



# **‘The EU and migration: Managing flows, overcoming divisions’**

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The conference was opened by the **interview to the former Italian Minister of Interior, Marco Minniti**, by the journalist **Fiorenza Sarzanini**. Mr. Minniti emphasised that currently there is no immigration emergency in Italy and in Europe, that migration flows have decreased significantly in the last year and that the few immigrants currently coming to Europe could easily be welcomed and integrated. Nevertheless, the problem of the perception of the phenomenon is serious, due to the poverty, weakness and crisis of the welfare State that the European societies are still experiencing as a result of the economic crisis. The problem of perception is severe and must be fought, not ignored. The European left was wrong not to listen to and respond to the fear and anger that the crisis caused



among European citizens. The task of the left is to stand next to frightened people in order to free them from fear. The national-populist parties stand next to those who are afraid but they have no interest in setting them free from fear. Rather they keep them chained to their fear in order to take advantage from it. We need to counteract the idea exploited by national-populists that reception of migrants and security are opposing and contrasting objectives. Politics must find a way to reconcile these aims. To avoid deaths at sea, it is necessary to keep active the current system of rescue at sea by means of all its three pillars: the Italian Coast Guard, the Libyan Coast Guard in Libyan territorial waters and NGOs. The action of NGOs is essential, as we cannot think that the Libyan Coast Guard can carry the burden of the rescue operations in the Mediterranean Sea all by itself. The effect would be, as it is already happening, an increase in deaths at sea. It is also necessary – in the opinion of

Marco Minniti – to discuss what migration really is. Migration is a great epochal phenomenon that accompanied the history of the world and will do so also in the future. It is impossible to think of stopping it. Not even a great democracy can pretend to stop migration flows by itself, but it can govern it by reconciling the principles of humanity and security. Democratic parties know that these principles must be reconciled. The national-populist forces say that the two terms are antithetical and that we need to sacrifice humanity if we want to guarantee security. When this paradigm is affirmed, the founding principles of Europe are lost. The national-populist forces are implementing, for political purposes, a strategy of communicative tension based on the idea that a migration emergency is in act. In Italy, in particular, the strategy of the government is twofold: to give the impression of putting in place a strategy to solve the problem, hiding the fact that in Italy no other important issue is being seriously tackled; to provoke strong tension that can challenge the European project, as it has been understood to what extent tensions over the question of migration can be harmful for the EU. An alliance was built between the European governments led by national-populist parties that want to impose the idea of a “minimal”



Europe. Their goal is to change the balance of forces in Europe to change the EU. Therefore, it is necessary, at a European level, to strengthen the alliance among the forces that oppose this plan. We must reiterate the idea of Europe as an open society, an idea that is currently in extreme danger.

Many topics were discussed also in the panel entitled **“Migration, a structural phenomenon that must be understood and managed”**. **Giulia Laganà**, Senior

Policy Analyst at the Open Society Foundation, underlined the link between the migration crisis and the crisis of policies that should deal with it. European bureaucracy and some European governments are aware of this; unfortunately, public opinion is not. The bad management of what is essentially a structural phenomenon generated panic in European societies. This panic is used in an instrumental way by populist political parties. For populists, migratory flows are a “boon”. In the last European Council a consensus was reached on the idea of sealing the external borders and preventing the arrival of refugees, asylum seekers and immigrants, increasing the number of repatriations and creating offshore centres for reception and asylum procedures. This is an unfeasible plan, but unfortunately European public opinion believed it can be successfully implemented. Following the propaganda of the right-wing forces on migration, the Left fell into a trap, because the level of migration they are aiming for is the zero level, and the zero level is unattainable. **Giovanni La Manna**, President of the Associazione Elpis, exposed the sad paradox of a world in which goods and money travel without difficulty while the movement of people is seen as a problem. This is a



symptom of the impoverishment of human feelings we are experiencing. We must work to avoid acting impulsively. We should ask ourselves about the causes of these migration flows and recognise our responsibilities. **Riccardo Clerici**, Senior Protection Officer at UNHCR Italy, discussed the so-called Global compact on refugees, which is currently being drafted and should be proposed at the UN General Assembly next September, that will go beyond the European dimension and, on a voluntary basis, will create new places for discussion and global governance of the phenomenon. **Marc Arno Hartwig**, Team Leader of the Migration Support Team Italia, DG Home, European Commission, cited what has been done so far by the European Union: strengthening of some agencies such as EASO, the asylum support agency in Malta, the creation of the European Coast Guard and the effort for a more targeted use of available funds. He also stressed that many of the actions promoted by the European Commission and more generally by European Union from 2015 to date have not been implemented due to the lack of a political agreement among national leaders. **Anna Triandafyllidou**, Professor at the Robert Schuman Centre for Advanced Studies of the



EUI, focused on the crucial topic of communication. It is necessary, in her opinion, to find a way to talk to people who do not agree with us on migration and other sensitive topics. She also stressed the role of globalisation in feeding people's individualism and their fears and insecurities. The immigrant and the Muslim have become an enemy against whom we can measure ourselves and feel strong. Citizenship is becoming a "privilege" that makes us feel better than the foreigner: we forget inequalities and we feel rich because we have the right citizenship. Migration conflict has replaced class conflict. The interventions of the speakers were followed by some questions from the public. Questions and answers focused mainly on the problems of the erroneous perception of the migratory phenomenon and on the failure of the Left to cope with the growth of selfish and racist tendencies in European societies.

