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LUIGI MOCCIA, LIA POP EDS.

MIGRANTS AND REFUGEES ACROSS EUROPE

HOW TO SHARE THE CHALLENGE FOR A SHARED WORLD OF PEACE

PAPERS OF THE INTERNATIONAL SEMINAR
APRIL 27-29, 2016 AT UNIVERSITA ROMA TRE

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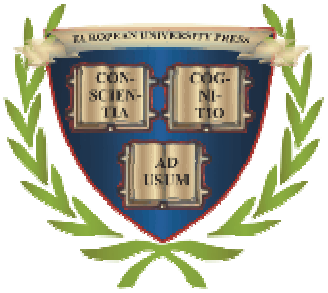

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The 'common' European border and the migration crisis as a 'borderline' issue in the future of Europe: an introductory viewpoint

The papers here collected are (some of) the contributions delivered at the occasion of the International Seminar held in Rome (Italy), the 27-29 of April 2016, on "*Migrants and Refugees across Europe: How to share the challenge for a shared world of peace.*"[1]

This brief presentation does not pretend to be an introduction on the complex and multifarious issues and experiences that affect migration, as regards especially the European Union (EU) and its member states, and even less on the variety of contributions delivered during the Seminar convened precisely to discuss such issues and experiences. This is rather an attempt to call attention to the need for a distinctive viewpoint that can serve as a reference point from which to observe the migratory phenomenon as a whole and to evaluate its implications on a European scale. In other words, it is an attempt through which we try to develop a greater awareness of what is at stake in the so-called crisis of refugees and migrants: not only the security of our external borders, but, even more, the identity of the Union itself, based on the credibility of its institutions and policies, and on the accomplishment of its foundational principles, values and objectives.

Because of this, and along such guide-lines, the papers, although dealing with a wide range of topics, have been assembled in two sections

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[1] The Seminar was organized jointly by the "Centro Altiero Spinelli" - Jean Monnet Centre of excellence (CeAS), University Roma Tre (Italy), and the Research Centre on Identity and Migration Issues (RCIMI), University of Oradea (Romania). I wish here to thank Prof. Lia Pop, Director of the Romanian Centre, for her helpful and fruitful collaboration in the preparatory work of the Seminar.

around two complementary focuses. One concerns general issues and policies at the European level and the other one is related to individual or group rights and to national experiences in present and past times. Both sections, however, are linked together by the same concern underlying any discourse on migration, with regard to all its aspects whether directly or indirectly implied (from security to humanitarian matters, from asylum to social inclusion and cohesion policies and measures): namely, the decisive importance of such phenomenon – especially due to its massive proportions – as a real test of the stability, integrity and solidarity of, and within, the Union.

Having in mind this approach, these introductory pages (which partially reproduce my opening speech at the inaugural session of the Seminar), will focus on the meaning and the scope of such a common concern for the future of a united Europe.

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It is difficult to know what exactly is going to happen in months and years to come, as regards to migration flows and related humanitarian emergencies. One can, however, easily foresee that, depending on European attitudes, capacities and policies to tackle such phenomenon, something will happen which will affect, one way or another, the future of the European polity, and the socio-economic environ for future generations here in Europe, and elsewhere in the nearby Euro-Mediterranean area (an area generally defined as ranging from the Middle East to North Africa, including the sub-Saharan countries down to the Horn of Africa). This is one of the most strategic areas in the worldwide balance of international relations.

Having in mind this scenario, it is just to acknowledge from the outset the *global* dimension of a phenomenon which can no longer be looked at as a purely national responsibility, but must be considered in a much more comprehensive way. It is based on the assumption that migration flows will need to be tackled as the 'new normal' in this area: possibly for a long time to come.

What we experience, when talking about migrants and refugees across Europe, is a phenomenon with multiple actors involved. On the one side

are the national governments and European institutions together with international organizations and humanitarian agencies, NGOs, voluntary associations, and religious authorities. On the other side, are people seeking acceptance and assistance: the victims (especially women and children) and their exploiters, the smugglers and, possibly, terrorists hidden in the masses of people arriving – in addition to the official, or de facto, authorities from the sending, transiting and receiving countries along the way.

