

Migration, refugees and European security: Fostering co-operation, building coalitions

Meeting Report
Athens, 10 May 2016

Overview

Upon the initiative of Hon. Dora Bakoyannis, former OSCE Chairperson-in-Office (2009) and a member of the [Panel of Eminent Persons on European Security](#), the OSCE Secretariat together with the Hellenic Foundation for European and Foreign Policy (ELIAMEP) organized a panel discussion in Athens on "Migration, refugees and European security: Fostering co-operation, building coalitions".

This joint OSCE-ELIAMEP event discussed challenges posed by the current migration and refugee crisis as well as its implications for European security, and explored perspectives for strengthening co-operation among relevant players. The event contributed to a forward-looking discussion on co-operative security within the context of the OSCE and the recent work conducted by the Panel of Eminent Persons on European Security.

The event, which brought together over 90 participants from the Greek Foreign Ministry and Athens's diplomatic, academic and media communities, was opened by the Alternate Minister of Foreign Affairs of Greece, **H. E. Nikos Xydakis**. The OSCE Secretary General, Amb. **Lamberto Zannier**, delivered a keynote speech, which was followed by a panel discussion featuring Amb. **Claude Wild**, Permanent Representative of Switzerland to the OSCE and Chair of the OSCE Informal Working Group on Migration and Refugee Flows; Amb. **Nina Suomalainen**, Head of the OSCE Mission to Skopje; Prof. **Saban Kardas**, Director of the Center for Middle Eastern Strategic Studies (ORSAM) in Ankara; and Ms **Monika Ekstrom**, Head of Sector "Political Reporting & Policy Analysis" of the Representation of the European Commission in Greece, Athens. The event was moderated by Dr. **Thanos Dokos**, Director General of ELIAMEP.

Summary of discussion

Speakers agreed that the unprecedented flow of refugees and migrants posed a significant humanitarian, political and societal challenge for Europe and its neighbours. The crisis had tested Europe's solidarity and co-operation, put pressure on borders, raised political tensions among transit and receiving states and increased public support for radical political parties and populist movements with an anti-immigration agenda. From a **geopolitical point of view**, the crisis had weakened not only the European Union's internal cohesion but also its external credibility, and shifted the balance of power within the Union. In a dangerous turn, migration had emerged as a new fault line cutting across Europe.

The debate underlined that due to economic and demographic factors, this phenomenon was here to stay for the long term and Europe needed to prepare itself for dealing with sustained flows of refugees and migrants. It was noted that migration should not be seen as a “threat” and refugees should not be portrayed as intruders – in fact they had been the first victims of the current crisis and Europe had a duty to help those in need and provide protection to refugees as required by international law. At the same time, it should not be denied that mass-movements of people fleeing conflicts and other dire conditions carried significant security implications, both for transit and destination countries. Some participants suggested that Europe was currently not facing a “migration crisis” but in fact a “**migration governance crisis**” as it had not been prepared for this situation. It was noted that many governments had not considered this a priority area despite clear indications of worsening migration trends and a deteriorating security situation in regions neighbouring Europe. The EU-Turkey deal on migration and refugee flows was discussed in more details in this regard.

Many speakers stressed that European countries needed to build bridges, not walls, to protect their common security and prosperity. The migration challenge was global in its nature and no single country could hope to effectively address it from a national perspective alone. While it was recognized that every state had a responsibility to protect and manage its own borders, it was also noted that in today’s world states were dependent on broader regional developments. State-level solutions could not solve the problem and many participants stressed the need to **strengthen mutual co-operation and build international coalitions** of multiple stakeholders, including multilateral and governmental actors but also local communities and civil society organizations.

The discussion highlighted that challenges posed by the current flow of refugees and migrants required a “**smart**” **comprehensive approach** that would **reconcile both state and human security**. It was noted that these two concepts did not need to be inherently in tension and in fact could reinforce each other under a comprehensive approach to security. Many underscored that any successful strategy for responding to this challenge would have to address both **short-term emergencies** as well as **long-term trends**, and should be guided by principles of humanity, solidarity and responsibility. It was noted that such a comprehensive approach would have to address **several key elements**: protection of refugees and migrants on the route, solidarity with frontline and transit countries, coordinated measures and strategies to combat crime along migration routes, responsible border management, successful integration of those entitled to stay in a host country, effective return of unsuccessful asylum-seekers and – perhaps most important but also most difficult to implement – strategy for addressing root causes of migration in third countries. Some speakers also suggested that the EU would need a common asylum system to be able to manage effectively the amount of people fleeing to Europe.

In addition, it was noted that it was necessary to **strengthen local resilience in transit and in host countries**. Local infrastructure in many of these countries was under extreme pressure to deal with such an unprecedented situation. A realistic assessment of needs at the local level, especially in countries neighbouring Syria, would be very much needed. At the same time it was stressed that any assistance to refugees and migrants (including humanitarian aid) should be sensitive to local conditions, especially in case of underdeveloped regions.

