

# Migration as a Factor of International Cooperation and Stability

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Internationally, migration can be, should be and already is, to a certain extent, a issue requiring cooperation and stability. The world is indeed 'flat': communications and freedom of movement multiply among a host of international actors that have torn apart the intergovernmental framework established three centuries ago with the Treaties of Westphalia, at the end of the internecine intra-European 'Thirty Years' War.

It could well be said that international relations have been democratized. Such a development implies benefits and drawbacks for all nations concerned, big and small. There are more states now than ever in the history of humanity. It is not the first time that the world has undergone a process of globalization: the Silk Route, the discovery of the Americas, the Enlightenment, trade expansion in the nineteenth century, colonization and decolonization are among the many different previous expressions of it. As on those occasions, the new situation has radically altered the signposts. It has spread a feeling of precariousness typical of every transitional period, which should not induce panic but instead indicate the urgent need for all to adapt.

Among the many new phenomena, migratory flows must be seen as both the cause and consequence of this global upheaval. In order to deal with every such critical situation, international relations must move on from *ad hoc* emergency responses to a cooperative management of the underlying causes. Migrations in particular must be considered not as a pathology, which they obviously become if left unattended, but instead as a physiological development, potentially beneficial to the individuals concerned and equally to the countries of origin, both in terms of relieving their demographic pressures and of obtaining much-needed financial remittances (which in some countries account for 70 per cent of the national revenue). Historically, Italy has acquired both a very wide experience and a special sensitivity in the matter.

In political terms as well, migrations have become one of the most relevant 'human security' issues that have come to the fore in recent times, requiring an array of cooperative methods. These are needed for various reasons: in order to move from bilateral relationships to a network of involvements, and from an economic and social approach to a more political one, which should combine the 'pull' and 'push' factors, stamping out the criminal connections that go with migration, in terms both of people smuggling and of straightforward trafficking of human beings. This latter situation is akin to the slave trade of yore. In my country, Lampedusa has long been witness to an unbearable constant stream of modern-day 'Rafts of the Medusa', so dramatically rendered by Géricault over a century ago. Over and above security considerations, it is therefore finally a matter of preserving human dignity.

Three million legal immigrants come annually into OECD countries (with fewer asylum seekers and more family reunions). Successive Interior Ministers have stated that, contrary to other European countries, Italy needs an inflow of unskilled labour: 2.6 million immigrants (1 million of whom are Muslim) already reside legally with us, accounting for 5 per cent of our population, 6.1 per cent of our GNP and 2 billion Euros of remittances to their countries of origin.

Nationally, improved integration and intercultural dialogue must counterbalance the instinct of self-segregation and separation, which our open and pluralistic societies do not justify, and the eventual naturalization process excludes. True, our welfare states are less generous than in the past, but the resulting additional effort is required from every individual citizen, both current and would-be. Every immigrant must be encouraged not to assimilate and thereby lose their national identity, but to integrate in the new social environment, which does not imply cutting ties with their country of origin, on the contrary. For over a century, Italian immigration to the four corners of the world has shown the way. As Ernest Renan said in those days, all that is required is a will to live together.

Internationally, multilateralism must provide the broader framework in which to insert bilateral cooperative agreements. Partnership is the buzzword used nowadays to indicate the usefulness of sharing responsibilities, tasks and benefits, while protecting in the process individual national interests. International organizations such as the International Organisation for Migration (IOM), the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) and the United Nations as a whole with the 'high-level dialogue on migrations' launched in September 2006, provide the general framework. Among Mediterranean countries, the 5+5<sup>1</sup> and the Mediterranean Forum<sup>2</sup> contexts are finding their way, supplementing the Euro-Mediterranean

'Barcelona process',<sup>3</sup> which can and must proceed on specific issues, such as the implications of migratory flows, even when (especially whenever) its comprehensive political outer shell tends to falter.

The European Union has clearly restated its political intentions, by including its Mediterranean partners in its 'neighbourhood policy', and most recently by giving it further substance with the Rabat ministerial conference held on 10 and 11 July 2006 and the Tripoli Summit of 22 and 23 November 2006, dedicated to migration issues. The joint involvement of the countries of origin, transit and destination that resulted from these gatherings have put their management on a new footing, addressing at the same time the causes and consequences of migratory flows, addressing comprehensively and coherently (in a 'global approach', as has been stated) their economic development, social integration and law enforcement aspects.

The Tripoli meeting, resulting from a persistent Italian initiative, proved ground-breaking in that respect. Its conclusions should now constitute the much-needed essential common terms of reference for all countries concerned.

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## NOTES

- 1 The 5+5 is an informal western Mediterranean cooperative group of the Ministries of the Interior of France, Italy, Malta, Spain, Portugal, as well as Algeria, Libya, Morocco, Mauritania and Tunisia.
- 2 The Mediterranean Forum includes additionally Egypt, Greece and Turkey for informal political consultations supportive of the Euro-Mediterranean (that is, 'Barcelona') process (see n. 3 below).
- 3 The Euro-Mediterranean Conference of Ministers of Foreign Affairs, held in Barcelona on 27–28 November 1995, marked the starting-point of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership ('Barcelona Process'), a wide framework of political, economic and social relations between the member states of the European Union and partners of the southern Mediterranean.