

Extract from:
Yves Bertoncini, "European Steering Committee 2011 of Notre Europe - Key elements",
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1. “Schengen and immigration”

The session on the Schengen area and immigration began with a key-note speech by António Vitorino, followed by an address from Stefano Manservigi and comments and questions from other participants. The session as a whole led to the identification of the following main points for present analysis and future direction¹.

1.1. Immigration, a political challenge at the national and European levels

1.1.1. *Public opinion appears to be less favourable to immigration*

- the arrival of 30,000 Tunisians on the Italian coastline sparked a dispute the like of which had not been seen even when 500,000 Balkan refugees entered EU countries back in the 1990s;

1. The views expressed here are not necessarily those of *Notre Europe*.

- public opinions in many countries feel that there are too many immigrants in the European countries, though they estimate the number of immigrants to be double the real figure (as confirmed by a recent study by the German Marshall Fund);
- these opinions are no longer the prerogative of the “poorer” classes exposed to direct competition, they are held also by a part of the middle classes, immigrants frequently becoming scape-goats at times of major uncertainty for the future;
- immigration’s negative image is not promoted solely by traditionally extremist right-wing parties any longer but also by new parties or players (for instance Pim Fortuyn in The Netherlands) who wield an increasing influence over mainstream parties.

1.1.2. Immigration reflects tangible problems

which need to be addressed in order to avoid confusion

- several kind of organised delinquency or crime are associated with networks which can be traced back to the Balkans (gangs) or to Bulgaria and Romania (the “Roma” network); these must be combated for what they are, also in order to forestall any kind of link between immigration and insecurity;
- several thousand asylum-seekers apply for asylum illegally and they, too, need to be addressed in that context because they are sufficient to spark a crisis which national political authorities then occasionally bend to their own purposes;
- some 3/4 of illegal immigrants are overstayers: they have legally entered EU territory with a visa but they overstay after visa expiry or residence permit expiry: thus the real priority is to track those people, rather than staging a media circus involving monitoring immigrants arriving at the border with no visa.

1.1.3. Immigration, a topic for mistrust among member states and the Schengen area

- mistrust among countries is due to the structural imbalance between the establishment of common borders while each country continues to maintain responsibility for its own and for deciding who may or may not enter its territory (deciding on both admission and regularisation);
- this mistrust is initially displayed outside the country, in the form of doubts voiced regarding the ability of one or the other country to efficiently monitor its borders or to effectively record the arrival of refugees on its soil;
- this mistrust is also displayed towards the rules governing internal freedom of circulation, with negative reactions being expressed, for instance, towards Polish workers who have come to work in the United Kingdom or in The Netherlands and are now unemployed.

1.2. Immigration is a triple challenge for the elite classes

1.2.1. A current challenge: improving the perception of people's reality

- the main problem for most European citizens today is not getting to Helsinki without a passport or without being checked at the border, it is feeling safe in their own homes. Greater attention needs to be paid to this hierarchy of priorities, without always harping on about the grand principles of freedom of circulation (“values do not grow on trees”);
- the elite classes have frequently underestimated the impact of immigration, which may have a positive impact for them – access to low-cost services, few coexistence problems, no head-on competition on the labour market – but does not necessarily have the same impact for other social groups.

- the objective is to take into account this public opinion, while underlining that immigration doesn't constitute the most central economic, social and political problem in Europe.

1.2.2. *An anthropological challenge: immigration and European identity*

- when globalisation is perceived as unbalanced, not to say downright aggressive, it triggers an anthropological debate on the specific characteristics of the European territory (the "relationship between us and them") and on its ability to promote its own interests;
- competition from other countries and other regions, coupled with concern for the future, may occasion a demand for protection focusing on borders, which play a strong role in the field of identity;
- in that connection, the slogan of a "Europe without borders" becomes less popular if people perceive that Europe's external borders are not properly guarded; but in imparting legitimacy to this demand for border protection, the EU can also encourage people to fall back on national borders because those borders are generally perceived as being the safest of all.

1.2.3. *A cultural challenge: free circulation versus "territorial liberalism"?*

- "circulatory ideology" must not necessary be backed onto universal values or be applied at the global level, even if the elite classes do consider themselves "citizens of the world": we have to define a specific kind of freedom of circulation for the European territory;
- the transition from "Lepenism" to "Fortuynism" reveals the emergence of anti-immigration movements that combat Islam on the basis of a "territorialised liberal ethic" because, in defending European territory against Islam, they also pretend they defend the rights of women, of homosexuals and so on. Finding an intel-

lignant way to counter this “anti-Islamic liberalism” constitutes a major challenge for the pro-European governing classes.

