue Card Directive. As the LIBE rapporteur for the revision of the Blue Card directive I will develop the European Parliament's position to the Commission's proposal. The LIBE committee will aim to have in place an EU system which will improve the conditions of entry as well as the rights attached to Blue Card holders whilst offering Member States a degree of flexibility for the EU blue card to cater to the different national labour markets that exist across the EU. For this to happen, there also needs to be an increased effort to improve research and information sharing in order to gauge an understanding of the labour market conditions in Member States across the EU.

With that being said, the Blue Card directive should not be seen as a silver bullet for EU labour migration given the fact that it deals specifically with high-skilled labour migration. It is important that the **EU also has in place more legislation that deals with other forms of labour migration of non-EU citizens**. In my role as LIBE chair, I will call on the Commission to come forward with more proposals on labour migration.

EU funding

As I stated earlier in my speech, **EU funds are a good means of support for Member States to facilitate better integration of migrants. The EU Asylum Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF) is a good example of EU financial support to promote better managed migration and integration.** In addition, the aim of the AMIF is to support Member States in implementing the EU common asylum package. Bearing this in mind, **more questions should be raised as to why a large number of Member States are slow to implement the EU asylum system given their use of the AMIF?**

The UK opted into the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF) for 2014-2020 and was allocated €370m for use on UK priorities in the field of migration and integration. Most of these funds have been used to facilitate returns (18 for returns, 2 for integration and 7 for asylum support). From the UK example, it is evident that **EU funds need to be better targeted to support the integration of migrants. Given the increasing refugee flows in Europe, having a separate EU integration fund could prove to be very beneficial in the long-term.**

The concentration of the refugee crisis to a few Member-States has also meant that EU emergency funding is quickly allocated. For example, this year Austria asked the Commission for 600 million euros to cover costs for reception. This exceeds the amount normally allocated to Austria within the AMIF budget for the whole period of 2014-2020. It is clear that the reluctance of Member States to show solidarity with countries such as Greece, Italy and Austria is having a significant impact on EU funds which could be used to support integration across the EU.

The mid-term review of the AMIF will take place in 2018 and the European parliament will play a role in scrutinising the review and giving recommendations to improve this crucial piece of funding.

The way forward at EU, national or local level

We urgently need an **intensive integration policy, at the moment the response is mostly based on volunteers and NGOs.** The importance of volunteers and NGOs on the ground in Calais, Lesbos, Grand-Synthe *etc.* cannot be underestimated. They have provided much needed immediate support to the refugees and asylum-seekers arriving in EU. However, **living in a refugee camp for several months is not something that should be normalised as this leads to further humanitarian challenges as well as the continued social exclusion of migrants.** Political decisions need to be taken and more support is needed from Member States in taking steps to foster better integration at the national and local level.

As I stated earlier in my speech, there appears to be **serious implementation failures by Member States with regards to key EU measures which can facilitate better migrant integration in our societies.** A prime example of this can be seen with the relatively low numbers for the emergency

relocation mechanism from Italy and Greece to the other countries in the EU, the target was a modest 160,000 yet as it stands 1,020 have been relocated from Italy and 3,428 from Greece. At present, a handful of Member States have been left to respond to the refugee crisis in the EU.

A strategic approach **centred on promoting solidarity at EU, national and local level** is essential for sustainable migrant integration policies. Here are some examples of how this can be achieved:

- Commitments to enhanced integration support - Austerity measures have significantly reduced key tools to support integration. From speaking with NGOs and local authorities it is clear that support is urgently needed for legal assistance, family reunification projects, language support, housing, better recognition of degrees, access to education and tailored support for children. Having these tools in place will ensure faster and sustainable migrant integration in host countries. I think it should not be forgotten that integrating migrants will also change the host society. Therefore, I think integration policies should not be a one-way street but a chance to enhance dialogue on the local level.
- General public opinion needs to be informed - The rise of far-right populist parties and the anti-immigrant sentiment is a worrying trend across Europe. The increase in hate-speech towards migrants following the UK referendum on the EU is a clear example of this worrying trend. This anti-immigrant sentiment has also affected policies of Member States and created a race to the bottom. The Danish asylum law as well as the cap on refugees in Austria are indications of this worrying trend. **The European Parliament has a major role to play in fighting such phenomenon particularly given our work on asylum and migration.** We as progressives need to assert ourselves in the political dialogue and counter the racist and anti-immigrant narrative. We can do this by drawing more attention to the positive case of integration in our societies. Failure to address this will lead to an even more hostile environment for migrants in the EU.
- Improving EU funds - We need more information concerning the impact assessment and evaluation of EU funds in order to gauge the effectiveness of these funds in supporting integration. The examples that I have given already indicate that EU funds need to be better targeted. In addition, local authorities have indicated that they still face bureaucratic obstacles to secure EU funds. It would be beneficial for cities to be able to directly apply and receive EU funding for integration.

To conclude, it is important that we strengthen our commitments to improve migrant integration. Moreover, if Member States do not implement the necessary EU measures that can help to ensure better management of the refugee situation in the EU then we will continue to offer a lukewarm response to the biggest refugee crisis in Europe since the Second World War.