

**WORKSHOP ON COMMON EUROPEAN MIGRATION POLICY,
KATHOLIEKE UNIVERSITEIT LEUVEN,
20–21 NOVEMBER 2003**

Rana Cakirerk

On the 20th and 21st of November 2003, HIVA (Higher Institute of Labour Studies) of the Katholieke Universiteit Leuven, Belgium organised a two day workshop, financially funded by EZA, which turned out to be a very productive event from which a book will be published in the very near future. The aim of the workshop titled "A Common European Migration Policy: A common policy for different problems?" was to create a platform where practitioners and researchers would be able to discuss withstanding and future problems Europe is facing due to the increase in unresolved immigration and asylum issues and the lack of a coherent policy. Topics of discussion covered areas primarily related to the European migration policy, the necessity for a new European migration policy, the implications of diverse policies in the area of migration and asylum on the EU level, the validity of existing structures, the regional dimension, migration in new member states (Poland, Slovenia, Hungary, Malta), migration in Southern Europe (Italy, Spain, Greece, France) and the possibility of a common European Migration Policy. Many diverse views came to light and all were equally significant. Representatives from the EU Commission, IOM, UNHCR, CEPS, major NGO's from the 'to be' member countries and eminent academics from the field¹ were present in a very interactive environment and the following conclusions were drawn from the productive two day workshop.

The issue of immigration and asylum has gained considerable prominence in European Union member states as a security issue since the mid 1980's. The combination of increased migration pressure and reduced willingness to accept migration has pushed the issue towards the top of the political agenda. The declining enthusiasm of member states to accept migration, from the mid 70's onwards, forced many economic migrants to consider alternative routes of migration. Among these routes *asylum* gained significant prominence as it seemed to be one of the remaining routes to settle legally in Europe. For this reason, policy makers' eyes turned from immigration to the growing number of asylum applications.

The main concern however at present for the European Union, besides the number of asylum seekers, is the inequality of their distribution among member states. Those

¹ See attached full list of participants.

member states with a higher rate of applications naturally wish to push through common policies on an EU level to alleviate the burden, as these common policies will enforce burden sharing. In addition to burden sharing it is a way for member states to keep hold of the declining power they are facing in this field. The inability to face the consequences individually is a driving force for member states to allocate powers to the Union level for a common coherent solution. But the enduring reluctance so far also proves the existence of continuing conflict of interests in this area. Each member state experiences migration and all have varied experiences in accordance to their historical, cultural, economic and political backgrounds and of course their geographic positions. Therefore applying a common solution to an array of problems is a complicated task.

Coming back to the core question of the workshop, is a common immigration and asylum policy possible for different problems? No one answer prevailed. During the workshop diverse views came to light, all supported with logical reasoning. The dominating view was however that it is most likely to be inevitable as interdependence increases in the area – but how it is to be formulated carries great significance and there may be many obstacles and drawbacks during formation.

The ‘zero migration’ approach has proved its failure over many years and has probably created the current bottleneck situation. Antonio Vitorino has stated “that it is time to face the fact that the zero immigration policies of the past 25 years are not working, but in addition they are no longer relevant to the economic and demographic situation in which the Union now finds itself.” Consequently, a restrictive approach should not – and in the long term cannot – be the basis of the solution. For an increased restrictive approach in one state inevitably undermines the position of another, causing neighbouring states to adopt even further restrictive policies in turn. As a consequence of this ‘race-to-the-bottom’ an eventual acceptance of minimal standards of protection, for asylum seekers and migrants may apply, which can derange the system all together. We should also keep in mind that attempts to harmonise these restrictive policies would increase rather than effectively address existing disparities in the distribution of immigrant and asylum seekers across the European Union.

In an increasingly interdependent world with increased geographic mobility, through access to affordable transportation, an increased network of communication and increasing inequality of income and natural resource distribution – restricting entrance would be unfeasible. The attempts to restrict entrance through legal channels have only led to an increase of entries through other channels. Restricting entrance, besides being unfeasible, would be impossible because Europe is in need of skilled and unskilled migrants for a number of reasons. The Commission has officially accepted that migration may “to a certain extent” minimise labour shortages and may be a partial solution to the demographic problems the European Union as a whole is facing.

During the workshop another important question arose which was “is a common migration policy possible without a coherent integration policy?” (Janja Žitnik). The Commission strongly upholds the fact that the two concepts should be in conjunction.

For immigration to bring with it the social benefits of diversity and the economic benefits of productivity, incoming citizens must be successfully integrated into society. The failure to do so has proven to increase restrictive measures, which in turn limits the benefits of migration and threatens flexible immigration policies. These integration policies however should be compulsory to have any effect.

