



EUROPEAN ASSOCIATION OF FORMER MEMBERS OF PARLIAMENT OF THE MEMBER STATES OF THE COUNCIL OF EUROPE

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CHALLENGES OF IMMIGRATION.

LYON DECLARATION

Adopted by the delegates() representing the members of the
European Association of Former Members of Parliament of the
Member States of the Council of Europe*

* abstention by the delegates of Belgium, The Netherlands, Switzerland and Turkey. Being an observer, Norway could not vote.

Background

- 1) The history of humankind has always also been a story of migration and settlement. It does therefore not make sense to regard the recent flow of immigrants as an unique event, as history shows migration as a structural phenomenon inherent in our human nature. Such a comprehensive understanding would enable us to look at the actual situation in a different way. In our time, almost all parts of the world are affected by migration in the form of voluntary and non-voluntary immigration, emigration or transit movements, which could be defined as a catch-up globalisation. Forced Migration is the result of persecution, wars and armed conflicts, Climate Change and natural disasters, miserable and insecure living conditions.
- 2) According to UNHCR there were 65 million forcibly displaced persons in 2015; most of them in Africa and Asia. Usually they stay in the neighbourhood (within their country or a nearby country) to be able to return, when the situation ameliorates. Many often, neighbouring countries take on great burdens to accommodate refugees.
- 3) In the event that the situation gets worse and there seems to be no way to return or the situation in refugee camps or temporary protection centres become dangerous or unbearable, displaced persons will flee again to other parts of the world, where they expect to be safe. Camps in affected areas often suffer from lack of resources, when the international community fails in its commitment to provide financial and humanitarian support.
- 4) Reaching safer regions is attempted by migrating in large numbers or by using the “services” of traffickers of persons. Acts, which are often driven by fear of death, where they are and hope to survive elsewhere. Routes to countries of destination can often not be predicted and may change when policies changes, but refugees, who are afraid of dying if they stay in their country or at the camps, would not be afraid of dying during their travelling.
- 5) The recent movements of asylum-seekers, refugees, and migrants represent major challenges for Europe. Globally, millions of people are seeking a better, free and healthy life in a safe, nonviolent environment for themselves and often their families. These aspirations are understandable, but it is not possible within the foreseeable future for European countries to satisfy even a part of the aspirations of all the millions of people wanting to come to us with very high, often unattainable expectations.
- 6) The Immigration Europe has been experiencing since the summer of 2015 is different from previous ones (e.g. 1945) as immigrants mostly come from countries with different cultural and religious backgrounds and not all of them are prepared to accept “our common values” and legal and socio-political norms. Some may even seek to actively undermine the host’s countries’ legal and political norms.
- 7) Even though the root causes such as civil wars and natural disasters have been known for many years the recent flow of refugees and migrants found Europe unprepared and nothing had been done to elaborate and implement a comprehensive and coordinated plan for confronting the compound immigration problem. The Mediterranean countries have been hit hard and too often left to face the consequences by themselves.

We, former parliamentarians of the “European Association of former members of parliament of the member states of the Council of Europe” (FP-AP), emphasize the following principles and propose guidelines for tackling the challenges.

- 8) The Geneva Refugee Convention, the UN Declaration on Universal Human Rights and the European Convention on Human Rights of the Council of Europe set the policy framework of most aspects of immigration policies – supplemented by national and EU regulations.
- 9) There must be a worldwide and European responsibility sharing in terms of fighting against forced migration, integrating immigrants and boosting the number of refugee resettlement places – all this requires a common political will in our countries and adequate financial means. The root causes of growing forced migration must be addressed in the countries of origin or by mitigating the consequences of Global Climate Change. It is the duty of the international community to join in the efforts to eradicate the root causes, considering that past (colonial) wars and creation of countries could have contributed.
Mass exploitation of land and raw materials, neo-liberal and open-market policies imposed on developing countries, and trade and fishing policies have contributed.
The effects of Climate Change contribute to the already precarious situation in many countries and world-wide action has to be envisaged.
- 10) We need to be humane and rational in our attitude towards the immigration question.
In addition to the legal instruments, in particular the Geneva Refugee Convention and the special rules for war refugees, we have to devise a further system of controlled and lawful immigration in order to avoid the danger of overstressing state and society systems and their capacity for absorption.
- 11) All efforts, from asylum policies to robust search-and-rescue mechanisms must be guided by the humanitarian principle: rescue the lives of persons and safeguard the dignity of all human beings.
- 12) Asylum-seekers, the “climate change refugees” and other refugees and (economic) migrants have to be treated differently. Migrants don’t have inherent rights to migrate to another country of which they are not nationals – with the exception of the EU where the right of free movement of persons exist. Economic migrants must be treated by the host countries according to their specific legislation. Migrants who are not granted the right to stay (e.g. coming from safe third countries) could be made to return to their home countries as soon as possible.
- 13) What is called the flight and migratory crisis is particularly a crisis for Europe and has to be solved by all European countries. Better cooperation between countries of origin, transit and destination is needed.
- 14) Managed migration helps ensure safe and legal channels for refugees and migrants, *including* specific measures for those suffering from humanitarian catastrophes. Anticipating future challenges includes providing measures for people escaping areas progressively ravaged by Climate Change.
- 15) In view of the reality of the magnitude of immigrants, border controls and registrations must be maintained and even enforced, with particular regard to the problems of terrorism, organised crime and trafficking of persons.
- 16) We need to pursue a European policy on asylum, refugees and migration based on our common values of humanity as well as on the principle of solidarity and enlightened self-interest.

