

In search of a comprehensive EU migration policy towards Africa

Concept paper

The year 2015, which resulted in the arrival of more than one million migrants on the shores of the European Union (EU), shaped a new reality for the continent. Migratory pressure on its external borders has become a constant that the EU and its Member States feel an urgent need to act upon. As a result, the EU adopted several new mechanisms of cooperation with third countries, such as the 2015 Valletta summit and its accompanying political declaration, the 2015 EU-Turkey Joint Action Plan and the 2016 EU-Turkey Statement, and the 2016 Migration Partnership Framework.

After the closure of the so-called Balkans route, which left thousands of migrants stranded on EU's borders, the Mediterranean route re-emerged as the central concern of migration to Europe. The EU thus launched new Migration Partnerships with five priority African countries, signalling a new policy of engaging Africa over migration. The external dimension of this policy has short and long term objectives, aimed at achieving better managed migration, among them are saving lives at sea, fighting traffickers and smugglers, opening legal ways of reaching Europe, and addressing the root causes of migration and forced displacement through fostering sustainable development in countries of origin. The latter objective goes well beyond migration policy, and encompasses areas such as trade, development cooperation, mobility, energy, education and so forth. Unfortunately, development funding has in the process witnessed re-channelling from its original aim of eradicating poverty towards managing migration.

Only two months ago, another decision was made to secure EU's borders. The Regulation that amends Schengen Borders Code was adopted, which obliges EU Member States to carry out systematic checks on all of its external borders. While this decision will not significantly impact migration from the African continent, it again sheds a light on the main characteristic of the EU's migration policy. The Maltese Presidency of the Council of the EU stressed that work on border security is one of the four elements of a holistic EU approach to managing migration.

On paper, the EU external approach tackles various elements of immigration, but in order to become holistic, the EU migration policy needs to look beyond immigration and take into consideration also emigration. Until both dimensions are included, the EU and its Member States will not be able to escape its partial approach to migration, which stems from the national perspective and, far from being holistic, is reduced to a narrow agenda of deterrence and risk containment.

The aim of the round table is to go beyond criticism towards the existing EU migration policy, and to look for viable solutions, which could enable the EU to move away from its political realism stand. To guide us in our search for an alternative migration policy are the following questions:

- What would the EU need to do in order to adopt a comprehensive migration policy that would include both ends of migration: emigration and immigration?
- In what way can the focus of EU policies be shifted from prevention of persons leaving countries of transit towards long run solutions that actually look at the root causes of migration?
- What are the true root causes to migration? Are the EU and its Member States willing to address them?
- How does the fact that development does not reduce migration enter into the equation?
- How can the EU return to the path of adhering its moral and legal responsibility towards migrants, if not for the reason to stop the race towards minimising the rights of people on the move, then at least to prevent the decay of its own core values?

- What measures can the EU and African countries, which receive a far greater number of migrants, agree to that will benefit both continents, but also migrants that look for an escape or better possibilities?
- Given the increasing popularity of populist and anti-migration parties within the Member States, what would be the best approach to convince decision-makers that one side of the coin to well-managed migration involves opening up legal routes to the EU?

The document expresses the views of its authors and does not represent the official position of the Government of Republic of Slovenia