

## ON THE MIGRATION ISSUE IN EUROPE

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### ABSTRACT

Migration has come to represent a hot and contested topic in current political debates across Europe, revealing conflicting interests and concerns across and within Member States. By reconstructing three different although overlapping migration-related crises characterising Europe in the last fifteen years, *i.e.* the integration crisis since the early 2000s, the economic crisis since 2007 and, recently, the so-called ‘refugee crisis’, we suggest that they reflect the difficulty of Europe in coming to terms with being *de facto* a continent of immigration. Against national governments’ short-sightedness and in order to promote the reconstruction of Europe and of its relations with current and past migrants, we argue there is a urgent need to pay greater attention to both the EU and local levels. While the former should sustain a shift in political discourses and actions towards ‘intercultural integration’ as the keystone of Europe as continent of immigration, the latter constitute the very context in which economic, social and cultural interactions between immigrants and natives take place, and thus where ‘interculture’ and ‘integration’ may be realised on a daily basis.

**Keywords:** Migration, EU Policies, Integration Crisis, Economic Crisis, Refugee Crisis.  
JEL Codes: F22, J61, K37, O15.

### INTRODUCTION

A year before the 1973 oil crisis, Stephen Castles and Godula Kosak published what is considered one of the most critical analyses of labour migration in Europe, *The Function of Labour Immigration in Western Euro-*

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*pean Capitalism* (Castles and Kosak 1972). Inspired by Marxist thought, they interpreted labour migration as functional to European capitalism in economic, social and political terms. Accordingly, immigrants from Southern Europe and the ‘Third World’ were fundamental to forming a “new industrial reserve army” (*ivi*: 23) in the hands of the capitalist class, which in turn could keep wages down and profits up. In addition, labour migration was depicted as fulfilling a social and political function for capitalist economies in Europe, *i.e.* dividing the working class and, thus, preventing class consciousness and working-class movements.

Over forty years later, the analysis by Castles and Kosak is still topical in many respects. In the context of increasingly tertiarized and services-oriented economic structures, immigrant workers continue to fulfil a key “reserve army” function (Sassen 1991), which was once performed by other groups such as women or youngsters. The higher levels of education achieved by these latter groups make most of the available non-qualified positions simply no more attractive to them. At the same time, the conditions of social disadvantage and political marginality that were denounced by Castles and Kosak do not seem to have been significantly alleviated: many first- and second-generation immigrants live in disadvantaged urban areas and suffer from racialization and discrimination, a situation which is worsened by the weakness of traditional immigrant allies like the working-class movement in the early 1970s.

These contradictions have become more and more apparent over the last two decades, conveying a sense of an ongoing ‘migration crisis’ in Europe. Political responses have been slow and often inadequate, contributing to the polarization of the European public without tackling the key structural causes of ‘the crisis’, such as economic marginalisation and systematic discrimination. In this article we argue that the reconstruction of relations between Europe and its – current and past – immigrants necessarily requires a firm recognition that Europe is a continent of immigration, in which immigrants represent a key factor for its future development and wealth. Independent of any ‘utilitarian’ argument about the demographic and economic advantages of migration for an increasingly old and poorly innovative Europe (Coleman 2008; OECD 2014), migration is a process of social change whose challenges cannot be further delayed or overlooked. To deal with such challenges and build the conditions for positive cohabitation we suggest the need to pay greater attention, both in terms of research and policy intervention, to both the EU and the local level as central *loci* of political action on the migration issue. While the former may represent the most relevant actor for promoting and sustaining a shift in political discourses and actions towards ‘intercultural integration’ as the keystone of Europe as a continent of immigration, the latter constitutes the very

context in which social interactions between immigrants and natives take place on a daily basis.

The article is organised as follows. The first three sections are aimed at reconstructing the different and overlapping European migration-related crises, *i.e.* the integration crisis since the early 2000s, the economic crisis since 2007 and, last but not least, the current refugee crisis. We will show how the three crises are strictly interconnected and in some way reflect the difficulty of Europe in coming to terms with being a *de facto* continent of immigration. Hence, in the fourth section we will discuss possible ways forward from the current impasse in European – both EU and Member States (MS) – debates and policies on migration, laying the groundwork for a possible agenda for the reconstruction of Europe beyond the ‘migration crisis’.

## 1. THE INTEGRATION CRISIS

Since the beginning of the 2000s, a series of terrorist events have contributed to the growth of anti-immigrant and xenophobic sentiments in Europe. The 9/11 attacks in New York, the Madrid (March 2004) and London (July 2005) bombings, the murder of Dutch filmmaker Theo Van Gogh in Amsterdam (November 2004) and the Danish cartoon crisis (September 2005) have triggered a debate on the ‘incompatibility’ of Islam and European culture (Caponio and Cappiali 2016). The recent attacks in Paris (*Charlie Hebdo* in January 2015 and the *Bataclan* massacre of November in the same year), Brussels (March 2016), Nice (July 2016), Berlin (December 2016) and London again (March 2017) have polarised the debate and spread the idea of a ‘clash of civilizations’. Immigrants have increasingly been constructed by the media and political discourse as a ‘security problem’ and a ‘social threat’ for Europe, reinforcing the emergence of anti-immigrant sentiments and xenophobia in the general public.

