

EU migration policies on the eve of the European Parliament elections

di Janina Maria Ochojska-Okońska

As Europe is increasingly becoming a “fortress”, the new EU Pact on Migration and Asylum fails in ensuring adequate protection to the life and fundamental rights of people who seek international protection.

I have been dealing with migration issues for many years, both from a practical and political perspective.

I would like to present some of my comments on the new Pact on Migration and Asylum that was adopted two days ago by European Parliament only thanks to abstentions, which were used by MEPs who did not agree with the text but wanted the pact to be adopted.

I believe that the provisions of the Pact do not protect human life and fundamental rights sufficiently well. Also, we have to take into account the safety of people who seek international protection or a better life.

Monitoring, guidance, and legal challenges will now be pivotal. The implementation should focus on longstanding compliance problems rather than border procedures. It is time to tackle: backlogs, appalling reception conditions, asylum lottery, neglect of procedural rights, etc.

The principal aims of a new pact on migration and asylum are:

1. to introduce a new border screening procedures;
2. to improve relocation procedures for vulnerable groups and people rescued at sea – solidarity aim;

3. to support other countries hosting refugees and fight migrant smuggling;
4. to insure a common and fast reaction to migration crisis.

Theoretically, they are the very good aims, but I believe that the weakest point of the Pact is the assumed solidarity of the member states and its flexibility. Unfortunately, member states are rejecting this solidarity, including my country. Poland explains that it accepted two million refugees from Ukraine, but that was two years ago and today these refugees are mainly in Germany, the Netherlands, Belgium, etc.

The assumptions of the idea of solidarity are:

1. relocation of recently-arrived persons;
2. reception of newcomers or return operations;
3. assistance in responding to specific migratory trends affecting Member States through cooperation with non-EU countries.

The last proposal is quite unclear to me in the light of activities outside the Pact leading to the externalization of migration proposed by the Commission that opened the way to the externalization of the granting of international protection and asylum.

Lately the European Union signed agreements with Tunisia and Egypt in which it committed to large financial support in exchange for its help in the fight against illegal migration to Europe.

However, the conclusion of this agreements aroused considerable controversy among European politicians. There are many accusations against Tunisia and Egypt as countries where there is a dictatorship and human rights are violated.

As a result of this agreements, the situation in southern Europe has not improved at all. An example is the Italian island of Lampedusa, where the number of illegal migrants has exceeded the number of inhabitants in recent days. So the question is whether the European Union should stick to an agreement that is expensive, controversial and doesn't work?

The migration crisis in southern Europe continues and is even intensifying, despite the agreement between the European Union and Tunisia or Egypt aimed at stopping the influx of illegal migrants.

You can see how weak the Pact is as the Commission has to rely on the regimes of Turkey, Tunisia, Libya and Egypt.

It seems that the much earlier experience with Turkey, which was supposed to stop the influx of Syrian refugees, did not teach the European Union anything. I was in Turkish camps in 2017 and knew the consequences of this agreement – refugees living in overcrowded centers or nesting in makeshift tents.

I think the reason for the recent deals is primarily to show before the European elections, that the governments of EU want to show how much they care about preventing the crisis.

Europe is becoming a fortress intended to protect us against the influx of migrants, although this protection is only apparent. From my experience, I know that people looking for security or better living conditions will conquer any fortress.

I believe in legal migration routes, in solidarity in sharing the wealth of European countries and in respecting human rights. I believe that the Pact should not only be based on the values that are fundamental for the existence of the EU but much more important that those rights should be respected.