



**“They are erecting walls,
we are promoting doors”**



Speech by Giuliano Amato, former Italian Prime Minister, during the conference organized by FEPS Europe: “United for a Different Migration”

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Thank you all for being here and for the really thoughtful debate we had this morning. I can tell you that had we written the paper “Prioritising people” after the debate of this morning, it would be much richer than it is. However, if you read it, you will find that on the whole, your ideas, expectations, and visions are reflected in the few pages of our document. If you just want a detailed presentation of it, you can read the ten points that have been already drawn from the 13/14 pages of the document. I will limit myself to some of the “key words” to enter into the overall vision that the group has been sharing throughout the months. Some of the members of the group have already spoken and I was proud of them. What the discussion of this morning suggests to me is somehow preliminary to our argument. It has to do with the confidence that we must have in the fact that people are still ready to understand and accept good arguments. Most of the debate in Europe nowadays, and not only in Europe but also in the US, tends to be paralysed by this kind of observations. People react to emotions not to rational arguments. Therefore, your fact-based arguments are fine, but they are doomed because nobody is ready to accept them. A British scholar, a young woman, Erica Fudge, wrote more than ten years ago, a book, the title of which was: “Brutal Reasoning”. It was devoted to the history of animals and human beings.

The first stage of this history is when animals and human beings decide what is right and what is wrong on the basis of what their belly suggests to them. “I’m hungry. I need something. I can’t give anything to anyone else, so this is mine. Feed me. This is what my belly says.” In the second stage they pass to their heart. They have feelings. “I love you. I hate you. I tend to be nice with you. I tend to be nasty with you”. This is what our heart suggests. The third stage, and as human beings we are supposed to have reached it, is when also the mind suggests what is right and what is wrong. The “perfect” human beings, if you allow me, are those who react to the heart and the mind. Emotions that correspond to good arguments. On migration we have arguments that may succeed with the heart and the brain. We have to be confident that it is still possible.

We must not surrender to the fact that emotions suggested by the belly are what really count nowadays. Either you adapt, or you are lost. I do not adapt because adapting means surrendering. Giving up. We are human beings. We are not animals at the first stage of their history. I am convinced that in each of us, there is the tendency to react with the belly. It depends on those who lead us, if they want to exploit our belly. People will be ready to identify themselves with these kinds of political leadership. However, if there is another political leadership, there is room to create debate and to convince. I will give you a very small example that I generally quote. It has to do with a specific topic, very relevant in my country, Italy.

As a member of the Italian Constitutional Court, I cannot speak of Italian politics. Hence I limit myself to reporting a fact. The fact is that in Italy there is a strong movement against vaccines. According to the supporters of this movement vaccines are dangerous for children, so they believe it is better either not to vaccinate them, or to make vaccination voluntarily and not mandatory, as it is by legislative act in Italy now. This movement is now somehow gaining ground and therefore, there is a propensity in parliament to backtrack from mandatory to voluntary. A woman – not a political leader, a woman, a mother, whose son’s immune system is depressed – did not want her child to attend a class where other children had not been vaccinated, as this could be dangerous for him. Therefore, she started a petition, saying that such behaviour is against science, it is not rational. Vaccines are essential for the health of our children. She collected – she, alone - more than 300,000 signatures. Do you want to be less than this woman? Is your case less important than that? What this mother was defending was absolutely important. And she dared to use reason and heart, instead of using heart and belly. This is what you have to do. The arguments our papers offers to you have a sense, as long



as you are ready to use them, as long as you are not scared of being submerged by the reasoning by belly.

Upon this assumption, the first point the document clarifies is demystifying immigration. In three basic senses that were already discussed this morning. The first one, that there is not an invasion. This sense of invasion was somehow strong in Europe in 2015 for an exceptional reason, Syria. Without Syria, the inflows are higher than in the past, but it is not an invasion at all. We know the figures and they were repeated this morning. Most of the immigration from Africa remains in Africa. 85 per cent of African migrants remain in Africa. Less than 15 per cent move to Europe.

First point, then, this is not an invasion. Second point, this is not an emergency. Therefore it should not be countered with temporary measures and then God will see. No. We have to be aware that people have been migrating throughout their long history and they will continue to do so for different reasons. So, as long as migration creates problems, such problems cannot be treated as temporary. To the contrary, they have to be tackled with long-term policies. Putting people of different origins, cultures, and identities is not as simple as it might seem. We have to be prepared to prevent on the one side and solve, on the other, the difficulties that necessarily.

