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Panel 4. Migration Challenges in the Western Mediterranean Region

**"Migration in the Mediterranean:
EU policy responses"**

Sandra Pratt
Deputy Head
Immigration and Asylum Unit
DG Justice, Freedom and Security
European Commission

Migration on the EU's political agenda

One of the most deep rooted concerns in the EU today is migration. It is a complicated issue, which goes to the heart of political debate in Europe and of course an extremely sensitive one for public opinion in the EU. EU leaders, however, recognise that migration is not a problem, but a necessity as our populations get smaller and older. In this context, most of them would also agree that migration is an opportunity for the EU!

For centuries Europe itself was a source of migration. Now we are an attractive destination for migrants. But we have to ask the question whether, as globalisation increases, new economic super powers arise, and Europe's population declines, we will be able to continue to attract the migrants that we need. The challenge we have today is to put in place the policies which will ensure the management of migration which responds to labour market requirements while ensuring that it benefits also both the migrants themselves and their countries of origin.

Our pre-occupation as policy makers is to ensure that we attract legal migration which matches the needs of the labour market while at the same time discouraging illegal migration and the issues which arise: from smuggling and trafficking to the insecurity of working in the black economy. We have to get the balance right between clamping down on illegal immigration and welcoming those legal migrants we need. And we must not miss our target here – we need to be fighting those who organise illegal immigration, not the migrants themselves.

I will not describe in detail the demographic background which is well known in this audience I think. Suffice it to say that in some EU countries today the net increase in population is entirely due to immigration and this will progressively apply to the others in the next decade or so, including the 10 newest Member States. We estimate that by 2050 the EU will have lost 20 million people from its workforce and a third of its population will be over 65 years old. In spite of high levels of unemployment we already need immigration to maintain economic growth. It is therefore urgent to put in place strategies to make sure we can attract in the future the skills and labour we need in a rapidly changing labour market. We have also to bear in mind that already, with respect to the highly skilled, we are not doing as well as other countries, notably the United States and Canada. We do not forget either an additional factor, which Philippe Fargues has just highlighted, which is the demographic forecasts for some of our source countries, including the Maghreb, which indicate population decline of various degrees. This, together with economic development in these countries, will reduce the pressure to emigrate in the years to come.

In the last few years we have developed a clearer understanding of migration, and of the balanced migration policy which we need to implement. We are moving away from an approach which aims solely to reduce migratory pressures on the EU by keeping migrants out. Instead the policy emphasis is on working in partnership with countries of origin of migrants to achieve effective and balanced migration management.

We have therefore put migration on the agenda of political, economic and social dialogues with many non-member states. In Asia, Africa, Latin America and beyond. But we give a particular emphasis to our neighbourhood and in particular to the Mediterranean countries with which we have close ties and which have been our major sources of migration in recent decades. However our neighbours, and particularly our Mediterranean neighbours, now find themselves increasingly as transit and destination countries as we have just heard. The fact that today we face the same challenges, has now given us a unique opportunity to understand each others' perspective and cooperate more efficiently, accepting our shared responsibility for the issues.

Migration and development

Another aspect of the migration issue, which is now a key part of EU policy, is the link to development. Migration creates challenges for the countries migrants leave behind. A constant theme in the common immigration policy, which has now become a major priority, is to find ways to mitigate the harm and maximise the benefit of migration for ourselves, for the migrants and for their countries of origin.

Our response to this issue was the adoption by the European Council in 2005 of a ***Global approach to migration***. This confirms our move to a policy more in keeping with today's world. It takes us away from "more development for less migration" to "better managing migration for more development". The aim is to take

comprehensive and coherent policies and action on migration, addressing the broad range of migration issues, working in partnership with countries outside the EU and bringing together justice and home affairs, external relations and development policies to see how each of them can contribute to the better management of migration. It is interesting to note that the trigger factor for the development of this approach was the attempt, in September 2005, by hundreds of young men, mainly from Sub-Saharan Africa, to enter the EU via Ceuta and Melilla – the two Spanish enclaves on the North African coast.

The Commission developed an action plan to implement the global approach which focuses on:

- 1) Increasing operational cooperation between Member States with respect to border control. The FRONTEX agency takes a lead here.
- 2) Working with neighbouring countries more closely on migration issues including within the EuroMed framework.
- 3) Extending the dialogue concerning migration in the Mediterranean to include a number of key Sub-Saharan African States bearing in mind the importance of migratory flows along the West African route. In this connection we have been working hard with our African partners to develop the Regional networks of Immigration Liaison Officers along four of the key migration routes from Africa to Europe.
- 4) Promoting closer cooperation at global level on migration and development with some promising results coming from the High Level Dialogue which took place in New York last month.
- 5) Implementing the actions described in the Commission's Communication of September 2005 on migration and development particularly in the four priority areas: remittances, working with the diaspora, temporary and circular migration and brain drain.