Looking at **root causes**, speakers agreed that a key causality of the current crisis were conflicts in the Middle East. Ending fighting in Syria and strengthening the political process to resolve the conflict would be a first important step to improve the situation in the long-term. At the same time, it was noted that a growing number of migrants were coming from sub-Saharan Africa where entire regions were plagued by a lack of development, dysfunctional governance, and the impact of climate change. It was recommended that Europe should deepen engagement with these countries and there should be a global

debate on how to improve co-operation formats among countries at different levels of development across continents. A **global migration governance compact** was seen as a key item on the international agenda in this regard. It was noted that the upcoming **United Nations Summit on Refugees and Migrants** in September 2016 would provide an important platform to discuss these issue and the OSCE should contribute to it as well.

Turning to the **role of the OSCE**, it was recognized that the Organization was well placed to address challenges posed by migration due to its comprehensive approach to security, capacities to act in the field, ability to foster security dialogue at regional level and long-term expertise in a number of specific areas such as protecting human rights, promoting tolerance and non-discrimination, countering trafficking in human beings, border management, etc. The debate showed that the OSCE could offer real added value to the international response in case of both short-term emergencies as well as long-term agenda, and it could complement the work by organizations such as EUROPOL for instance. It was also noted that the OSCE was already doing a lot in the field of migration and what was needed in many areas was refocusing, updating and possibly consolidating available mechanisms and tools. Activities of the OSCE Mission to Skopje served as an example to illustrate OSCE's work in the field in this regard. **The OSCE Informal Working Group on Migration and Refugee Flows**, that had been created after the [OSCE Security Days on migration in Rome](#) in March 2016, was now exploring what more coherent and strategic approach could be adopted by the Organization to address this challenge. Potential elements under consideration included holding a regular political dialogue on this issue as well as regular sectorial meetings for exchanging best practices, creating a special coordinator for this area, reviewing and reinforcing mandates of relevant OSCE field operations, and establishing mobile spots and/or task-force unit for assisting participating States with emergency situations. It was also suggested that the OSCE should reinvigorate its Mediterranean dimension and strengthen its relations and co-operation with the OSCE Partners for Co-operation.

Last but not least, the discussion also touched upon the issue of **divisive and populist public discourse on migration**. It was noted that most state authorities had failed to explain their citizens what was actually happening. Persistent lack of communication as well as persistent lack of integration were dividing European societies and creating room for more radical positions. It was underlined that education was a key to countering fear, xenophobia and populism. Putting in place a well-managed and well-functioning system of legal migration (including effective return of unsuccessful asylum seekers) could help to address public fears of uncontrollable situation. It was also suggested that discussion on these issues should be moved from political platforms, where it is often misused for political gains, to more experts-to-experts level. Positive impact of Syrian refugees on local economy in south-east Turkey (new competitive labour force, Syrian capital flowing to Turkey, expansion of trading networks, pressure on state authorities to improve local infrastructure and public services) served as an example that migration can also be a win-win situation for everybody.

Conclusions and key findings

- The unprecedented flow of refugees and migrants poses a significant humanitarian, political and societal challenge for Europe. Europe needs to prepare itself for dealing with sustained flows of refugees and migrants in the long term.
- The migration challenge is global in its nature and no single country can hope to effectively address it from a national perspective alone. It is necessary to strengthen mutual co-operation and build international coalitions.

- The migration challenge requires a “smart” comprehensive approach that reconciles state security with human security. It has to address both short-term emergencies as well as long-term trends.
- Key elements that need to be addressed include: protection of refugees and migrants on the route, solidarity with frontline and transit countries, coordinated measures and strategies to combat crime along migration routes, responsible border management, successful integration of those entitled to stay in a host country, effective return of unsuccessful asylum-seekers and strategy for addressing root causes of migration in third countries.
- It is necessary to strengthen local resilience in transit and host countries, especially local infrastructure. Local needs-assessment in countries neighbouring Syria is needed. Any assistance to refugees and migrants, including humanitarian aid, should be tailored to local conditions.
- Ending fighting in Syria and strengthening the political process to resolve the conflict is a first important step to improve the situation in the long-term.
- Europe and the international community should deepen its engagement with sub-Saharan African countries. There should be a global debate on how to improve co-operation formats among countries at different levels of development across continents.
- A global migration governance compact should be a key item on the international agenda.
- The OSCE is well placed to address challenges posed by migration and can offer real added value to the international response in case of both short-term emergencies as well as long-term agenda.
- The OSCE is already doing a lot in the field of migration and what is needed in many areas is refocusing, updating and possibly upgrading available mechanisms and tools.
- The OSCE should reinvigorate its Mediterranean dimension and strengthen its relations and co-operation with the Mediterranean and Asian Partners for Co-operation.
- Persistent lack of communication as well as persistent lack of integration are dividing European societies and creating room for more radical positions. Education is a key to countering fear, xenophobia and populism.
- Putting in place well-managed and well-functioning system of legal migration could help to address public concerns.