The first time I came to the US – it was more than fifty years ago – we were on a Dutch boat that took more than 15 days from the UK to Boston. Incredible for me now, but at the time I did not understand the language. I still remember a lady who asked me: “How are you?”. I did not understand. She repeated, “How are you?” Eventually, a friend of mine said in Italian: “Come stai?”. Then shame on me. It took time. If you are a migrant and you do not understand the language, you are exactly as I was in that moment, you feel ashamed, you do not understand what is around you and what is around you does not understand you. There is a problem of lack of communication that if not easily solved, generates hostility, wariness to say the least. But this is not an emergence.

The third most difficult point is convincing people nowadays that closing the doors is much worse for us than controlling the inflows. Erecting barriers, erecting walls is a mistake. A mistake not just for the sake of human rights. It is a mistake also for us and for more than one reason. This is where the matter might become more problematic. A point, a very delicate one, that we discussed with the FEPS Global Migration Group concerns this, the national border.

We cannot get rid of borders. Behind any border, there are communities that have historically taken shape, languages that are different from other languages, traditions that are different from other traditions. Costly social protections that exist here and do not exist there. I have to take these elements on board in order to do what? Not to shut the border, but to make the other who arrives aware that he/she is entering a new community. A mutual understanding is needed. It's a door. The door is not a wall, it can be locked, but it can also be open. We cannot reject the other because he or she is different from us. We have to adapt to each other. I have to adapt to you. You also have to adapt to the community you are entering into; and in order for these mutual adaptations to occur, the work of local communities is really essential, as we have learned from one of our panels this morning.

The next point is controlling immigration. What our debate this morning has clearly demonstrated is that you cannot control it unilaterally. Not even the new Italian government, which cultivates nationalist feelings, says “I decide to control migration, on my own”. To the contrary they expect Europe to do more in order to control immigration and complain with the European institutions because they don't do enough. What has not been clearly understood in the world – and the Global



Compact will be essential for the world to understand it – is that controlling immigration is never a matter of unilateral sovereignty. Either by a single nation or by a union of states. It can only be managed at a multilevel scale that goes from global, to supranational, bilateral and only eventually national.

The bilateral level is crucial, but something I personally hate are readmission agreements, even though as Minister of Interior, several years ago, I was involved in the attempt of negotiating more than one of them. The notion itself of readmission agreement is sort of a contradiction in itself. It is an agreement between you and me to the end of doing something that is advantageous only for me, namely to get rid of your citizens. You have to get them back. It's not clear to me how this kind of agreement could be acceptable for the countries of origin. Why should they take them back? What are the incentives? They are citizens of a state, and they are free to move. What kind of obligation do those states have to take them back?

Agreements with the countries of origin are essential, but not only for the readmission. Comprehensive agreements such as the mobility pacts make sense. We started in Europe with mobility pacts about ten years ago, but very few of them. There is this new approach that has been suggested by a brilliant American young scholar, Michael Clemens, the global skills partnerships. In fact, they are to be partnerships. The countries of destination must understand that they are on an equal footing with the countries of origin. This must be a relationship that is between interlocutors that are on the same footing, that are equals.

There are advantages and disadvantages. They have to be balanced and the two countries have to agree with each other on this basis. Of course we must be aware it is not necessarily enough because they are a wider phenomenon, as Maria João was highlighting before. We might need continent-to-continent agreements. We need global governance. Here, the political family that most of you represent should remember that it comes from an initially international movement, that, after a while, got somehow locked into the borders of nation states, that were very advantageous for several reasons. Suffice to say that welfare institutions were created inside the frame of national states. But now the world is wider, and we cannot remain prisoners of national borders because we come from a wider notion of our role, of our links, of the solidarities that are needed. If there is somebody that has all of the reasons and the qualifications to be protagonist of the transformation of these nation states governance into something wider, this is our political family more than any other.

Piece by piece, this kind of construction will come out. Controlling obviously means fighting illegal traffickers, illegal transport that is at the origin of irregular migration. Let us be clear on that. With all of our states, unless we restore on a wide scale the legal pathways to migration, the illegal channels will remain necessarily strong. I know the counter argument that the impact on illegal trafficking is not immediate, that after one restores legal migration, there is a sort of in-between phase where the two of them somehow compete with each other, but in the long run we will see the effects. Particularly if regular migration is based on agreements with the countries of origin. As it had started to be before the great economic crises of the late first decade of this century.

