

SUMMARY OF FIRST EUROPEAN MIGRATION FORUM HELD IN BRUSSELS FROM 26 TO 27 JANUARY 2015

Topic : « *SAFE ROUTES, SAFE FUTURES. HOW TO MANAGE THE MIXED FLOWS OF MIGRANTS ACROSS THE MEDITERRANEAN?* »

- *by Julien Kalimira Mzee Murhula, vice chairman of GtU, Danish Emmaus member association.*

Background

Back in 2009, the European, the European Commission with the European Economic and Social Committee launched and established the European Integration Forum. The latter is a platform where civil society organizations and the European institutions meet to discuss immigration, asylum and migrant integration of third-country nationals.

The EMF¹ has developed from the European Integration Forum (EIF), of which eleven fruitful editions took place since 2009. Like the EIF, the EMF constitutes a platform for dialogue for the EU institutions with civil society organizations (CSOs), local and regional authorities, and representatives of the Member States (MSs).

Objectives

The objective of the Forum is to provide representatives of civil society a voice on issues related to migration, asylum and migrant integration, in particular relating to the EU agenda thereon, and for the Commission to take a pro-active role in such discussions. This will allow the European institutions to promote a comprehensive approach to migration, involving stakeholders at all levels. Furthermore, the forum will serve as a platform for civil society to engage at the EU level and exchange experiences in order to enhance coordination and cooperation amongst key actors. Bringing together civil society organizations from EU Member States working at European, national and local levels, the Forum aims also to facilitate the creation of partnerships and synergies in the field. The forum will finally inform the implementation of the EU decision-making in the areas of migration, asylum and integration.

Programme

Monday 26 January 2015

- Registration of participants
- Welcome and introduction to the new European Migration Forum by □ Luis Miguel Pariza Castaños, Member of the Permanent Study Group on Immigration and Integration in the EESC and Matthias Ruete, Director-General, DG Home Affairs, European Commission
- Introductory session, chaired by Luis Miguel Pariza Castaños, EESC
- Intervention of Vincent Cochetel, Director of the UNHCR Bureau for Europe
- Intervention of Stefano Sannino, Italy's Permanent Representative to the EU.

¹ The European Migration Forum

- Testimony by Majid Hussain who lives now in Italy as refugee.
- Testimony by Milen Eyob: an unaccompanied minor from Eritrea arrived in Sweden in 2009
- Christian Remøy, Norwegian Seafarer and Haakon Svane, Norwegian Ship owner's Association
- Reactions and questions from plenary
- Lunch and informal exchange of experiences (marketplace of ideas)
- Workshops: discussion
- Presentation of upcoming election of the Bureau and presentation of candidates

After the interventions mentioned above, the EMF² broke into four thematic workshops aimed at producing short reports to be presented in the final plenary session as well as delivered to the participants of the High-level session. These four main themes are:

- Access to the asylum procedure at the borders
- Integration of beneficiaries of international protection
- A comprehensive approach to counter migrant smuggling
- Providing adequate information in countries of origin and transit

Workshop A: Access to the asylum procedure at the borders.

The workshop was characterized by many speakers with rich participation, at the expenses of discussion with and from the floor. The speakers agreed that the EU legal framework, including the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights and the case-law of the ECtHR³ on Migration, has been enhanced with additional safeguards to protect persons arriving at the border against refoulement. The following issues were discussed under the Workshop A:

- The gap between theory and practice with regard to access to the procedure
- The specific challenges related to arrivals at sea
- The gaps in the functioning of the CEAS⁴
- The legal channels to reach protection in the EU
- The role of the civil society organizations and local authorities

Workshop B: Integration of Beneficiaries of International Protection.

The workshop approached the topic by putting the human dimension at the centre of the discussion. The participants agreed that integration efforts should start already upon arrival, not only after the status of a beneficiary of international protection is recognized. The following issues were discussed under this workshop:

- All BIPs (beneficiaries of the international protection) have the right to long-term social inclusion in their country of asylum and the European Union.
- The reception conditions for asylum-seekers set the starting point for the integration of BIPs.
- Equal rights and secure legal status for BIPs and their families should be seen as preconditions for their integration.

² EMF: European Migration Forum

³ ECtHR : European Court of Human Rights

⁴ CEAS: Common European Asylum System

- Targeted policies for BIPs must actively partner with BIPs and their organizations in order to address their most urgent and specific needs.
- Overall, a welcoming society must build and show solidarity with beneficiaries of international protection.
- At European level, the European institutions should provide greater support for more equitable integration policies across the EU Member States.

Workshop C: A comprehensive Approach to Counter Migrant Smuggling

The participants of the workshop considered how to reduce the risks and harm that migrants are exposed to in a situation of irregular migration, and how to counter smuggling activities. The starting point was earmarked in respecting the human rights obligations when apprehending migrants in an irregular situation. The following issues were discussed under this workshop:

- Respect the rights of migrants in an irregular situation, in the drafting and implementation of an EU plan against smuggling.
- Develop and implement regular migration channels to the EU for protection, employment and family reunification.
- Create a firewall between immigration control and access to justice and services for migrants.
- Revise the Facilitation Directive to exempt humanitarian assistance from criminalization.
- Consider circumstances of aggravation and mitigation when prosecuting smugglers
- Put in place an Implementation Plan for the EU and Member States comprising all European regulation protecting migrants, irrespective of status.
- Debunk myths and misinformation about migration.

Workshop D: Providing Adequate Information in Countries of Origin and Transit.