- 17) Integration into our societies requires efforts from our respective countries as well as from migrants. The development of ethnic ghettos and/or parallel societies must be avoided.
- 18) The wish of asylum seekers and refugees to return to their home countries, if the situation there ameliorates, has to be upheld.
- 19) European solidarity is required on three levels:
 - (i) Vis à vis refugees;
 - (ii) Within the whole of Europe, without exception;
 - (iii) To refugees' countries of origin where the causes of emigration and flight are inherent, though those have to show solidarity as well.

Immigration can open opportunities but only if the challenges are successfully addressed and decisions and laws are implemented. We need strong democratic states with efficient institutions and good governance.

Challenges and Threats

- 20) In view of the massive immigration, we perceive great challenges, even danger as well as opportunities stemming from legal, regulated immigration.
- 21) The huge flows of immigration threaten to divide Europe, to endanger EU's accomplishments and visions, to encourage a return to nationalism, to undermine – within our countries – social cohesion and important values such as Human Rights and democracy, and to create a wider breeding ground for chauvinism and nationalism, xenophobia, racism and intolerance. There are limits to what our countries and communities can bear and shoulder.
- 22) The great and unpredictable number of refugees, as well as the changing routes presents unprecedented difficulties for authorities in transit and/or countries of destination regarding registration, organisation of shelter and systemization. As it is often impossible to verify name, origin or age of refugees or migrants, an obligation to honestly reveal their identity.
- 23) A large number of refugees try to reach Europe with the help of traffickers of persons, i.e. organized international crime, resulting in death by drowning, abuse and rape, killing and loss of documents and funds. Women and children are the most vulnerable group and special efforts have to be undertaken to support them.
- 24) Authorities in European Countries need resources to provide humanitarian help and shelter; organize travelling and distribution of migrants; provide language courses and integration measures; make special provisions for unaccompanied minors.
- 25) People are sometimes afraid of foreigners, in particular if there is no common language and they can only communicate with difficulty. Some also fear that many people with different background concerning religion and traditions could bring too much change to the European societies. Such fears could lead to developments endangering the process of European cooperation.

Opportunities

- 26) Experience proves that a legal, controlled and reasonable immigration can open opportunities for the European host countries.
- 27) Demographic change, an ageing population as well as the lack of labour force and developmental dynamism in many European countries demand comprehensive and attractive immigration and integration policies that could create triple-win situations – for the host country, the country of origin, and the migrant.
- 28) New positive economic and cultural activities could be triggered off by the increase in numbers of inhabitants.
- 29) Chances for development for European societies with integrated refugees can only be realised if measures and conditions are transparent, comprehensive and fair, worked out, monitored and evaluated with the participation of all stake holders.

Possible Actions and Answers

We, Former Parliamentarians declare and strongly suggest from

A) The International Community and the United Nations

- 30) At UN level, as well as by national engagement, every possible effort should be made to end armed conflict and to prevent escalation of conflicts and fight against any form of forced migration.
We welcome the adoption of the UN Declaration for Refugees and Migrants on 19 September 2016 which expresses the political will of world leaders to protect the rights of refugees and migrants and share responsibility for large movements on a global scale.
- 31) International diplomacy should work to find balanced solutions, as developing as well as developed countries are struggling with economic, environmental, humanitarian and political challenges, that require coordinated international responses.
- 32) UNHCR (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees) should be provided with sufficient funds to run the refugee camps.
- 33) UNODC (the UN office on Drugs and Crime) should be supported to fight international organized crime, in particular trafficking of persons.
- 34) At EU level the engagement of a functioning external border control by a common agency is indispensable.
- 35) International coordinated actions to combat terrorism and organized crime must be prioritized.