This trend has been defined as the “multiculturalism backlash” (Vertovec and Wessendorf 2010), implying the failure of immigrant integration policies characterized by the formal recognition of “group difference within the public sphere of laws, democratic discourses and the terms of a shared citizenship and national identity” (Modood 2007: 7). Accordingly, since the early 2000s, a sense that European societies have failed to integrate their immigrant and ethnic minority populations became more and more acute especially in countries like the Netherlands, traditionally known and praised as the “country of multiculturalism” (Jacobs and Rea 2007), and the UK, whose integration policies until then were characterized in terms of “multicultural race relations” (Favell 1998). Several Western European governments distanced themselves from and engaged in a general questioning

of their past integration policies, leading to what Joppke and Morawska (2003) defined as “the assimilationist turn”.

Starting in the Netherlands (2003) and Denmark (between 1999 and 2004), so-called ‘civic integration’ policies were widely adopted throughout Europe, introducing specific obligations that immigrants are required to fulfil in order to obtain permanent residence permits or even to obtain a visa to enter the country. Nevertheless, variations in the logic, scope and specific restrictions introduced by European countries may be still identified (Jacobs and Rea 2007). As highlighted by recent studies (Perchinig *et al.* 2012), European countries can be grouped around three main clusters in relation to the weight that integration measures have on immigrants’ possibility of being admitted into the receiving country.

In countries such as Austria, Denmark, Germany, the Netherlands and the UK, a strong linkage between admission and integration policies can be identified, due to the presence of binding pre-entry and post-entry measures. Compulsory pre-entry tests target in particular non-EU citizens applying for family reunifications. They concern basic knowledge of the language and culture of the country of destination, the passing of a specific test is a precondition for obtaining a visa to enter the country. Compulsory post-entry measures mainly target non-EU newcomers and those who apply for a permanent residence permit, and their right to stay is conditional upon the attainment of a certain level of knowledge of the host country’s language and culture.

In contrast, in countries like Sweden, Spain and Italy, integration policies consist of post-entry measures only, highlighting a weak linkage with immigrant admission policies. For instance, in Sweden attending a language course is compulsory for asylum-seekers, while other immigrants (including European ones) may take courses on a voluntary basis. In Spain and Italy, post-entry measures target non-EU citizens who apply for the renewal of a permit to stay and consist of an evaluation of immigrants’ knowledge of the host country’s language and culture. Hence, in these countries civic integration is interpreted as a precondition for long-term stay, as the renewal of the residence permit is denied in the event that the person fails the test.

France is somewhere in between the previous two clusters, showing a moderate linkage between integration and admission. On the one hand, non-EU citizens applying for family reunifications are required to take a pre-entry test, which if failed entails attending a two-month course on French language and culture once in France. Hence, taking the test is required, but its successful passing is not a precondition for obtaining a visa to enter the country. On the other hand, post-entry measures target non-EU newcomers, who must provide a certificate of attendance of a one-year

language and culture course, the lack of which makes it impossible to obtain a permanent resident permit.

Regardless of these differences, civic integration policies have somehow been passed on to the European level. In fact, although immigrants' integration is still considered an exclusive responsibility of the Member States, over time the EU has attempted to play an increasingly influential role in this policy field. Accordingly, the 1999 Tampere European Council (European Council 1999) spelled out the key elements of a common European asylum and migration policy, defining integration as a goal to be pursued in a more coordinated and effective way in order to enable immigrants to fully contribute to the economic development of Europe.

However, faced with some Member States' obstructionism, the European Commission has mainly used 'soft law' instruments to promote immigrants' integration (Balch and Geddes 2012). These include, for instance, the definition of the 2004 Common Basic Principles on Immigrant Integration Policy (European Council 2004), which emphasise integration in terms of immigrants' employability and labour market participation and encourages civic integration courses to these ends. It also provided funding for immigrant integration interventions under the INTI programme (Preparatory actions for the integration of third-country nationals) in the period 2003-2006, the EIF (European Integration Fund) in the period 2007-2013 and, more recently, the AMIF (Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund) for the period 2014-2020. Over time, these instruments have aimed to sustain interventions on non-EU immigrants' integration into European societies, such as programmes for improving diversity management; intercultural training and dialogue; courses, platforms and tools for language learning, sharing information and best practices among European integration actors; and activities in the host EU countries and in the immigrants' countries of origin on introduction to the host society.

Therefore, from the European Commission's perspective, the promotion of non-EU citizens' knowledge of the host country's language and culture has traditionally been considered a tool to improve immigrants' participation in the European labour market. Similarly, research carried out at the local level shows how language courses have always been provided by public institutions and/or NGOs in order to facilitate immigrants' access to the labour market (Caponio, Jubany Baucells and Guëll 2016), therefore focusing on their economic rather than cultural integration.