In this context, migration – including both the so-called 'economic' migration, of those fleeing from hunger, poverty and social deprivation, and the 'humanitarian' migration, of those fleeing war, violence and persecution – stands as a central issue, irrespective of the peripheries where it arises. This is so because of its root-causes and its large-scale implications and effects on either bank of the Mediterranean and over the entire Euro-Mediterranean area – an area destined to become (in the medium to long term) one of the hottest areas of the planet. This is true not only from a climatic point of view, but also from the human and social side. It concerns, on the South bank, issues such as water and energy supplies, conflicts and political unrest, instability and economic underdevelopment, demographic growth, and, on the European side, integration and security problems.

This then is the question: how to share the challenges posed by the migration crisis for a shared world of peace?

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Without any pretension and without even any intention to address this question, I will simply try to point out one point which seems to best synthetize a core argument and, possibly, a vision about the choices and responsibilities involved in the challenges before us. It is precisely because of its far-reaching implications and due to its long-term effects that migration is a true 'borderline' issue.

To explain this apparent calembour, it is necessary to consider both the evolving concept of citizenship, and the issue of borders. When Union citizenship was introduced, a new paradigm of socio-political membership was established, whereby, as it is stated in the EU Treaty every

citizen of a Member State became, simultaneously, a citizen of the Union. In the same way, we often speak of the so-called Schengen area as an area of free movement without internal frontiers. But, in addition to this, the EU Treaty states that: "The Union shall offer its citizens an area of freedom, security and justice without internal frontiers, in which the free movement of persons is ensured in conjunction with appropriate measures with respect to external border controls, asylum, immigration and the prevention and combating of crime."

What then does it mean to join Union citizenship together with Europe's external borders? Very simply, but, perhaps not quite yet obviously, it means primarily that just as every citizen of a Member State is also a European citizen, every internal (national) border is also an external (European) border. Therefore, when the government of a Member State decides to close its internal border – raising walls or deploying military and police forces there– the true effect of such decisions is to lock 'Europe' outside of the door along with the migrants and refugees from abroad.

We should be fully aware of this effect, if we want to care for ourselves and our future as European citizens, while also fulfilling Europe's role and responsibilities in this area of the world. In other words, because we want to protect the rights of European citizens and, at the same time, ensure control over the common European (external) borders, the management of migration flows and the acceptance of immigrants becomes a problem of solidarity between EU member states.

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Indeed, the extent to which we can speak of a common European citizenship applies also to the idea of a common European border in the only way in which this expression makes sense: that is, as more than just a cartographic element delimiting a territorial line of inclusion/exclusion. It is also a political, institutional, cultural and social attitude to 'think European' in terms of values, principles, interests, regulations, rights and duties. It is this attitude that gives shape to the European space of freedom, security and justice common to all the people living in Europe, including those ones who, as migrants and refugees, arrive here, without even a suitcase in their hands, carrying only hope for a better life.

This common attitude should support the efforts at any level, European, national and local, as regards the ways in which Europe and Member States alike should monitor, control, protect and defend the common border – precisely by thinking European and acting locally.

When the EU Treaty states that the Union shall offer its citizens an area of freedom, security and justice, it speaks words of principle and value. These words are connected, however, with other words, of a more political and technical nature, referring to "appropriate measures" to be taken by or through European institutions, on the mandatory basis of "the principle of sincere cooperation." This means, in turn, mutual trust among Member States, with respect to external border controls, asylum, immigration and the prevention and combating of crime (such as human smuggling and trafficking which accounts for a significant portion of irregular migration).

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The complexity and the size of the phenomenon, however, together with the pressure posed by emergencies and sometimes amplified by sensationalist and emotionally conditioned communication in the media, is a fact that hits the public at large, causing alarmed feelings and concerns, together with contrasting and confusing views. In the face of the large-scale migration flows that have poured over the Union's borders in recent times, Europe has had difficulty, and continues to find it hard, to present a welcoming face – one who offers hospitality and hope – to people who come in need of help. Instead, Europe is giving the impression – dramatically evidenced – of wanting to close itself within internal borders as if within a fortress. The walls are back again, raised to mark various boundaries: mental and emotional, dictated by fears, insecurities, and xenophobic impulses.

It happens then, that anti-Europeanism advances on the grounds of nationalism and, even worst, of a populism with racist and discriminatory tones against minorities. But under attack are fundamental principles and corresponding rights and duties that should be recognized, accepted and shared by everyone – such as the solidarity principle and the legal duty of asylum as the right of everybody who is denied personal freedom and security (at the base of a person's dignity) in their native land. To use

the words of Pope Francis (in his address delivered to the European Parliament in 2014), solutions which do not "take into account the human dignity of immigrants" are doomed to fail.