Policy frameworks

Our framework for cooperation with our neighbours to the east and south is the **European Neighbourhood Policy** (ENP). It is a policy designed to bring neighbouring countries interested in deeper relations with the EU closer to us. And to promote an area of stability, prosperity, and security for us all.

The EU offers neighbouring countries the opportunity to deepen their political cooperation and their economic integration with us – through inclusion in internal EU programmes and access to the biggest Single Market in the world - in return for working together on issues of mutual concern. The Mediterranean countries are of course major partners in this policy. We have increased the intensity of our dialogue on migration, particularly with our southern neighbours, via this instrument.

Action Plans are the European Neighbourhood Policy's principal tool and have already been signed with a number of Mediterranean countries (Israel, Jordan, Morocco, the Palestinian Authority, Tunisia, Egypt, and Lebanon). Each Action Plan is specifically tailored to the country concerned. It sets out our mutually agreed vision for our relationship and detailed commitments for us both for a three year period.

Migration plays a more and more central role with our neighbours, so is one of the major issues in the Action Plans. We look at the whole range of migration-related issues in keeping with our new, more coherent approach. Throughout our neighbourhood we are funding projects to strengthen institutional capacities; improve

border controls; upgrade reception facilities for asylum applicants and refugees; and fight illegal immigration and people trafficking. The precise issues vary from country to country, but we adopt in each case a comprehensive and balanced approach.

We are also helping to build institutions that enforce the rule of law and promote respect for human rights. This is a key element for implementing commitments on institutional and practical protection and rehabilitation of victims of trafficking. In Algeria, for example, we are training police forces in the management of migratory flows, including the requirements of international conventions for refugee protection.

Overall, we have committed ourselves to stepping up the volume of our assistance to our neighbours for assistance on migration and asylum. We have discussed with EU member states increasing expenditure of up to 3% of the budget of the European Neighbourhood financial instrument and our other instruments for external cooperation. Depending, of course, on increased funds being available for external relations in the next budget period.

With respect to the Mediterranean countries the ENP builds on and complements Euro-Mediterranean cooperation which has been developing within the **Barcelona process** for over 10 years supported by the MEDA programme. The 10th anniversary of the Barcelona declaration was celebrated last November at a Euro-Mediterranean summit which agreed on a five-year work programme.

This programme acknowledges that migration is now a shared interest. The emphasis is placed on promoting legal migration opportunities and developing these as a means for economic growth for both countries on the north and the south of the Mediterranean by, on the one hand, improving integration policies and fair treatment of migrants and, on the other, bringing some key development issues into the arena, notably those concerning the brain drain and the flow of remittances.

Beyond the regular bilateral dialogues with Morocco and Tunisia, which have now been extended to Algeria, Libya, and Egypt, these two frameworks (ENP and Barcelona) provide a number of opportunities for regional and multilateral discussions. The latest of course was the conference with both Northern African and Sub-Saharan African countries held in Rabat in July which we see as a first step towards an integrated dialogue between countries of origin, transit and destination.

We have also nearly completed negotiations on a readmission agreement with Morocco and we expect that discussions with Algeria will begin this autumn.

Managing Migration in the Mediterranean

Legal labour migration

Better management of legal migration is now a key issue in the EU's relationships with the Mediterranean countries. People planning to emigrate need to be encouraged to come legally. They need advice and practical help, while those returning to their country of origin may need support for their reintegration. In Morocco for example we are funding the creation of an international section in the National Agency for Employment (ANAPEC).

There are a vast number of different ways to enter the EU to work depending on the country, the sector and the type of job. This is very confusing to those outside the Union and it discourages the people we need most to fill the many job vacancies which we have, especially the highly skilled. So, following a wide-ranging debate

within the EU, we are going to propose over the next few years the harmonising of admission procedures for certain categories of workers: the highly skilled, intra-corporate transferees, trainees, and seasonal workers. Let's be clear: we do not want to decide for Member States how many engineers they need. That will remain a national competence. We do want however to have a clear system for entering the EU because that will be in our joint (economic) interests.

We will also propose a basic European legislative framework to establish a set of common rights for legally residing migrant workers. This, together with the EU legislation already in existence (on family reunion, long-term resident status, the admission of students and researchers) should greatly improve the management of migration flows.