In contrast, national rhetoric on civic integration has brought the cultural dimension to the fore, assuming an irreconcilable difference between native citizens and immigrants (and Muslims in particular) in cultural or religious terms, narrowing the scope of 'integration' to language and cultural values. National discourses have shadowed the socio-economic facet

of immigrant integration processes, even though integration has always represented a major challenge for the social cohesion of European societies. Riots in the French *banlieues* in 2005 and 2009, in British cities in 2011 and in Stockholm in 2013 unveiled the economic and social marginalization of second generations and young people of an immigrant background, as well as their conditions of residential segregation and discrimination.

As is clear, civic integration policies, which apply only to newly arrived immigrants and set the conditions for access to the residence permit, do not tackle the much more challenging second generations issue. While born and raised in their parents' receiving country, and often citizens of that country, they continue to be discriminated against for their colour, racial origin, accent or cultural affiliation. The Paris and Brussels attacks mentioned above, as well as the London ones in 2005, which were perpetrated by young people of immigrant origin, clearly show how religious radicalisation is often linked to social marginalisation and discrimination. The 2007 economic crisis further exacerbated risks of social exclusion and deprivation among immigrants and people of immigrant origin, as we will see more in-depth below.

## 2. THE ECONOMIC CRISIS

After two decades of steady increase in national GDPs, the outbreak of the 2007 global economic crisis led to a serious downturn in economic growth and rising unemployment across Europe. Cyclical sensitive sectors such as construction, wholesale, services and certain branches of manufacturing – in which immigrant workers are particularly concentrated – have been hard hit by the current crisis (Kuptsch 2012).

However, economic deterioration and its consequences have not been shared equally across EU Member States (Table 1). Whereas Southern and Baltic EU countries as well as Ireland suffered from a major recession, other countries such as Hungary and Sweden faced a short downturn, followed by a period of recovery. This uneven impact of the economic crisis is also reflected in unemployment rates. In almost all European countries the un/employment gaps between foreign-born and native-born citizens have widened since the outbreak of the crisis, with a substantial decrease in employment rates and a simultaneous increase in unemployment rates among foreign-born workers. Nevertheless, in Northern countries such as Belgium, Denmark, Finland, the Netherlands and Sweden, immigrants' unemployment has always been double that of native citizens, and the economic crisis has broadened differentials in unemployment rates, while joblessness for Germany's immigrants has decreased since the onset of the crisis.

In contrast, in Baltic and almost all Southern EU countries, the economic crisis had a deep impact on both native-born and foreign-born employment and unemployment rates, leading to a convergence towards lower employment levels for both groups, whereas the unemployment gap between them has significantly increased. In Spain, for instance, immigrant workers' unemployment rate reached over 30% in 2015, which was 10 percentage points higher than the rate for native-born. Hence, in Southern and peripheral EU countries the economic crisis has exacerbated structural labour market distortions, *e.g.* a segmented labour market with a rigid main sector regulated by strict employment protection legislation and a low-skilled, poorly guaranteed secondary sector, heavy dependent on labour-intensive and low-productivity jobs, weak welfare provisions and social policies unable to compensate for social inequalities generated by the market (Ponzo *et al.* 2015). As a result, the 2007 economic downturn played a major role in reducing economic migration flows to Southern EU countries and in re-activating the South–North labour migration route for EU citizens (Lafleur, Stanek and Veira 2017). In this regard, since the crisis a reduction in the stock of low-skilled immigrants and an increase in the stock of those with secondary and university education have been observed, highlighting a difference from low-skilled emigrants from South Europe during the *Trente Glorieuses*. At the same time, however, unskilled workers still constitute a significant share of South-to-North European migration (*e.g.* about one third in Germany and in the UK) (*ibid.*).

As with the big crises of the 1990s, the 2007 economic crisis triggered important transformations in migration policies across Europe, with States introducing restrictions to new entries for work purposes, protecting native workers from (perceived) foreign workers' competition, encouraging return migration and enforcing stricter controls on irregular migration (Kuptsch 2012: 19). Specifically, European governments reacted to rising unemployment by making new economic migration more difficult (Table 2), particularly for what concerns long-term permits of stay. In the period 2008–2014, the issue of long-term permits for work purposes (more than 12 months) decreased by more than 70% across the EU28, whereas short-term permits (3–5 months) increased exponentially (+175%).