Another subject brought up by Joanna Apap of CEPS at the workshop was the various green card policies the member states were individually adopting. Member states should be very cautious about the legal migration channels that are to be opened. Programs such as the highly skilled migrant category or other green card programs etc. are somewhat insecure because of the brain drain effects they could produce – which would amplify the push factors in sending countries. But it is important to keep in mind that these programs have a very narrow scope and they are targeted at a minuscule fraction of migrants who want or have to leave their home countries.

So to sum up, a Common European Migration and asylum policy should formulate in the long run because:

1. Migration flows will not stop.
2. There is an increased inability of member states to handle the issue alone.
3. There is a necessity to prevent the exploitation of asylum procedures.
4. The unequal distribution of immigrants and asylum seekers over member states requires balanced burden sharing.
5. The interdependence of the member states of the EU in social economic and political fields necessitates a common approach.
6. Europe needs and will need new people in the future – especially to revive the economy; in addition to satisfying demands of skilled/unskilled labour, immigrants are enthusiastic consumers. Besides economic contributions immigrants provide cultural and social enrichment, they contribute to diversity and innovation. And as Johan Wets stressed during the workshop, help reduce the stress of push factors through remittances.
7. As Jan Niessen has put it, “as much as the free movement of the EC citizens was important for the development of the European Community, are the common policies on immigration and asylum indispensable for the deepening of the European Union.”

Finally instead of utilising methods of reducing, deterring and excluding migrants from entering Europe – more emphasis needs to be placed on the problems of how to tackle the root causes – which necessitates addressing problems that force or push people to leave their home country. Maximising deterrence policies without addressing these factors would invalidate all steps taken to control migration flows efficiently. As the Commission has declared, more sustained immigration flows will be increasingly likely and necessary and it is important to anticipate these changes.

The contents of the second day of the workshop were narrowed to the regional

dimension of problems related to the common European migration policy and how regions would be affected, taking their current situation, concerning migration and asylum, into consideration.

Europe's migration frontiers have moved south and east since the 1980's. In the same period Southern Europe experienced a major turnaround from net emigration to net immigration. The attractiveness of these countries as a destination of migration, increased as a consequence of their inclusion into the European Union. The membership of Spain, Portugal and Greece increased the perception that these countries were now economically equivalent to the other members of the union. As a consequence, their responsibilities multiplied. Even though immigration policies are left to national jurisdiction and are internal affair matters, policies that border countries execute have major implications on all member states. With the inclusion of Spain, Greece, Italy and Portugal into Schengen their borders transformed into EU borders, which caused the shift of border control to these countries. The policies adopted by new members were influenced by concepts used in the EU, which placed emphasis on security and control issues and were therefore in nature restrictive policies.

Another point of focus at the workshop was the pressure on borders and how Southern Europe was under additional pressure by being close to regions where the push to emigrate is strong. These regions have a high level of unemployment and fairly young dynamic populations. They are dynamic entities that hold high incentives and motivations to move. In addition to accommodating strong push factors they are extremely close to regions that have attractive pull factors. The southern borders of course make it an easy target for undocumented immigrants because the geographical features of these countries increase access opportunities for immigrants.

Immigration issues have climbed the agenda in these countries due to the increase in numbers and the difficulties they are facing in managing the flow. For example, Italy has 2.4 million foreign residents, which is 4.2 percent of the population in addition to a high number of irregular immigrants – as do Greece and Spain. Even though it is a fairly new concept in comparison to other member states, they have from the start taken on board a restricted approach.

Migration from new member states after enlargement is an important topic that was also discussed at the workshop. We see that there are diverse migration issues in these countries that they are tackling before enlargement.

Member states, though being very enthusiastic about the close at hand enlargement, are quite anxious about the number of people who will cross the borders once the doors have opened. Some time ago during the early talks of enlargement the fear of mass migration flows from Central and Eastern Europe countries was a common phenomenon among the already members. There were many guesses on the number of people who would leave once the doors were to be opened, some of which were extremely exaggerated. According to some guesstimates the migration flows from Central and Eastern to Western Europe would be up to 10 million people. Other assessments indicated more modest figures in the magnitude of about 4 million, predicting

that most of them would go to Germany. In spite of these random figures, as the date arrives member states seem to have dismissed these vacuous fears.

This kind of anxiety also surfaced on the verge of acceptance of previous members in the past. When in 1981 Greece and in 1986 Portugal and Spain became members of the European Community, Northern European member countries again worried about the South-North migration potential. But, Portuguese, Spaniards and Greeks did not follow the predicted paths and now with their increased standard of living, the traditional EU emigration countries have become immigration countries.

