

“Immigration and Europe: Current Trends and Future Options”

Global Strategy Forum The National Liberal Club

Check speech against delivery

London, 17 October 2017

Ladies and Gentlemen, Distinguished Audience, Mr. Chairman,

ICMPD is a European organisation although we are working in many parts of the world and with many non-European partners. I will give my speech from what I would call a European perspective and will argue that this European perspective has to be most and foremost one of partnership. Our economic, social, geographical and political situation does not allow for an unlimited liberalisation of global mobility but also not for full restriction. What we need as Europeans is partnership on migration between sometimes quite different partners.

Let me start with some fundamentals: The main drivers of international migration are 1) war, civil war and conflict; 2) economic and wage disparities; 3) socio-economic development in the so called developing countries which enables more people than ever before to migrate; and 4) demographic imbalances that induce movements from poorer countries with young and growing populations to rich countries with old and declining ones. None of these factors will go away any time soon. On the contrary, they will become more significant. We do not have to worry about mass movements or catastrophic scenarios as our media constantly suggest, but we can definitely expect an increasing demand for migration.

Today, there are 244 million international migrants, representing 3.3 percent of the world population. There are more than 67 million refugees, displaced or internally displaced. Countries like Iran, Jordan, Lebanon, Libya, Pakistan or Turkey host between 700,000 up to 3 million refugees. The largest refugee camps, located in Kenya, Jordan or South Sudan host up to 200,000 persons. Many of them will stay there for long time periods, often without any perspective for gainful economic activity. More than 2.5 million persons have applied for asylum in the EU in 2015 and 2016. In 2017 we saw a significant reduction in numbers, but by September it was still almost 400,000 new applications for asylum. Thus, the distribution of refugees and asylum seekers was very uneven within the EU; with Germany, Sweden, Austria France and Italy hosting most of the asylum seekers. And although everybody in Europe knows and acknowledges that a number of non-European countries have a much heavier burden to shoulder than we do; this did not help European governments in convincing their populations to engage even more strongly on protection inside of Europe. Still, Europe has done a lot in terms of hosting millions of refugees and by proving hundreds of millions of Euros in supporting refugees outside Europe and the countries hosting them.

Of course Europe has not forgotten that despite the refugee crisis the majority of migration flows still refer to other types of movement. And with regard to those, public opinion and political responses seem to be divided more than ever before. The one side acknowledges the benefits of migration and the contributions made by migrants to economies in sending

and receiving countries. The other side sees migration as a threat to employment, wages, housing costs or national identity, regardless of whether such assumptions are based on facts or not. We all know that the outcome of the Brexit referendum was largely influenced by concerns related to migration, again regardless of whether they referred to refugees, non-EU migrants or EU citizens. The following elections in Europe swung in the other direction, gaining majorities for pro-European Union forces and their positions on freedom of movement within the EU. But in all honesty, it was a very close race in all those elections and the result could have been exactly the same as in the Brexit referendum. This would definitely put an end to the EU as we know it, and the future is anything but certain.

We can call it an irony of history, that European States question the existence of their main framework for partnership and cooperation because of migration; only to learn that they need exactly this formal cooperation to address their own domestic challenges. How should small States with small capacities establish functioning partnership with countries of origin and transit by themselves? How should States situated at Europe's Southern borders stem immigration flows on their own that would not simply stop just because there is no EU anymore? And how much more difficult would the establishment of a global regime be when Europe stops to contribute as a unified and financially capable partner? I think the answers to these questions are obvious and everything speaks for strong and unified action in Europe, including the United Kingdom.

We at ICMPD are convinced that Europe should fully support the New York Declaration of September 2016 and the process on developing the global compacts on migration and on refugees. The global compacts will not result in internationally binding norms. But they could indeed result in new and enduring structures of cooperation on migration and displacement. This could lead to a new culture of collective action among states, even when they have divergent preferences and interests. We should support this process simply because we will not be able to solve our European challenges without global solidarity, without global responsibility and without global migration management. Conversely, we also believe that without European support, resources and capacities it will be very difficult to translate into action what was concluded last September in New York.

The conviction that the New York Declaration and the global compacts are the way ahead for Europe and its non-European partners was also widely confirmed during the Vienna Migration Conference held by ICMPD in November last year. It will also feature prominently during the discussions of this year's conference which will take place next week. We know that we have to address the root causes for migration much, much better than we did in the past. Only then we can make migration a matter of choice rather than of necessity and build up confidence that migration can be managed in a truly beneficial way.