This trend appears particularly significant in countries such as Belgium, Germany and the Netherlands, inviting comparisons with guestworker programmes adopted after World War II. In these countries, the need for an unskilled or semi-skilled labour workforce to be employed in heavy industries, construction and manufacturing after the end of the war triggered the establishment of State-driven guestworker programmes to attract a cheap, temporary workforce that would have met the requirements of their post-war economic boom. Depicting immigrants as “birds of pas-

Table 1. Real GDP growth rate and unemployment rates (average and by place of birth) - % values – various years 2007-2015

Country	2007			2011			2015								
	GDP growth rate <sup>a</sup>	Employment rate <sup>b</sup>		GDP growth rate <sup>a</sup>	Employment rate <sup>b</sup>		GDP growth rate <sup>a</sup>	Employment rate <sup>b</sup>		Unemployment rate <sup>c</sup>					
		Foreign-born	Native-born		Foreign-born	Native-born		Foreign-born	Native-born						
Austria	3,6	65	72,7	9	3,5	2,8	66,7	73,3	8,2	3,4	1	64,7	72,8	10,7	4,6
Belgium	3,4	50,9	63,5	16,4	6,4	1,8	52,6	63,7	15,1	5,8	1,5	53,3	63,6	17	6,8
Czech Republic	5,5	67,3	66,1	9,1	5,3	2	67,8	65,9	8,3	6,8	4,5	71,1	70,2	6,8	5,1
Denmark	0,9	62,5	78,8	8,2	3,4	1,3	61,7	74,7	14,5	6,9	1,6	63,6	75,1	12,2	5,4
Estonia	7,7	74,2	68,4	5,7	4,6	7,6	63,6	65,3	16,9	12,1	1,4	70,2	72,1	7,8	6,1
Finland	5,2	63,5	70,5	14,5	6,7	2,6	62,1	69,4	14	7,6	0,3	59,3	69,2	17,5	9,1
France	2,4	58,7	65,2	13,1	7,4	2,1	57,3	64,8	15,4	8,6	1,3	55,3	65,1	17,4	9,5
Germany	3,3	60,2	70,5	14,6	7,8	3,7	66,9	73	8,9	5,6	1,7	68,3	75,2	7,7	4,1
Greece	3,3	66,6	60,9	8,7	8,4	-9,1	58,4	55,2	22,2	17,4	-0,2	52,2	50,6	32	24,4
Hungary	0,4	64,5	57,2	4,3	7,5	1,7	62,1	55,7	9,5	11	3,1	71,1	63,8	6,8	6,8
Ireland	3,8	73,1	68,1	5,9	4,3	0	59	58,8	17,3	14,3	26,3	62,6	63,4	11,4	9,1
Italy	1,5	65,9	58	7,9	6	0,6	61,5	56,3	11,7	8	0,7	58,6	55,9	15,7	11,5
Luxembourg	8,4	71,1	59,2	4,6	3,6	2	69,8	59,5	6,7	3,5	3,5	68,5	62,6	8,1	4,4
Netherlands	3,7	62,4	77	7,6	3,1	1,7	64	76,5	9,5	3,7	2	61,7	76,1	12	6,2
Poland	7	36,8	57,1	9,4	9,7	5	55,2	59,3	11,9	9,8	3,9	60,7	62,9	10,6	7,6
Portugal	2,5	73,1	67,3	9,6	8,4	-1,8	68,7	63,8	16,9	13	1,6	68	63,5	14,8	12,7
Slovakia	10,8	66	60,7	6,8	11,2	2,8	59,4	59,3	15,6	13,7	3,8	58,4	62,8	13,6	11,5
Slovenia	6,9	67,9	67,8	5,7	4,9	0,6	61,9	64,7	11,5	8	2,3	61,3	65,7	11,9	8,8
Spain	3,8	70,3	64,4	10,3	7,9	-1	55,1	58,1	30,5	19,8	3,2	55,2	58,3	29,8	20,7
Sweden	3,4	63,1	76,2	12,1	5,3	2,7	62,5	76	16,3	6,3	4,1	64,1	78,5	16,2	5,5
UK	2,6	66,4	71,6	7,6	5	1,5	66,7	69,7	9,5	8	2,2	70,4	73,2	6,4	5,2

(a): EUROSTAT; b: OECD.Stat. Accessed: February 20, 2017)



Table 2. First permits for working reason by length of validity – absolute values, % of total permits issued and rate of increase – years 2008 and 2014