- 36) Based on the conclusions of COP 21 (Conference of the Parties to the UN Convention on Climate Change) and the 5th report of IPCC (International Panel on Climate Change) the UN should examine if migrants affected by the effects of Climate Change can be granted refugee status under the Geneva Convention.

B) The Member States of the Council of Europe

- 37) Authorities have to work together in a better way to manage the flow of refugees.
- 38) Countries should install efficient and fast procedures for registration and recognition of refugees.
- 39) Measures to integrate refugees into European societies, where gender equality and equal rights for women are constitutional rights, have to be comprehensive and compulsory. Knowledge of the language of the host country and children's attendance of school are important features to facilitate integration.
- 40) States, as well as political parties, teaching and economic institutions should inform citizens, in particular their stake-holders about the impact of the arrival of refugees and migrants on European societies. The World Refugee Day on June 20 and the International Migrants Day on December 18th could be appropriate opportunities.

C) Civil Society

- 41) The role of NGOs in dealing with the influx of refugees is important, as many NGOs are involved in helping authorities to welcome, house, clothe, provide medical health care, and teach the national language to refugees. The organisations have to get more support and credit for that from national authorities as well as from the international community. The task to point out that Europe is going through a period of change and how to best cope with this, cannot be achieved by state authorities and/or politicians alone.
- 42) Integration is an important challenge for civil society as well. It must be made part of the social and intercultural dialogue. The task of supporting official bodies in examining school textbooks and history books with a view to discriminatory, racist and xenophobic content, and removing them, also falls within this context.

D) FP/AP

- 43) We support all efforts of a humane, rational, immigration and integration policy in Europe characterized by a comprehensive approach lowering the risks and threats related to an illegal influx of people; and enhancing possible opportunities as well. We support integration and condemn discrimination, racism and xenophobia.
- 44) European values: gender equality, respect for the Human Rights including the four freedoms (conscience, religion, opinion, organisation), the rule of law, a pluralistic, liberal and secular

society, as well as the legal and socio-political systems and institutions are to be respected by everyone. We expect immigrants to be ready to integrate (language learning, attendance at civic integration courses, making use of the educational and vocational training facilities and job offers).

- 45) Integration should not be understood as assimilation. Those who refuse integration into our societies should not have a future in our countries, as they exclude themselves from our solidarity.
- 46) European solidarity is required towards refugees and migrants: within Europe and between the EU Member States; particularly as regards local and regional authorities, where the problems directly emerge and integration is taking place. There is need for a clear regulatory framework and adequate financial resources. And last but not least towards the refugees' countries of origin to fight the root causes of the problems.
- 47) Implementing the 2030 Agenda of the UN with its 17 sustainable development goals (SDGs), the international community, UN Member States and the EU, civil society and the private sector are called upon to contribute to the development towards a better world. The agenda 2030 constitutes a promising programme for the people seeking better living conditions at home, also by creating more fairness in international trade, implementing coordinated development cooperation and fostering internal and external peace endeavours.
- 48) We demand that UN Member States, in particular the EU, to further implement and strengthen a forward-looking, sustainable, humane, efficient and comprehensive development policy in partnership with the developing countries especially in Africa and the Middle East. To facilitate the return of refugees, an action plan must be created to provide better standards of living, job opportunities, and rebuild social, economic and democratic structures. Circular migration and reintegration programmes, as well as migrant remittances may soften the problems of the brain drain.
- 49) Governments and parliaments must strengthen social cohesion and work on eliminating stereotypes and prejudices towards foreigners. Policies in order to strengthen citizens' faith in democracy have to be implemented, so that further disenchantment with democracy and politics in Europe and particularly in the EU can be avoided.
- 50) The Committee on Migration, Refugees and Displaced Persons, and its Sub-committee on Integration of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe should play a more important role to monitor and evaluate the development in Europe.
- 51) The European Parliament and National Parliaments should create (following the example of the *Inter-parliamentary Conference on Stability, Economic Coordination and Governance in the European Union* and the *Inter-parliamentary Conference on Common Foreign and on Common Security and Defence Policy (CFSP/CSDP)*) a new ***Inter-parliamentary Conference for Migration and Integration***.
- 52) Integration can only be successful as a process of mutual efforts of the majority and minority, involving newcomers from the start into content and method of civic, cultural, social and political participation. After refugees receive recognition and status the citizens of the respective country should understand that acceptance and support is needed for their integration.

53) We propose that the Member States of the Council of Europe together with local authorities, civil society and immigrants create a

“Charter of Equal Participation in Political and Public Life”

and would appreciate if the Parliamentary Assembly could support this proposal by submitting an appropriate recommendation to the Committee of Ministers.