

## ***Strategic Insight Breakfast Briefing***

### **Is Migration an Existential Threat to the European Union?**

4<sup>th</sup> May 2016

*Hosted by Salamanca Group*

On Wednesday 4<sup>th</sup> May, the European Leadership Network (ELN) and Salamanca Group co-hosted a meeting on the topic "*Is Migration an Existential Threat to the European Union?*", as part of the *Strategic Insight Breakfast* series. The event brought together senior diplomats, civil servants and members of the business community to discuss the implications of the refugee crisis which in 2015 alone brought more than a million people to Europe. Managing the huge numbers of migrants has highlighted the need for a comprehensive European strategy to deal with this issue.

The meeting was chaired by Dr Ian Kearns, the ELN's Director and co-founder. He opened the discussion by raising several questions about the preparedness of European institutions and governments and their ability to tackle the greatest humanitarian crisis of the century. He emphasised the severity of the problem and stressed that a common approach agreed and actioned by all member states is needed if the EU is to survive as a political project. Minister Tania von Uslar-Gleichen focused on Germany's approach to the migration crisis and addressed some of the key challenges the German government has faced in their effort to tackle the crisis. Mr Cem Işık talked about the impact of the migration crisis on Turkey and the challenges and opportunities of working with the European Union in devising a common strategy to address the issue. Finally, Mr Jonathan Portes shared his assessment of the impact of migration on Europe and offered some suggestions for improving the policies and instruments of both the EU and national governments to address the crisis.

The three speakers were in broad agreement that migration does not pose an existential crisis to the EU but noted that it represents a critical challenge for the future of the Union - both in terms of preserving the EU's values and principles, particularly solidarity, and with respect to the viability of the sharing arrangements

between member states. Although the speakers did not fully agree on the extent to which current mechanisms for tackling the crisis have been a success, they all highlighted need to share the burden fairly amongst EU members. There was also general agreement that efforts needed to be taken to resolve the Syrian conflict as one of the root causes of the crisis.

Another key point of the discussion was the 18<sup>th</sup> March refugee deal between the EU and Turkey. Although some participants questioned the compliance of some of the deal's provisions with international humanitarian law there was agreement that the deal had decreased the number of illegal persons crossing the Aegean. The visa liberalisation programme for Turkish citizens visiting Europe was also raised. There was some support for the programme with some arguing that the visa liberalisation programme should not be drawn into discussions over the refugee deal because differences over visa liberalisation should be dealt with in accession discussions, separate to managing the migrant issue which requires urgent action.

With respect to the difficulty in devising and implementing a common migration strategy one of the challenges identified during the course of the discussion was the need to draw up policies to allow for effective integration of migrants (culturally, socially and economically through the labour market). With insufficient integration programmes currently in place in most European states, several states have reverted to national measures to stem migration flows rather than working to find common European solutions. One such example is the reinstatement of border checks between Schengen countries.

To effectively address this crisis a number of issues need to be managed domestically, EU-wide, as well as internationally.

First, with respect to domestic priorities, the member states political leadership in must prevent nationalist and populist movements from 'hijacking' the crisis and address the growing concerns of local populations. Governments should review and enhance their integration policies to enable migrant populations to better assimilate into their countries.

Second, at the European level, EU institutions must update the tools and instruments at their disposal. Under the terms of the Dublin Regulation, asylum seeker application procedures must be mainstreamed and implemented to the same standard across the Union. Translating words of solidarity into practical actions with tangible results must be urgently pursued. Germany and Sweden have been leading by example by accepting the highest number of refugees. However, more assistance should be provided by the other members, particularly to the 'point-of-entry' countries.

Third, there should be further attempts to address the root causes of this problem. Above all, finding a way to manage and resolve the conflict in Syria should be a key priority. This is not an issue which can be handled by the EU alone and concerted international efforts are required.

For more information about this meeting, or on future ELN-Salamanca  
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