	2008					2014					Permits for work rate of increase 2008-14
	3-5 m.	6-11 m.	> 12 m.	Tot. work	% work on total	3-5 m.	6-11 m.	> 12 m.	Tot. work	% work on total	
	EU28	51.869	223.124	511.899	786.892	31,0	142.650	206.828	223.843	573.321	
Belgium	0	7.097	0	7.097	15,4	280	451	4.037	4.768	10,9	-32,8%
Bulgaria	171	554	51	776	19,7	63	151	90	304	3,5	-60,8%
Czech Republic	7.537	28.436	7.309	43.282	70,5	1.405	868	8.810	11.083	31,3	-74,4%
Denmark	0	0	7.420	7.420	23,4	1.015	1.703	8.236	10.954	30,5	47,6%
Germany	1.519	1.014	17.764	20.297	17,8	2.958	13.369	12.948	29.275	12,3	44,2%
Estonia	15	42	910	967	24,9	13	54	815	882	27,4	-8,8%
Ireland	636	3.617	1.555	5.808	20,1	426	2.387	2.326	5.139	14,0	-11,5%
Greece	0	13.345	2.264	15.609	38,6	0	0	2.190	2.190	9,8	-86,0%
Spain	4.204	15.702	76.413	96.319	24,1	2.775	1.361	38.737	42.873	22,6	-55,5%
France	732	3.768	17.284	21.784	11,5	288	3.265	15.875	19.428	8,8	-10,8%
Croatia	:	:	:	:	:	78	334	197	609	18,3	:
Italy	22.298	92.946	157.547	272.791	49,6	944	27.729	24.654	53.327	26,1	-80,5%
Cyprus	1.970	3.283	8.631	13.884	55,2	1.723	1.887	4.379	7.989	57,7	-42,5%
Latvia	492	1.105	226	1.823	23,7	19	933	19	971	9,9	-46,7%
Lithuania	1.033	804	2.303	4.140	78,1	59	437	4.304	4.800	66,2	15,9%
Luxembourg	:	:	:	:	:	40	592	333	965	22,5	:
Hungary	1.314	5.606	10.839	17.759	47,4	446	1.496	1.791	3.733	17,6	-79,0%
Malta	61	495	241	797	16,5	106	967	971	2.044	20,7	156,5%
Netherlands	0	11.613	0	11.613	18,6	912	1.819	9.049	11.780	16,9	1,4%
Austria	66	2.139	891	3.096	14,2	62	3.098	282	3.442	8,6	11,2%
Poland	0	0	18.653	18.653	45,6	94.712	108.227	3.340	206.279	58,0	1005,9%
Portugal	41	578	24.667	25.286	39,7	6	282	6.121	6.409	21,5	-74,7%
Romania	348	4.681	4.010	9.039	46,7	8	148	1.647	1.803	17,5	-80,1%
Slovenia	2.112	2.685	1.157	24.954	85,4	444	2.248	1.491	4.183	42,3	-83,2%
Slovakia	10	141	3.833	3.984	49,6	44	436	1.261	1.741	31,6	-56,3%
Finland	614	1.368	3.740	5.722	26,2	756	1.567	2.463	4.786	22,2	-16,4%
Sweden	6.696	3.105	4.458	14.259	16,9	4.169	2.928	7.760	14.857	13,8	4,2%
UK	0	0	139.733	139.733	22,1	28.899	28.091	59.717	116.707	20,6	-16,5%

(Source: EUROSTAT. Accessed: February 21, 2017)

sage” (Piore 1979) who would return to their native countries after their usefulness for the European labour markets ends, these programmes revealed these governments’ short-term and utilitarian view of immigration. The current increase in short-term permits for working purposes sponsored by several EU Member States seems to replicate that pattern, highlighting governments’ short-sightedness on the migration issue.

Furthermore, restrictions have been introduced on EU citizens’ right to move freely across Member States, on the basis of rhetoric about the presumed abuses of EU immigrants coming from countries with less developed welfare systems towards Member States with more social protection policies. For instance, in the spring of 2013, ministries in Germany, Austria, the Netherlands and the UK wrote a joint letter to the EU Council and Parliament warning them of the “considerable strain” (Barbulescu 2017: 24) their countries were subject to “by certain immigrants of other Member states” (*ibid.*), in relation to which they called for tougher controls, including repatriations and re-entry bans. Likewise, Belgium has intensified the number of expulsions of EU citizens, removing residence permits for ‘inactive EU citizens’, who are depicted as a burden on the social system (Lafleur, Stanek and Veira 2017). The Brexit referendum is probably the paradigmatic example of this restrictive turn against EU citizens’ mobility across Europe.

On the other hand, in Greece, Spain, Portugal, Italy, Romania and Hungary entries for working purposes have been drastically constrained, as Table 2 shows. In Greece, the issue of permits for work purposes decreased by 86% in the period 2008–2014. This extraordinary trend is replicated in Italy, Portugal, Romania and Hungary (around –80%) and, to a lesser extent, in Spain (–55%). In Italy, specifically, regular entrance for working purposes has become almost impossible, as shown by the reduction of entry quotas in the most recent Inflows Decrees (*Decreti flussi*). According to these Decrees, the number of entries allowed concerning nonseasonal working immigration went from almost 100,000 positions permitted in 2010 to 17,850 positions in 2016. Likewise, seasonal working immigration has been reduced from 80,000 positions in 2010 to 13,000 positions in 2015. This attempt to restrict (regular) immigration has come hand in hand not just with the economic crisis and the increasing rate of unemployment across the country. Rather, it is simultaneous with increasing arrivals of asylum-seekers since 2011, in particular from the Northern African coasts and especially from Libya.

In fact, along with high levels of immigrant unemployment and sluggish economic performances in countries such as Greece, Spain, Portugal, Italy, Romania and Hungary, it is worth noting that most of them constitute the external borders of the EU, facing the so-called ‘refugee crisis’ on

the front line. Indeed, considerations on the relationship between economic crisis and migration are further complicated when migration itself is depicted as a 'crisis'. As Castles and Kosack argued more than forty years ago, "by making immigrants the scapegoats for the insecurity and inadequate conditions which the capitalist system inevitably provides for workers, attention is diverted from the real causes" (Castles and Kosack 1972: 35). The following section will address this point.