Instead, what we are witnessing today in Europe seems to be a prevailing trend to close borders to people seeking assistance and to use so-called 'hotspots' as prison-like centers. To counter this trend, Europe is called upon to keep faith and to give realization to its founding ideals. It must make decisions and take actions that prove, primarily to its citizens, that resolving the migration crisis with European solutions is possible.

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It is up to the Union to take action and to apply pressure in order to assign more structured objectives and to empower (with better performing tasks and greater resources) its agencies and offices in charge of external border management (Frontex) and asylum matters (Easo). In this regard the need to adopt the legislative package for a permanent Border and Coast Guard, such as proposed by the European Commission, should be also mentioned.

Moreover, it is up to the Union to put in motion a revision of the Dublin Regulation to ensure a fair distribution of refugees and migrants among all EU Member States in the spirit of true European solidarity. In this way the Union will show to the world that, in the name of humanitarian values and respect for human rights, it can fulfil its duty. It can accept and integrate the number of people currently seeking protection in Europe, instead of abandoning them to their fate of poverty and despair.

However, apart from humanitarian emergencies and urgent measures needing to be taken, everybody knows that the real problem with migration, of any kind, lies in the countries of origin of the migrants. To this regard Europe is called, and should be committed, to take "fair, courageous and realistic policies which can assist the countries of origin in their own social and political development and in their efforts to resolve internal conflicts" (again in the words of Pope Francis).

At the same time, it is in the countries where the people who arrive want to live (for family or other valid reasons), that European policies, resources and means should be made available in a spirit of mutual sup

port and true cooperation with national authorities as well as between the Member States involved.

Many other tasks remain therefore to be fulfilled on the part of Europe.

It is up to the European Union to act as the main player in the Euro-Mediterranean area in order to contribute to the creation of viable external conditions (including 'humanitarian channels' and other solutions in the sending/transit countries) respectful of its obligations under international law, together, of course, with a clear commitment to peace initiatives in all this world region. And it is also up to the Union to engage with problems of socio-economic and territorial cohesion – and of cultural integration. These problems must be resolved on the basis of a far-sighted strategy, in terms of programs, projects and actions – especially at the local level – in the territories where the social and economic impact of migration is greatest, and where people's fears and resistance are strongest and widespread.

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For all of this, the present crisis of migrants and refugees calls into question the issue of the common European border, thus becoming a true borderline issue between two basic alternatives. To defend, on the part of each Member State, its borders as internal borders according to a securitarian political agenda of nationalistic closure affecting the very concept of European citizenship – in other words, to stay divided under the umbrella of a pretended union. Or, instead, to accept the idea of national boundaries as the internal side of a common European border, along which appropriate measures are taken in matters such as: the common asylum system, relocation (as a concrete exercise of solidarity and burden sharing), economic, social and territorial cohesion and, moreover, actions aimed at common security purposes – in other words, to stay united by interests and policies, as well as by values, rights and duties, shared in common in the so called area of freedom, security and justice.

We don't know which choice will prevail in the end. But it is an easy prediction that, should the first one prevail, the consequence will be a patchwork of national measures that will further aggravate the migration

crisis and inflict another blow to the credibility of European cohesion and integration, affecting the very concept of European citizenship, and debasing the promise of an "ever closer union among the peoples of Europe," enshrined in the EU Treaty.

This then is my concluding remark.

It is up to all of us to take a stand on this borderline issue. Surely, on the basis of a thoughtful, if not of a scholarly, approach to its multifarious and complex aspects, a stand must be taken. Yet, we must keep in mind that what it is really at stake, behind and beyond the humanitarian emergencies of our days, is the future of Europe. Not only as a project of peace and prosperity, but, practically speaking, as a concrete opportunity to give shape to a Union more like a 'federation' than an 'association' of Member States – sovereign enough to be in disagreement between them, but not so much so as to resist, alone, the impact of a phenomenon having consequences for them all, and, needless to say, for their nationals, who are also European citizens.

Luigi Moccia

President
Centro di eccellenza Altiero Spinelli (CeAS)

University Roma Tre