What we could learn from the southward enlargement of the EU (claims Straubhaar) is that rapid economic integration into a single market area was, and is, a most effective transformation strategy and therefore it turns out to be a most efficient anti-immigration strategy. The inclusion of Eastern Europe into an enlarged single market with no barriers to trade, free capital flows and unrestricted labour mobility can therefore be expected to diminish substantially, rapidly and sustainably the East-West migration potential.

Once the Eastern European countries become EU members, access to the internal market will stimulate economic growth and this will have a strong inhibitive effect on migration, as can again be demonstrated by the example of Southern Europe. But meanwhile, during the transformation period, there is a delicate balance to be sustained. For open border policies, implemented before full economic integration, could produce adverse effects. For example, the loss of necessary human capital through emigration is likely to have a negative effect (*Brain drain*) on productivity and economic growth.

Julda Kielyte from the WTO therefore claims that it is feasible to postpone the right of free movement of workers within an enlarged EU until the emigration incentives are sufficiently low to avoid negative impacts on their own welfare. But then again it is difficult to foresee how enlargement will affect the flow of migrants from the east borders and what impact this will have on the new member states on a whole. With such indeterminable data it is impossible to provide an accurate prognosis.

The following few months after enlargement may show an increase in movement but the majority of this movement will not be permanent as envisaged. Managing migration is one of the most difficult challenges, but new challenges and new problems requiring individual solutions await the EU. The member states on an EU level should choose to be flexible and should be decisive and quick to follow an effective and persistent approach.

As I stated earlier, the two-day session was found to be most illuminating and informative but as the topics discussed accommodated many aspects, it was of course not possible to cover them all in two days. That is why HIVA hopes that we will have another opportunity in the near future to meet and discuss aspects we had to omit due to time restraint. I thank everybody who attended the workshop for their significant input and I especially thank Dr. Janja Žitnik and editor-in-chief, Dr. Marjan Drnovšek of the international journal *Two Homelands* for publishing the summarised conclusions.

List of participants

Apap, Joana	CEPS: Centre for European Policy Studies
Beghini, Alessandro	MCL: Movimento Cristiano Lavoratori
Cakirerk, Rana	PHD Student – HIVA – Higher Institute of Labour
D'Andrea, Luciano	Gruppo CERFE
De Bruyn, Tom	HIVA – Higher Institute of Labour
De Feyter, Myriam	18-Dec
Dorottya, Beke	MENEDEK
Gottbehüt, Roswitha	EZA
Gsir, Sonia	CEDEM: Centre d'Etudes de l'Ethnicité et des Migrations
Iglicka, Krystyna	Institute of Public Affairs, Migration and Eastern Policy Programme
Kollwelter, Serge	CDAIC: Centre de documentation et d'animation interculturelles
Kovats, Andras	MENEDEK & Centre for Migration and Refugee Studies, office of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences
Kramers, Diederik	UNHCR: United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
Le Voy, Michel	PICUM: Platform for International Cooperation on Undocumented Migrants
Maroukis, Athanasios	ELIAMEP: Hellenic Foundation for European & Foreign Policy
Martiniello, Marco	CEDEM: Centre d'Etudes de l'Ethnicité et des Migrations
Morén-Alegret, Ricard	GRM: Migration Research Group – Spain
Münz, Rainer	
Muus, Philip	IMER: International Migration and Ethnic Relations
Paliokiene, Grazina	LCWU: Lithuanian Catholic Women's Union
Pisanello, Claudia	ULG – CEDEM: Centre d'Etudes de l'Ethnicité et des Migrations
Reyntjens, Pascal	IOM: International Organisation for Migration
Rocco, Gianluca	IOM: International Organisation for Migration
Salmenhaara, Perttu	CEREN: Centre for Research on Ethnic Relations and Nationalism & University of Helsinki
Sandell, Rickard	The Elcano Royal Institute
Scagliotti, Luciano	CIE: Centro d'Iniziativa per l'Europa
Schibel, Yongmi	MPG: Migration Policy Group
Singleton, Ann	Commission of the European Union
Talhaoui, Fauzaya	No organisation
Van Beurden, Jos	Africa Asia desk
Verbruggen, Nele	PICUM: Platform for International Cooperation on Undocumented Migrants
Vidal, Koen	<i>De Morgen</i>
Wets, Johan	HIVA – Higher Institute of Labour
Yeo, Colin	Immigration Advisory Service
Žitnik, Janja	Scientific Research Centre of the Slovenian Academy of Sciences and Arts: Institute for Slovenian Emigration Studies