The Directive on seasonal workers will provide an opportunity to develop some new thinking on temporary and circular migration. The Global approach seeks to promote these forms of labour migration because of their flexibility and potential advantages within the development context. We need, however, to look more closely at a number of technical issues such as visa facilitation to provide for multiple entries, incentives for return and to examine the role of integration programmes for such kinds of labour migrants.

Ensuring that migrants are well-integrated into the labour market reduces the possibility of employers or organised crime exploiting migrants or their remittances and facilitates their re-integration into their home work force on their return. A priority now is to improve integration policies via a coherent European framework which encourages the exchange of information and good practice and implementing the Common Basic Principles for integration adopted by the JHA Council in November 2004. In this area too we have fruitful discussions with the Mediterranean countries on aspects of integration related to their nationals

Illegal migration and border management in the Mediterranean

Border surveillance is of course a particularly important issue in the Mediterranean. The Spanish Minister of the Interior announced last week that the flow of illegal immigrants to the Canary Islands, which we have seen this summer, was coming to an end after a record number of 25 000 arrivals this year mainly from Sub-Saharan Africa. The government announced at the same time a recent increase in illegal arrivals from Morocco and Algeria across the Mediterranean to southern Spain. Considerable numbers arrived throughout the summer of course in Malta and Italy.

Considerable progress has, nevertheless, been made in coordinating our border control systems across the European Union under a common set of rules and procedures. Operational cooperation is now emerging and is spearheaded by the FRONTEX agency – the European agency for control of the external borders of the EU. The agency is now beginning to play a very important role.

For the first time this year there has been a truly European response to the migrants arriving by boat with several joint patrolling operations initiated in the Mediterranean and substantial sums of European money being made available to those countries most affected. For example the Commission announced in September that it was giving €3.28 million to co-finance six emergency projects in Spain, Malta and Italy.

FRONTEX is coordinating operational activities aimed at preventing large flows of illegal migration, targeting the current main "hotspots" of illegal entry, namely the Canary Islands and the central Mediterranean, in particular Italy and Malta. These

operations are a first test for the Agency and a signal of solidarity from Member States.

Operational assistance for Spain consists of two modules: technical assistance, an operation known as Hera I, carried out by experts on the Canary Islands which will focus on identification of illegal migrants, assurance of proper information flow between all parties involved and assisting the Spanish authorities in returning migrants. Hera II will focus on joint operations at sea, which will include enforcing control of the external maritime borders of the EU and, at the same time, contributing to the saving of lives of illegal immigrants in peril at sea.

Meanwhile a major new initiative, the Jason I operation, will start up shortly in the central part of the Mediterranean Sea, with the participation of Italy, Malta, Greece, Germany and possibly units and assets of other Member States, all under the coordination of FRONTEX.

The Commission is currently preparing a set of recommendations to further boost border management. The measures recommended will build on recent or current studies carried out by FRONTEX, including the Medsea study that proposes the establishment of a coordination centre in the Mediterranean, and the Bortec study that is looking at the feasibility of establishing a surveillance system covering the entire Mediterranean region.

The recommendations will also look at how to increase planning and coordination of joint operations, the issue of pooling of equipment and resources among Member States, the analysis of the international law of the sea currently being carried out by the Commission, and the proposal for Rapid Border Reaction Teams presented in July.

A further response to the escalating migration crisis in the Mediterranean over the summer and the increasing political pressure on the EU, has been the establishment of a Task Force of Commissioners, involving all Commissioners whose area of competence impinges on migration. Its mandate is to bring together everything that is happening across the Commission in a coordinated, integrated approach that includes both short and long term measures.

Asylum-related issues are also important in the Mediterranean region. The EU shares UNHCR's view that solutions to refugee problems should be found first and foremost in regions of origin. These countries often lack the institutional and financial capacity to address these challenges alone. So we aim to enhance their capacity to offer effective protection and durable solutions, through asylum capacity-building, local integration, repatriation and resettlement.

Conclusion

As you can see, we have a full and active agenda ahead of us. We are fully committed to implementing the new approach to migration issues in the Mediterranean and elsewhere through the ENP, the Barcelona process and the global approach. There is an obvious added value to dealing with migration at the EU level, since unilateral solutions are clearly ineffectual. This gives us a unique opportunity to take the lead on an issue which is highly sensitive to European public opinion but where our member states recognise the need for joint action.

The key to success is the development of partnerships with each of our neighbours. Here we are making good progress, particularly with the Mediterranean countries as

a result of our shared concerns. The second challenge is to ensure we have enough funds to dedicate to our migration programmes to make them meaningful.

The Commission is ready to play its role in meeting these two challenges, and to working with the Member States and our southern partners to achieving our objective of obtaining a triple win with respect to the management of migration in the Mediterranean.

Thank you for your attention.