But how can we contribute to that aim? In short, we have to become better in three main areas; and those areas could be labelled as the "*three Ps*" – referring to *protection, prosperity and partnership*.

Let us start with protection. We know we must not mix up refugees and displacement with other types of migration. But we also know that sustainable solutions in the area of protection are a precondition for moving on in other areas of migration as well. Europe and the EU still struggle with some sort of agreement on solidarity and responsibility sharing. But there is still clear commitment to the Geneva Refugee Convention, to resettlement and to the continuation of the discussion on relocation within Europe. And nobody challenges the need to step up the support for the main refugee hosting countries and to work on creating

perspectives for refugees in those countries. The aim has to be “to bring jobs to the refugees rather than to bring refugees to the jobs”. We have to get serious about this approach.

The second “P” stands for prosperity. We all can agree that safe and orderly migration will only be possible if people are not forced to migrate but have migration as a choice among others in securing their livelihoods and fulfilling their ambitions. In order to achieve this, we need to create more prosperity. And for creating prosperity, we need policies that combine development cooperation, trade, vocational training, mobility, energy, security, institution and capacity building. We need to involve the private sector and increase the financial tools available. We need new initiatives that trigger private investments and tap into private sector know-how. And things are happening: The European Commission, for instance, has established a new External Investment Plan to promote sustainable growth and job creation in Africa. The Plan should focus on fragile states, follow a coherent approach, and go beyond classical development assistance by using guarantees to overcome private investment bottlenecks. We need more of this. And we should treat these policies also as an investment in new markets for our own goods and services. It would be wonderful to see economic cooperation that was rooted in migration related goals evolve to something much bigger, benefitting all partners and reducing global inequality at the same time.

When it comes to migration as such, we have to be aware of one aspect. Europe does not have large low wage labour markets; European labour markets are highly specialised, formalised and regulated. Today, there is a yawning mismatch between the formal skills requested on European labour markets and the former skills that many of prospective migrants from outside Europe have. This also implies that much of the needed foreign labour, just to take the care sector as an example, is pushed to the informal market resulting in unsafe, disorderly and irregular migration; exactly the opposite of what we want to achieve. But Europe will and should not lower its standards and requirements. The only chance is to enhance the skills of labour migrants on the basis of joint and mutually applied training standards as a pre-condition for labour migration to Europe. The British example has shown us though that even in the area of qualified labour migration we might have to apply control measures and have to strive for the acceptance of our voters.

But let’s take this is also a chance for our global cooperation on the compacts. The high standards place European workers among the most sought after in the world and make them an asset for the economy and prosperity in home and host countries. So why not take this very European feature of vocational training standards as Europe’s contribution to the migration compact? A global labour force, trained on basis of high and mutually acknowledged standards, will be in high demand pretty much everywhere and promote mobility much better than any good meaning policy could ever do.

This brings me to the third “P”, which is partnership. I think it is obvious to all of us that partnership is not something you preach, something you put in a paper, something you ask for when it suits you – partnership is something you have to practice and something you have to build. We should see partnership as a shared commitment, where all partners have rights and obligations, and where all partners are affected equally by the benefits and disadvantages arising from the partnership. I think the concepts that have emerged in Europe and on the global scale over the last two years reflect the notion of partnership a lot more than past attempts. I think there is a new seriousness and soberness when it comes to the necessity of investing in long-term partnership rather than cutting short-term deals.

But that is not the only partnership European governments have to build up or renew. European governments also have to renew the partnerships with their own voters. What happened in 2015 and 2016 led to a deep rift between European governments and populations as governments displayed their inability to control borders and steer entry of non-citizens which is a key state function. It went much deeper than the question whether European populations support the idea of providing protection to millions of refugees but shook the basic confidence that the leaders know what they are doing, that they know in which direction to go, and that they are on top of things. The leaders have to get on top of things again and global partnerships on migration will be necessary for that.

In view of what I have said, partnership will be one of the overriding themes of ICMPD's work in the years to come; partnership on migration of course, but also partnership within Europe, between Europe and its neighbours, between Europe and the global community and last but not least, between Europe and the European voters. We aim at supporting all our friends and partners in establishing these partnerships in the framework of our migration dialogues, in the research and policy work we do, in capacity building initiatives and hopefully also in their work on the global compacts.

Thank you very much.