

European Conference 2014  
**"1914-2014: Lessons from History?  
Citizenship Education and Conflict Management"**

16-18 October 2014  
Vienna, Austria

**Workshop 6**  
**"Migration, Mobility, Public policy.  
European Challenges and Predicaments"**

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Europe's demographic future is clear: The shrinking number of children per family is the main driver responsible for stagnating or even declining population size. At first this translates into fewer births as well as smaller cohorts of pre-school and school children. Eventually, the size of the working-age population as well as the number of potential parents also starts to shrink. In some regions and countries of Europe this demographic decline has already started. Others will be confronted with this in the decades to come.

At the same time Europe globally attracts immigrants. Already today, the European Union is home and host to some 49 million immigrants. Of them less than a third are people who have moved between EU member states while the other two thirds have come from third countries. Even if we do not count intra-European migration, the EU is one of the most important migrant destinations in the world. As Europe will experience a shrinking domestic labour force within the next ten years, this will create an additional demand for migrant labour and skills.

For the foreseeable future Europe will have to compete with North America, Australia and a few other developed economies for qualified labour and skills. In this context it is highly unfortunate that anti-immigration sentiment is growing in a number of European countries. An Ipsos survey carried out in 2011 in larger migrant receiving countries across Europe indicated, that a majority of citizens thinks: migration has more negative than positive effects. A GMF survey also showed that a majority of Europeans tend to believe that governments have lost control over migration flows. Today, for many Europeans, asylum seekers as well as people desperately looking for economic opportunities crammed into small boats trying to cross the Mediterranean have come to symbolise this loss of control over.

At the same time, in several destination countries a considerable share of citizens also opposes intra-EU mobility. According to Ifop, another pollster, over 80% of Dutch and some 60% of French citizens believe that even freedom of movement should be restricted for Bulgarians and Romanians. According to the Bertelsmann Foundation, two thirds of Germans see mobile EU citizens as a potential 'extra burden' on their country's social welfare system. In the UK the popular mood seems to be the same.

Reflecting and reinforcing these trends, political parties with a restrictive agenda are becoming more popular in Western Europe. At the most recent elections to the European parliament in Denmark, France and in the UK parties that campaigned for restricting mobility of EU citizens and drastically reducing immigration of 3<sup>rd</sup> country nationals have come first at the ballots.

It is evident that this constellation does not only create tensions in European societies today, but it also obscures Europe's future by making it a lot more difficult to attract the qualified labour our economies will need.

Another challenge is related to Europe's geopolitical situation and its neighbourhood. Both Europe's humanitarian tradition and international conventions (including the Geneva Convention and various European legal provisions) require EU member states to admit asylum seekers and to grant them refugee status if they qualify. This tradition and legal obligation, however, is being questioned, as an increasing number of people manage to cross Europe's land and sea borders in irregular ways – with many of them asking for protection. In recent years some up to 600.000 people claimed asylum in one of the 28 EU member states.

In this context Europe's predicaments are clear. The first dilemma is evident: Globally, but also in Europe's geographic neighbourhood millions of people are in need of protection or in an economically destitute situation – many more than the EU28 and other European countries will ever be able and willing to accommodate. The other dilemma relates to solidarity. Irregular entries mainly take place at Europe's Southern/South-Eastern sea borders and Eastern land borders. Countries like Italy, Greece, Malta and Bulgaria have to shoulder the main burden of dealing with these inflows – including increasingly costly rescue operations in the Mediterranean. At the same time only seven EU countries, all of them located in North-Western Europe are handling three quarters of all asylum applications. And, so far, under current EU rules there is no truly functioning mechanism for burden sharing, which both the countries with large irregular inflows and the others with large numbers of asylum seekers continuously are asking for.

Today, migrants crammed into unseaworthy boats trying to cross the Mediterranean have come to symbolise Europe's loss of control over immigration flows. The other symbol, though referring to much smaller flows, are EU citizens moving from poorer parts of Central and South-Eastern Europe to richer metropolitan areas of Western Europe. Despite the fact that most of them are just exercising their right to free mobility of labour and skills within EU28 they are often not welcome and have become targets of an anti-immigration discourse also hostile to intra-EU mobility. As a result not only tabloid media and extreme right-wing parties, but also some political mainstream governments – most vocally the UK government – have come up with proposals to restrict the mobility of EU citizens.