The session "**Open problems and political solutions**" was opened by **Marco Impagliazzo**, President of the Comunità di Sant'Egidio, who stressed that Europe and Africa, due to demographic trends, have a strong common interest in the orderly management of migratory flows and in the opening of legal channel for regular migration, that is useful for European economies. He recalled the example of humanitarian corridors, which should be replicated, and the existence of other legal forms of immigration that need to be strengthened. He emphasised the crucial role of measures to be taken directly in Africa. An effective European agenda should include strengthening the Valletta Action Plan and the funds for Africa; the increase in public welfare and agriculture aid in Africa; the

strengthening of bilateral relations for repatriation, implementation of plans for increasing investments. African leaderships must also take responsibility for themselves. **Miltiadis Kyrkos**, Member of the European Parliament, explained the position of the European Parliament and the Commission on secondary movements and recalled the existing differences among European governments. He underlined that the Austrian Presidency almost certainly will not find a solution based on the principle of solidarity. A possible way out could be a “coalition of the willing” founded on the idea of accelerated integration. We failed to face problems in time and now the problems are in front of us. The European Union should imagine solutions based on a criterion of solidarity. We must advocate European values while knowing that they are not enough to convince national-populist governments. Recite a mantra is not enough; we need to find concrete solutions. **Elly Schlein**, Member of the European Parliament, stressed that while we have been talking about a common European system for immigration and asylum for twenty years, very little responsibilities are shared. The Treaties, in Articles 78 and 80, already provide for European solidarity on these issues. The current flows of migrants could be easily absorbed. The problem is the lack of European political will. The actions of the European Council and the Commission are now all concentrated on external borders, as shown by the EU-Turkey Statement and the agreement signed with Libya, a country that has not signed the 1951 Geneva Convention and where torture and human rights violation are daily practice. The European Parliament approved documents that went in the opposite direction but remained unheard. She is rapporteur for the S&D Group of the reform of the Dublin regulation, which decides for each asylum request on the base of the criterion of the country of first entry. It is hypocritical to talk about irregular access when there are no regular access channels. The Dublin system has shifted responsibilities almost exclusively on the Mediterranean countries. The reform of the Dublin system proposed by the European Parliament aimed to affirm the principle that the responsibility towards these asylum seekers is European and replaced the criterion of the first country of entry with an automatic relocation system. A system was also foreseen for those countries that do not fulfil their reception obligations, which will in turn result in repercussions on obtaining structural funds. Unfortunately, this reform has not been accepted by the European governments. Migration is such a complex issue that it would require solutions in the short, medium and long term. In the short term, a European humanitarian mission for research and rescue at sea



would be needed. In fact NGOs make up for the lack of a European response on this front. In the medium term, the reform of Dublin regulation, open channels for legal access, as well as for job search should be introduced. In the long term, we should address the root causes, by implementing coherent policies that deal with the exploitation of raw materials and resources in Africa, and with the issue of European companies' tax evasion in Africa.

The last speaker was **Massimo D'Alema**, President of the Fondazione Italianieuropei. He explained that there is a link between the increase in the negative perception of migration and the growth of poverty, inequalities and precariousness in our societies, as well as the weakening of welfare state systems. Europe is not being invaded. Indeed, the European population has not substantially changed in the last years and is aging. The migration flows are necessary to support the European economic recovery and sustain our welfare systems. Migration, as a matter of fact, is independent from policies that European countries put in place; it depends essentially on the situation in the countries of origin of the flows. Having said that there is no emergency, we must worry about perceptions. Why did the political emergency linked to immigrants raise if there is no real emergency at all? There is a cynical political exploitation of the theme by some political parties. The distance between reality and perception arise from the failure of policies, because the perception of migrants as a threat grows where there is need and poverty and where the integration policies integration have failed. The effects of the Syrian crisis and the destabilisation of the Arab world could easily be predicted, but no countermeasures were put in place in time. It is not true that Italy was left alone in facing the immigration crisis. Germany has welcomed many refugees. Europe's inability to calmly accept a limited number of immigrants is a symptom of Europe's deep crisis. There is a major problem in communicating the phenomenon to which both politics and the media must work on. We must work on the management of reception to reduce its social impact. Beyond the emergency, Europe and Italy must formulate a comprehensive migration policy. The centre-left government should have cancelled the Bossi-Fini law, that encourages irregular migration. In Italy there are no channels for legal access. And prohibition generates irregular work and crime. When the Turco-Napolitano law was in force, flows were regular. We need to put in place a reasonable immigration policy that attracts the regular and skilled immigration that Europe needs. The solution to the problems of the frontier countries (Italy and Greece) is to create a system of solidarity with other European countries. The national-populist synthesis is instead the idea of a fortress Europe.