### 3. THE REFUGEE CRISIS

The term 'refugee and migration crisis' is currently used to refer to the recent massive and unplanned 'mixed inflows' of both economic migrants from poor countries in Africa and asylum-seekers from unsafe countries in the Middle East – especially Syria and Iraq – and Afghanistan. According to Eurostat data, in 2015 EU Member States received over 1.2 million asylum applications, more than double the number of the previous year.<sup>1</sup> Germany, Hungary, Sweden and Austria received around two-thirds of the asylum applications presented in 2015, while Hungary, Sweden and Austria collected the highest number of applications per capita.<sup>2</sup>

However, if in 2015 the 'migration crisis' reached its peak, it is fair to say that Europe had already undergone several crises throughout the 2000s. This is the case of 2006 in Spain, when the irregular maritime inflows towards the Canary Islands reached a total of 31,678 people, 25,000 of whom arrived in the midst of the holiday season (González-Enriquez 2010); or of 2011 in Italy, when, after the collapse of the Tunisian and Libyan regimes, 64,271 migrants reached the shores of Lampedusa (Frontex 2015). Migration 'crises' therefore are anything but new in Europe, which might have led to calls for a comprehensive approach towards unplanned arrivals. Quite the contrary, however, the debate at the EU level seems to be stuck tenaciously to issues of security, inflow containment and border control.

This restrictive policy frame reflects the context into which the immigration and asylum issues entered in the EU policy agenda at the beginning

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<sup>1</sup> Data retrieved from Eurostat official website. Available at: <http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/en/web/products-press-releases/-/3-04032016-AP>. Release date: March 03, 2016 (accessed: March 7, 2017).

<sup>2</sup> According to the UNHCR (BERRY, GARCIA-BLANCO and MOORE 2015), the top three nationalities of the over one million arrivals between January 2015 and March 2016 were Syrian (46.7%), Afghan (20.9%) and Iraqi (9.4%). Of the refugees and migrants arriving in Europe by sea in 2015, 58% were men, 17% women and 25% children. See in particular: <http://data.unhcr.org/mediterranean/regional.php> (accessed: February 15, 2017).

of the 1990s. In this period, the ‘Schengen project’ was already underway,<sup>3</sup> aiming at establishing a common space for the free circulation of goods and of EC workers – later EU citizens – through the abolition of internal borders. This required ‘compensatory measures’ in the field of harmonisation of immigration and asylum policies (Guiraudon 2001), with the purpose of ensuring internal security. The Dublin Convention, signed on 15<sup>th</sup> June 1990 – and following Dublin Regulations approved in 2003 and 2013 – is key in this respect, since it covers issues of border controls, asylum and irregular migration. Under the Dublin system, the State of first entry of an asylum-seeker is responsible for examining his or her application.

The creation of a common asylum policy became even more urgent in the aftermath of the Balkan wars and the ensuing refugee crisis: Central and Northern Member States, Germany first among them, took the lead in pressuring Southern Member States to develop well-functioning asylum systems in order to ‘share the burden’ within the EU (Pastore and Roman 2014). In the period between 1995 and 2005 new policy measures were introduced to this end, which have recently been reformed. The pillars of what is currently called the Common European Asylum System (CEAS) are: the Dublin III Regulation adopted on 26<sup>th</sup> June 2013 (Regulation n. 604/2013), which establishes the criteria for determining the Member State responsible for examining an application for international protection; the Eurodac Regulation (Regulation n. 603/2013), regarding the identification – and therefore the fingerprinting – of international protection applicants; the Qualification Directive (Directive 2011/95/EU), providing standards for the qualification of third-country nationals or stateless persons as beneficiaries of international protection; the Procedures Directive (Directive 2013/32/EU), on common procedures for granting and withdrawing international protection; and the Reception Conditions Directive (Directive 2013/33/EU), laying down minimum standards for the reception of applicants of international protection.

Notwithstanding this flurry of policies, the main goal of the Dublin/Schengen system continues to be that of ensuring external border security and preventing the entrance of irregular migrants (Thielemann and Armstrong 2013: 149). This is indeed a difficult task, especially for those Member States which are on the external borders of the EU, *i.e.* Southern and Eastern European countries, which have to face migration inflows that originate from a multiplicity of factors, including humanitarian, politi-

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<sup>3</sup> The Schengen Treaty was initially signed by France, Germany and the Benelux countries in 1985, to be joined by other countries later, whereas the Schengen Convention was signed in 1990.

cal, economic and environmental ones. CEAS does not apply to economic migrants who seek unlawful entry, who should either be stopped before arriving or repatriated once they are caught in Europe. To control these 'unwanted' inflows, the EU and its Member States are *de facto* dependent on the agreements signed with transit countries and, therefore, on their weak and unstable political regimes. The 2004 agreements between Spain and Morocco, as well as the re-admission agreements signed by Spain with most West African sending countries between 2006 and 2008 (González-Enriquez 2010), have drastically reduced arrivals through the Western Mediterranean route, while the EU–Turkey Statement signed on March 18<sup>th</sup> 2016 has for the moment curtailed arrivals across the Aegean Sea. Nevertheless, the central Mediterranean route remains difficult to control, as admitted by the members of the European Council in the Malta Declaration of February 2017, because of the chaotic political situation in Libya. Yet, the priority remains that of (re)acquiring control over this main entrance way to Europe through collaboration with the – weak – government of Prime Minister Fayez al Sarraj backed by the United Nations.

