

Illegal immigration is probably one of the main security challenges Europe is facing. Never in recent history have so many people wanted to settle in Europe, either because they are threatened in their home countries and they seek asylum, or simply for economic reasons, as they want to enjoy a better life. But can one really talk about a European migration policy, asks Jean Cady ?

Undoubtedly some progress has been achieved.

The Dublin system which determines the EU member state responsible for examining each migrant's situation is working better and faster. But as the Dublin agreement gives the responsibility of examining asylum requests to the country in which the migrant entered the EU, it overloads Italy and Greece where most migrants arrive. Border security has been strengthened through reinforcement of the European Border and Coast Guard Agency, the European Guard teams and Operation Sophia in the Mediterranean.

But the fact remains that the burden falls unevenly on a number of countries. Refugees or illegal migrants land on the Mediterranean shores and not on the Baltic coast. Italy bears the brunt. It has been so for many years without much progress in other countries sharing the burden, very much to Italy's distress. We can make some progress in reducing the number of illegal migrants only by a coordinated action with the countries where they come from or through which they transit.

The countries involved are first the countries through which migrants transit, in particular Libya. The agreement with Turkey, which is a transit country, could be an example. But Turkey has an administration and state structures in working order. Nothing of the kind can be said about Libya. It is a failed state, power being shared between Tripoli and Benghazi and dozens of war lords. Illegal migrant smugglers are taking advantage of this absence of control of Libyan shores and are making a prosperous business of their criminal activities. France is taking the lead on the Libyan track as Germany did on the Aegean track.

Europe also needs to engage in negotiations with the migrants' countries of origin like Chad, Niger, the Central African Republic but also Somalia, Erythrea and Ethiopia. A new approach started with the August 28 Paris summit when a Franco-German-Spanish and Italian quartet began talking with their African counterparts. The basic idea is that under the supervision of

UNHCR, Libya, Chad and Niger would identify their nationals who are eligible for asylum. It is a beginning. Nothing proves that this is going to be successful, as in these countries, state structures and administration are either non-existent or in a very poor condition.

To facilitate returns France gives each migrant a 2000â€“lump sum to help them resettle in their country of origin. But this is not sufficient to motivate a majority to go back. Only a minority accepts to be sent back. And when they are deported, after having been refused political asylum in Europe, countries of origin refuse to take back their own citizens. In a nutshell, readmission agreements have always been challenging. Unless they receive palpable subsidies, countries of origin are reluctant to honour their commitments. Often burdened with endemic unemployment, these countries are happy to see their nationals off, who â€“ once established abroad â€“ can raise state revenues by way of remitting money into their home countries. In addition, a return of migrants is sometimes simply impossible because there is no functioning government in place to issue the necessary identity papers.

For the moment there is hardly any decrease in the refugee influx. In 2016 more than 1.2 million requests for asylum were made in Europe, mainly by Syrians, Iraqis and Afghans. Citizens of these three countries receive special protection as it is Â« too dangerous for them to go back to their country and they need to take refuge elsewhere Â» as UNHCR declares. But people coming from north or west Africa do not have this special protection and are considered as economic refugees.

The main obstacle to a common European migration policy is certainly that there is a lack of common political will among the 27 EU members. Countries in Southern Europe face large numbers of unauthorized arrivals and have everything to gain from a joint European approach. Meanwhile, countries in Northern Europe have a more national and restrictive approach because they are sheltered by intra-European borders. Some countries, like Hungary, have enforced these borders by setting up physical barriers to migration. Countries in central and eastern Europe, in particular the 4 members of the VisegrÃ¡d group (Poland, Hungary, the Czech Republic and Slovakia) are very reluctant to accept migrants and are quite willing to bow to domestic pressure and sacrifice European solidarity. Not only are they opposed to accepting economic migrants, as are all countries in Europe, but also they do not want asylum seekers, even though they are bound by the Refugee convention of 1951.

Quite obviously illegal migration is not only a humanitarian issue but also a security problem. Migration has always been linked to security for hundreds of years and illegal migration even more so. But the relationship between illegal migration and terrorism is more complex.

Undoubtedly some terror attacks have been made by illegal migrants like the terror attack in Stockholm on April 7, 2017 or the terrorist who drove a lorry into a crowd at the Berlin Christmas market on December 19, 2016. But most attacks in France, Spain or the UK were made by homegrown terrorists who either became radicalized through the preaching of imams at the local mosque or were lured by internet to Daech (ISIS) in Syria, were radicalized there and came back to their home countries as mass murderers. Examples are unfortunately numerous. The most recent examples are the attack in Barcelona on August 17, 2017, the London Bridge attack on June 4, 2017, the Finsbury Park mosque terror attack in London in June 2017, the Manchester attack on May 22, 2017, the attack in a church in the suburb of Rouen France on 26 July 2016, the Nice terror attack on July 14, 2016, and the Charlie Hebdo attack in Paris on January 7, 2015. Hundreds of innocent people died in those attacks. Response still needs to be improved through better coordination of all security forces, including of course defence forces.

As far as the involvement of defence forces, they do patrol streets in a number of countries including France. They are also involved at sea. Let me mention operation Mare Nostrum, led by Italy, Operation Triton conducted by Frontex with the cooperation of 15 European countries and Operation Navfor Med also known as Operation Sophia. All of them were aimed at reducing the loss of lives at sea. However it can be argued that these operations were failures as they did not manage to reduce the number of deaths at sea and did not disrupt the smuggling network. In particular progress still needs to be made on intelligence sharing. This was felt by the Council of the European Union which on July 25, 2017 gave an extended mandate to Operation Sophia in which assets have been deployed by Italy, Belgium, France, Germany, Portugal, Slovenia, Spain and the UK.

In this new approach, what is new ? Two things :

- First : one has to recognize the fact that even though all countries in Europe do not have the same approach nor the same attraction power vis a vis migrants, progress can be made and the burden can be shared when the format of cooperation is adapted to the aim pursued.

- Second : illegal migration should not be dealt with only when illegal migrants reach European shores. One has to work upstream with the countries from where migrants come and through which they transit. This is precisely what has begun. It remains to be seen how efficient this approach will be.

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