1.3. Rekeying the debate on immigration by highlighting its positive effects

1.3.1. The links between immigration and welfare systems

- the widely held belief that immigrants get more out of our welfare system than they put into it must be countered with statistical facts;
- it is necessary to stress that Europe’s welfare systems, which are one of the EU’s trump cards, cannot be safeguarded or improved without a massive demographic input which is only going to come from immigration in the short and medium terms.

1.3.2. The links between immigration and growth

- a key idea that needs to be pushed through is that there can be no strong or lasting economic growth in an aging Europe without stable and properly integrated migration;
- the examples of Italy and of Spain show that immigration has a very positive economic impact in terms of the creation of businesses and jobs, and in stimulating demand on the home market;
- the Commission is right to highlight the fact that the European countries are involved in a global struggle to attract a more or less skilled workforce – even though the member countries are not necessarily well placed right now to organise a “selective immigration” system.

1.3.3. Pointing to national integration models that work

- the impression that immigrant integration no longer works must be counterbalanced by pointing to countries where integration has worked well; this, for example, is the case in Spain, which

has taken in almost 6 million immigrants over the past 10 years without encountering any major political or social problems;

- as the example of Spain shows, regularising illegal immigrants can also have a positive impact, especially by comparison with the problems caused by their non-regularisation;
- the successful integration of immigrants depends primarily on national issues: the integration of Turks in Germany, for example, appears to be an easier matter than the integration of North Africans in France – and this, even though we are talking in both instances about peoples from a Muslim background;
- the crisis must boost the attention we pay to immigrant integration, including incentives designed to get them to leave even when they are fully integrated in their host country.

1.4. Improving the Schengen *acquis* to safeguard it

1.4.1. *Bolstering existing European cooperation mechanisms*

- it is necessary to open the eyes of people thinking that European countries would be able to address the issue of international migrant flows single-handed and more effectively;
- it requires, in particular, to boost the mechanisms for cooperation and financial adjustment already in place, including by applying the “temporary protection” directive in the event of mass applications for political asylum;
- it would also be advisable to clear up the ambiguity surrounding the “Frontex” agency by endowing it with all of the resources that it needs to act.

1.4.2. *Improving the common handling of migration-related issues*

- real or alleged border problems raised by member states must become the subject of a common debate in a formal framework;

- the decision to reintroduce border checks in the event of a crisis must be adopted on the basis of a common decision taken in the respect of the EU competences as regards external borders control and the free movement of people;
- the Council must hold a structured political discussion on migration-related issues, on the basis of evidence-based reports and by improving the exchange of information on policies pursued by the individual member states;
- in legislative terms, the main goal must be to achieve common European regulations governing admission decisions in the areas of asylum and family reunification, as well as for decisions regarding the regularisation of illegal immigrants.

1.4.3. Combining political debate and practical applications

- the migration-related issues linked to the Schengen area deserve a broad preliminary political debate stretching beyond the mere handling of the crisis (for instance, see the debate in the United States in the early 20th century);
- strategies adopted by the member states have a tendency to vary according to their individual situations and traditions;
- the Commission must be tasked with monitoring the application of common regulations.

1.5. Immigration from the Arab and Muslim world, a specific issue

1.5.1. The weight of representations carried by “Arab and Muslim” immigrants

- this kind of immigration is often perceived as a threat to the identity of Europe’s societies, particularly in view of the importance assigned to religion in the public sphere and of the status accorded to women;

these issues, too, must be addressed both at the factual level and in terms of the (often mistaken) manner in which they are portrayed;

- the political ethos spawned by the war on terror continues to have an impact and can even lead to people associating crime with Arab or Muslim immigration, an association not borne out by the statistics;
- one of the key points is to avoid keeping Islam in a minority, whether it be in the Arab world or in Europe – the “Arab Spring” is a highly significant signal in that connection.

1.5.2. The Arab Spring and an open European response to migration

- the nature of Europe’s response to the “Arab Spring” depends partly on the way migrants from those countries are treated, and so we would be well advised to adopt a more favourable approach in view of our neighbourly relations with them;
- visa liberalisation for specific groups of people (teachers, business people, students) would be perceived as a very favourable signal – set against a trend involving encouragement for students educated in France to leave;
- one of the goals must also be to foster circular mobility between Europe and its neighbouring countries (multiple-entry visas);
- and finally, the policy for readmitting illegal immigrants into Arab countries must not be pursued either on unilateral terms or in brutal conditions.