This externalisation of border control has allowed the EU to keep its commitments to human rights and democratic values, while delegating to other, clearly non-democratic regimes, the 'dirty job' of constraining migrants' rights. However, in the midst of the current refugee and migration crisis, to regain control over migrants who have been able to arrive on European soil, the EU has introduced the so-called 'hotspot approach', highly criticised by international NGOs and accused of violating human rights. According to the European Agenda on Migration approved by the Commission in May 2015, hotspots are aimed at assisting frontline MS facing disproportionate migratory pressures at the EU's external borders to fulfil their obligations under EU law and swiftly identify, register and fingerprint incoming migrants (European Commission 2015). National officials are supported in their work by officials of the European Asylum Support Office (EASO), EU Policy Cooperation Agency (EuroPol) and EU Judicial Cooperation Agency (EuroJust). So far, hotspots have been implemented in Greece and Italy, but the European Commission states that 'other European countries can also benefit from the hotspot approach upon request' (*ibid.*). In concrete terms, hotspots are first reception centres which were already operating to assist migrants rescued at sea, and which currently also have the burden of screening them to identify those 'in clear need of international protection'.

Hotspots were presented by the Commission as a necessary measure in order to implement the relocation schemes approved by the European Council in September 2015 (Decision n. 2015/1523 of September 14<sup>th</sup> and n. 2015/1601 of September 22<sup>nd</sup>). According to these schemes, a total

of 160,000 ‘persons in clear need of international protection’ were to be relocated from Italy (24,000 according to the first relocation scheme plus 15,600 according to the second), Greece (16,000 plus 50,400) and Hungary (54,000 according to the second relocation scheme) over two years. At the same time, a resettlement scheme was proposed by the Commission in May 2015 and adopted by the Council in July aimed at providing to 22,000 asylum-seekers a legal and safe route to Europe directly from outside the EU. Furthermore, a resettlement scheme was also attached to the EU–Turkey Statement (see above), whereby for every Syrian returned to Turkey from the Greek islands another would be resettled in the EU directly from Turkey.

Whereas the resettlement schemes seem to have been largely implemented, since, according to the European Commission (2017), as of 27<sup>th</sup> February 2017 a total of 17,221 people have been resettled, the implementation of the relocation schemes is lagging behind and goals are far from being achieved. As of 28<sup>th</sup> February 2017, only 13,546 people had been relocated, of whom 3,936 were from Italy and 9,610 from Greece.

Two caveats account for this poor implementation: on the one hand, the relocation schemes rely upon Member States’ willingness to collaborate and take responsibility for a fair share of refugees; on the other, relocation applies only to applicants belonging to a nationality for which the proportion of decisions granting international protection taken at first instance is at least 75% or higher. These include Syrians, Eritreans, Iraqis and Afghans, while other groups have no chance of being added to the programme. Yet, according to IOM,<sup>4</sup> migrants who arrived on Italian shores in January 2017 originated from the Côte d’Ivoire, Guinea, Nigeria, Senegal and the Gambia; while in Greece migrants from Syria and Iraq are followed by other nationalities who have no access to relocation, like those from Algeria, the Republic of Congo and Kuwait.

The situation was similar in 2016, especially on the Western Mediterranean route, where the only nationality suitable for relocation was Eritrean. As a matter of fact, relocation schemes have not helped to significantly improve the distribution of migrants across Europe. In this context of political impasse, media coverage of fatalities and deaths in the Mediterranean has generated in the public opinion a heightened sense of a never-ending, epochal crisis, made worse by the perceived incapacity of the EU to adequately face the situation.

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<sup>4</sup> <http://migration.iom.int/europe/> (accessed: March 7, 2017).

#### 4. BEYOND THE CRISIS. RECONSTRUCTING EUROPE'S MIGRATION POLICIES

The refugee crisis can be considered the apex of a broader European 'migration crisis' that, as highlighted above, had already started in the early 2000s. On the one hand, in the context of the terrorists attacks at the beginning of the new century, integration has been *de facto* re-interpreted by Northern and Central European countries, and also later by EU institutions and Southern Member States like Italy and Spain, as a new barrier to migration (Joppke 2007; Caponio and Testore 2012). Pre-entry integration tests are a clear case in point, since according to these policies integration – i.e., a basic knowledge of the host country language and culture – is a pre-condition in order to obtain a visa and to migrate. On the other hand, the 2007 economic crisis has prompted all across Europe a tightening on new entries for work reasons. These parallel moves towards increasingly restrictive immigration policies, combined with the political crisis spurred by the Arab Spring in North Africa and the Middle East, as well as enhanced push factors in the migrants' areas of origin (especially in Africa), have conjured up a dramatic crisis which appears more and more uncontrollable.