The discussion in the workshop started from the premise that instability in Africa and Middle East would persist in the coming years, generating larger displacement of people toward the EU, and that the most adequate tangible action would be improvements of living and working conditions, especially as result of more investments in development cooperation programmes, mobility partnerships, provision of services and support of democratization processes. The issues discussed under this workshop were:

- Considering that a communication strategy should be built starting from the origin country where the migration project takes shapes.
- Considering that the most effective message is delivered by tangible improvements of living and working conditions.
- Considering that instability in Africa and Middle East will persist in the coming years and will generate larger displacement of people toward the EU
- Considering that a communication strategy aimed at encouraging legal channels.
- Considering that certain communication instruments have proved to be more effective than others especially among the young generations.

- Considering that the messages should be tailored on the specific context in each origin/transit/destination countries.
- Considering that criminal organizations recruit people also conveying misleading messages.
- Considering that well-managed migration flows implies a communication strategy.
- Considering that states and local authorities shall be encouraged to increase their efforts in providing pre-departure information to their citizens would be migrants.
- Considering that civil society organizations are able to reach a larger number of people with targeted and tailored messages.

Tuesday 27 January 2015

The plenary session of the second forum's day was chaired by Belinda Pyke, the Director for Migration and Mobility, European Commission – DG Migration and Home Affairs. The rapporteurs of different workshops presented the conclusions and recommendations of each workshop. Speakers included Cecile Kashetu Kyenge, Eugenio Ambrosio, Henri Malosse, Michel Lebrun, Dimitris Avramopoulos, Iliana Iotova alternately their opinions and abounded in the same direction.

The programme of the second day was:

- Vote casting (for Bureau elections)
- Workshops: drafting conclusions Participants go back to their workshop the session is aimed at finalizing the discussion of the previous day and drafting final conclusions to be presented in plenary by the rapporteurs
- Coffee break
- Plenary session, chaired by Belinda Pyke, Director for Migration and Mobility, European Commission – DG Home Affairs
- Reporting from workshops discussion by the four rapporteurs
- Intervention of Ms. Cecile Kashetu Kyenge, Member of the European Parliament
- Intervention of Mr. Eugenio Ambrosi, IOM⁵ Regional Director
- Reactions and questions from plenary
- Lunch
- Announcement of the newly elected Bureau members
- Reporting from Forum discussion, by Thomas Huddleston (MPG) and Sergio Carrera (CEPS)
- High-level session followed by Q&A session chaired by Irini Pari, President of the Permanent Study Group on Immigration and Integration in the EESC⁶
 - Intervention of Mr. Dimitris Avramopoulos, European Commission for Migration, Home Affairs and Citizenship
 - Interventions of Ms. Iliana Iotova, Vice-Chair of the LIBE⁷ Committee, European Parliament
 - Representative of the Presidency of the Council of the European Union

⁵ IOM: International Organisation of Migration

⁶ EESC: European Economic and Social Committee

⁷ LIBE: The Committee on Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs

- Intervention of Mr. Henri Malosse, President of the European Economic and Social Committee
- Intervention of Mr. Michel Lebrun, President of the Committee of the Regions.

Final reporting by Thomas Huddleston

The recent political unrest in African and Middle-Eastern countries resulted in growing migratory pressure at the Mediterranean border of the EU. While the scale of the migration flows in the Mediterranean might be among the highest recorded in the last decades, their mixed nature, covering both persons seeking international protection and economic migrants, is hardly a novelty in history. These categories of migrants have traditionally overlapped, at times sharing –sometimes-irregular – routes to reach EU territory and using the asylum procedure as a legal channel to gain regular status. The migration pressure in the Mediterranean emphasizes once more the demand for cooperation and coordination among the MSs⁸. By the same token, the complex management of migration flows demonstrates the need for multiple levels of governance the local, national and EU-wide and combined action between the public and the private sectors. During this forum, workshops were streamlined in four directions in order to ensure that the exchange provided concrete input to feed into the ongoing EU policymaking process. The result of each workshop was a set of policy recommendations.

While the world is experiencing the worst refugee crisis since the Second World War, with most languishing or strand in developing and often war-torn countries, the EU is not experiencing anything like a refugee or migration crisis given its high level of development and low number of new arrivals. The root causes of war and human rights violations are unlikely to change anytime soon. The challenges for EU Member States to respond were not new or unknown. Instead, Europe's real 'crisis' is an internal political crisis for the EU's common policy to show responsibility and solidarity to do its fair share in this world refugee crisis just across its land and sea borders.

He also reiterated the perspective of participants working outside the asylum system, who clearly see a 'demographic crisis' and a need for more labour migration and inclusion to maintain their shrinking labour forces and provide for their growing elderly populations. The importance of consulting and cooperating with civil society was a major cross-cutting message highlighted by the rapporteur. Civil society participants underlined their central role played by civil society in facilitating access to services and justice as well as the provision of information. Notwithstanding these varied roles for practitioners, NGOs and local authorities reiterated that they have neither the mandate nor the means to compensate for structural problems or a lack of investment. NGOs and local authorities can help to make safer routes for mixed migration flows in the Mediterranean so long as EU and national authorities provide more legal immigration channels, more structures and resources for SAR⁹ and a greater commitment to the long-term social inclusion of refugees and migrants.

⁸ MSs: EU-member-States.

⁹ Search Area Rescue of survivors for water landing.

In this light, the EMF was seen as a major opportunity to create a new consultative forum of and led by civil society. Participants wanted to inform EU policy developments and give feedback on concrete proposals and legislative initiatives from relevant EU institutions. For the next EMF, further reflection would be required to design the structure and preparation of a civil society-led forum as well as on the appropriate follow-up to the EMF recommendations by the EU institutions.

The EMF therefore arrived at a timely moment when the Commission is exploring the priorities for its future EU immigration policy agenda.