When I discuss this topic, I always go back to the years when I was Minister of the Interior. My country received by decree, signed by me and by the Labour Minister, between 160,000 and 170,000 migrants. Nobody complained. It was not perceived as an invasion. Never we have reached after wars these figures. They were responding to a demand coming from our labour market. Of course, there was a decline in this demand in the following years, but now, we are again at that point. We



have to restore this approach. In agreement with the countries of origin. Training people for what has to be done. Also, envisaging returns after a while. They can be useful here for a while and then go back to their countries. There are works that are being done on the current demands of our labour market and not only for highly skilled workers.

Not only agriculture with its seasonal works, but also constructions. Yesterday, I read that meat packaging has a shortage of manpower, perhaps because people dislike that kind of “bloody” work. High demand also for retail, not to speak of family care, elderly care. Thousands and thousands of jobs. Can we restore the habit of creating common committees, representing companies of the several sectors, and country by country, in order to assess and publicize the yearly needs we have? Doing so, it will be easy to demonstrate that those who arrive are not stealing jobs to others but are responding to a request that remains otherwise unsatisfied. It was so ten years ago, there has been scarcity afterwards, but now things are changing again.

Everyone wishes to defend his/her job, but with some more growth and with economies as they begin to be now, we can afford promoting legal entrance of migrants that will be absorbed by the labour market. Of course, there have to be limits. We have to say year after year, how many of them we can receive respecting our absorption capacity.

I don't sympathise with Brexit, I have to admit it. I'm one of those dreamers who still think that the British citizens might change their minds. But unhappily, even if they do change their minds, it might be too late. They will pay for the consequences of that mistake. Also, we will pay for it, but this is another matter. However, having received three-hundred-thousand immigrants per year, not from Africa, but from Romania and Bulgaria, and having realised how many more houses and how many more services they had to provide, it became likely for them to conclude that this was more than they could afford.

Let me pass finally to integration, diversities and identity. To this regard in our document we distinguish between social standards and principles. Most of the differences are in social standards and here we have to accommodate to each other as it happens in any new situations. To the contrary, there are principles that are intangible. No father from Pakistan can impose a husband to his daughter. Even less he can kill his daughter if she chooses not to accept. This has happened in my country twice in two years. Fathers from Pakistan have to understand that the role of the father in any family in the world cannot go against human dignity and the basic rights of the members of it. There is no possibility of compromise here. We have to be clear on that. We also have to be clear, though, that this is due to social and historical conditions, neither to religion nor to what somebody calls race, which does not exist.

I am well aware of the conditions of my grandmother in Sicily. Nobody threatened her in those terms, but the life of a Sicilian woman a century ago was very difficult. When I said years ago that there was a tradition, both Sicilian and Pakistani, then the reactions both from Sicily and from Pakistan were harsh against me. I simply wanted to say that there is a historical evolution that changes these habits. Therefore, now, I defend the principle inflexibly, but I have the reasonable hope that tomorrow it will not be denied anywhere in the world.

Where, precisely, do adaptation to social standards and evolution in relation to principles intervene? You may have global governance, continent-to-continent agreements, bilateral agreements, but people live somewhere. It is in that somewhere that they meet each other. They must understand each other, or they will dislike each other. This is absolutely clear. Only upper classes seems to



understand each other immediately wherever they come from. Engineers from whatever country meeting for a project, all of them speak English, all of them have the same culture in their minds, therefore mutual understanding is easy for them. People with lower levels of education from different countries may find it much more difficult. There has to be a proactive role of local communities. Don't tell me that these people are against my people if you don't do anything to allow them to understand each other, if you don't spend one single euro to create the conditions in local communities for mutual understanding. Years ago the European Commission delivered a booklet, also explaining how to organise Sunday picnics with people from different countries. Minor tasks – you might think – but nonetheless essential.

If people understand each other, and this is my final point, people are richer. This is not rhetoric. We Italians are so proud of our creativity. What is the quality of the Italians? They are creative. We invent new styles in architecture, in painting, in industrial design, in fashion. But if you study where this creativity comes from, you will find out that it comes from mixing diversities together. It comes from our history due to which people from different areas of the worlds with different cultures came down to our peninsula and settled there. It is the mixing up of these cultural diversities that is the reason of our creativity and the reason of the European creativity itself.

As some historian has rightly written, the day that Europe will not be able anymore to mix diversities with each other, Europe will decline. Furthermore the others are needed more than anywhere else in a continent where I, with my aging years, risk being a representative of the young generation if we continue like this. With an increasing number of older people and, with fewer children, we are doomed to declining, unless others arrive and reinvigorate our continent with their needed diversities.

These are basically the keywords of our document. You will read it but please, if you are convinced, you should try to convince others and start from the assumption that the brain is still useful, and people should reserve the belly for other functions. I thank you.