Getting out of this situation is certainly not easy. The answers provided by the EU and individually by Member States appear inadequate, since they put a considerable burden on transit countries and contribute to the political legitimisation of those authoritarian regimes that, through disputable practices in terms of human rights, are willing or able to act as guardians of the EU's enlarged borders. The reconstruction of Europe and of its relations with current and past migrants requires in our view a change of perspective, from Europe as a continent *sièged* by migrants to Europe as a continent of immigration. To be achieved, this change calls for political action both from above, *i.e.* from the EU institutions in the first place, and from below, that is from civil societies and the populations that at a local level are confronted with the 'crisis'.

Regarding political action from above, thus far EU institutions have adopted a merely reactive attitude towards the unfolding of the crisis, aimed essentially at coping with loopholes in the Schengen/Dublin border control agreements, rather than proposing a consistent and comprehensive policy on migration and integration. The Commission's European Agenda on Migration of May 2015, notwithstanding its title, in fact just introduces disputable measures for facing the emergency, *i.e.* the hotspots, while the relocation agreements seem to have failed to build any real collaboration and solidarity among Member States. Relocations, even if assisted through the funding provided by the Asylum and Migrant Integration Fund (AMIF), are likely to be regarded by Member States' governments that are far from

the EU external border as a mere cost, especially in terms of electoral consensus. The lack of an official EU discourse on how immigration is part of European contemporary history and its identity as a space of ‘freedom and security’ is certainly not helping progressive political groups in the receiving societies, which are likely to face increasing xenophobic sentiments and opposition. Indeed, survey data show that in recent years public attitudes towards immigrants, asylum-seekers and ethnic minorities have increasingly worsened in Europe (Berry, Garcia-Blanco and Moore 2015; Caponio and Cappiali 2016).

Yet, while we can expect a reactive attitude on the part of the European Council, it being formed by the representatives of national governments, it is far less understandable with respect to the European Commission, which, as the supranational institution of the EU system, has usually shown a more forward-looking approach. The 2004 Common Basic Principles on Immigrant Integration are a clear case in point. As highlighted above, while incorporating the ‘civic integration’ trend promoted by most Northern European Member States, this document, which serves as the basis for EC funding on immigrant integration matters, still lists a full series of policies which encompass the various dimensions of immigrants’ integration, *i.e.* socio-economic, cultural and political integration. A particular emphasis is put on ‘interculture’ as a possible key to fostering immigrants’ participation in the receiving society and social inclusion. Yet this concept, while widely used by policymakers and practitioners dealing with immigrants especially at a local level, remains rather fuzzy and vague, without a broadly accepted definition and without concrete policy recommendations on how to implement it (for a discussion see: Zapata-Barrero 2016). This is even more the case with respect to the recent arrivals of mixed inflows: threats in terms of security have been over-emphasised, while the possible contribution of these new migrants to their receiving societies is completely neglected. Political and media discourses on uncontrolled masses of people willing to enter Europe at any cost no matter the risks to their lives do not help bring to the agenda the necessity of going ‘beyond the crisis’, or thinking about how to integrate those who remain in Europe notwithstanding the walls and barriers created throughout the 2000s. Hence, urgent political action from the EU is needed to put ‘intercultural integration’ at centre stage and to think of Europe as a continent built more and more by immigrants of diverse cultural backgrounds.

Regarding political action from below, in the midst of the crisis many civil society organisations and cities, often supported by transnational city networks like Eurocities and ECCAR (European Coalition of Cities Against Racism), have gotten directly involved in promoting integration processes and coping with continuous new arrivals (Caponio and Cappiali 2016).



However, it is fair to mention that opposition has also emerged: some cities have either attempted to limit their engagement with refugees to mere respect of their national obligations or have opposed hosting migrants altogether<sup>5</sup>. Hospitality is not the rule, especially when anti-immigrant political parties are in government or threaten mainstream ones at the local level (Lidén and Nyhlén 2015). There is an urgent need to better understand the conditions that can lead local societies either to oppose or to welcome migrants, and to look for national and supranational policies that can strengthen welcoming attitudes while softening negative ones. The link between the local and the EU level, frequently neglected from a political perspective still too often centred on national interests, might nevertheless turn out to be crucial in order to overcome the ‘crisis’ and construct more forward-looking European migration policies.

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<sup>5</sup> See for instance the final report of the conference: *Welcoming refugees. Local European experiences*, Norrköping, 25-27<sup>th</sup> January 2017, available on the website [www.welref17.se](http://www.welref17.se) (accessed: March 13, 2017).

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