Fact is: The political discourse does not just target so-called “welfare tourists”. Hard working and economically successful migrants are also not always welcome. In a growing number of cases they have been accused of stealing jobs from native-born workers. Against the backdrop of the recent financial and economic crisis, we are confronted with considerable numbers of Europeans who are neither ready to accept more mobility between EU member states nor willing to admit more international migrants arriving from 3<sup>rd</sup> countries. In this context the outcome of a referendum held in Switzerland in February 2014 was telling. There the electorate voted in favour of abolishing the freedom of movement of labour between the EU and Switzerland. The challenge now is to replace it by an old-style government-administered quota system.

Opinion polls suggest: if asked in a popular referendum, citizens of quite a few EU member states might also have voted in favour of restricting labour market access for both people coming from other EU countries as well as for people from non-EU countries alike. Political parties with a restrictive agenda are becoming more popular. At the most recent elections to the European parliament in Denmark, France and in the UK parties that campaigned for restricting mobility of EU citizens and drastically reducing immigration of 3<sup>rd</sup> country nationals have come first at the polls. What could be done?

Mobility of labour within EU28 is an area where the European Commission can act. In contrast, the admission of labour migrants from 3<sup>rd</sup> countries not only takes place at member state level, but will also remain in their discretion.

In the context of global competition for talent becoming tougher, the EU and its member states will have to develop smarter admission and recruitment policies. First and foremost we have to improve our image as an attractive destination for skilled migrants.

- In the short term, a shortage of labour and skills in some regions and industries should be addressed (a) by encouraging more mobility between EU member states leading to better allocation of labour within the European Union; and (b) by better explaining the merits and welfare enhancing effects of intra-EU mobility to Europe's citizenry.
- In the medium and long terms European countries with aging societies and stagnating or declining working-age populations will need to invest more in sound, forward-looking migration policies. EU member states and the European Union as a whole will need to think more strategically about how to attract qualified workers. In this context a more widespread use of so-called Blue Cards giving newly arriving 3<sup>rd</sup> country nationals access to labour markets in more than one EU member state would make Europe more attractive.
- Tougher competition for skills will put more focus on the employment of migrant labour to supply needed human capital to the European labour market.

A series of measures will be necessary to both improve intra-EU mobility and to make Europe more attractive for qualified 3<sup>rd</sup> country nationals:

In all EU member states, migrants face barriers transferring their skills and experience across borders. Therefore all EU-member states need sound procedures for the mutual recognition of educational attainments and acquired skills based on comparable standards that have to be developed and agreed between sending and receiving countries. EU-wide standards would be extremely helpful. This is not only a matter of fairness but an important measure to counteract brain waste of different groups of migrants resident in the EU Member States and to maximise economic gains from migration and intra-EU mobility.

- International agreements and EU-wide standards on the recognition of foreign qualifications are not enough. In the same spirit we need to further develop non-discrimination policies making sure that mobile EU citizens and labour migrants coming from 3<sup>rd</sup> countries are employed and compensated according to their talent and skills.
- One important and pertinent barrier to transferring skills across borders is professional regulation. Domestic regulations to restrict entry into professional occupations and protect patients, clients, customers, students, etc. from poorly qualified experts and practitioners have a long tradition. They also tend to protect insiders against competition. Therefore such systems are not very well equipped to deal with foreign-

trained practitioners. As a consequence qualified migrants must often undergo time-consuming and expensive assessment or training to demonstrate their competences. Such procedures need to be simplified without sacrificing their role as “quality check”. The aim should be to reduce, or even eliminate, the need for case-by-case assessments when qualified migrants have been trained in systems conferring essentially comparable skills and knowledge.

- More emphasis also needs to be given to making acquired social and employer benefits fully portable. At the same time it should be made clear that mobile EU citizens and migrants coming from 3<sup>rd</sup> countries have to “earn” social protection in the receiving country through prior contributions. It should also be made clear that this restriction does not apply to asylum seekers and recently recognised refugees.