



BRUSSELS  
SCHOOL OF  
GOVERNANCE

# ECONDIS STUDENT PAPER SERIES

**2022**

INSTRUCTOR:

Prof. Dr. Sven Van Kerckhoven

TITLE OF PAPER:

Migration or integration crisis?

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This paper series consists of student papers drafted in the framework of the course ECN202: The European Economy, offered at the Brussels School of Governance.

The course is offered with the support of the Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency of the European Commission as a Jean Monnet Module, entitled 'ECONDIS: The Economics of European (Dis) Integration' under the Grant Decision No. 2019-1814/001-001.

### **Other academic publications originating from the project are:**

Van Kerckhoven, S. (2021). Post-Brexit Leadership in European Finance, Politics and Governance, 9(1), pp. 59-68.

Van Kerckhoven, S. and Odermatt, J. (2021). Euro clearing after Brexit: shifting locations and oversight, Journal of Financial Regulation and Compliance, 29(2), pp.187-201.

Van Kerckhoven, S. (2021). The impact of Brexit on the European single financial market, Brexit Institute News, Dublin City University Brexit Institute, 27 April 2021, available at:

<http://dcubrexitinstitute.eu/2021/04/the-impact-of-brexit-on-the-european-single-financial-market/>

Van Kerckhoven, S. (2021). Brexit heralds a bleak future for the City of London, LSE Brexit Blog, 3 March 2021; available at:

<https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/brexit/2021/03/03/brexit-heralds-a-bleak-future-for-the-city-of-london/>

Co-funded by the  
Erasmus+ Programme  
of the European Union



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The European Economy

Policy Paper: *Migration or integration crisis?*

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## Introduction

The issue of free movement and mobility in the European Union - EU - is an immediate antecedent of the lack of solidarity among EU countries in the management of the 2015 migration crisis. Some measures presented in this context by the European Commission in 2016, highlighted the tensions generated in the search for agreements among Member States - MS -, and their lack of solidarity and responsibility in the common migration policy. The long-term disagreements between the member states of the Union make us reflect on the extent to which national sovereignty and the lack of solidarity of the member states can condition the model of migration management proposed in the EU. In contrast, the security aspects and the fight against illegal immigration, based on the control and expulsion of illegal migrants from EU territory, seem to be the only measures on which the Member States agree without major discrepancies. The management of the refugee crisis has generated a far-reaching debate among EU Member States and institutions on what is the appropriate migration policy and what responsibility member states have in its implementation.

This lack of agreement, together with the lack of solidarity of the member states in the common migration policy, contradicts the desire to increase solidarity between their peoples indicated in the signing of the Treaty of the European Union and leaves us with a question for reflection: *Is the 2015 migration crisis rather an integration crisis in the European Union?*

## 1. Migration situation in Europe

According to data from the European Parliament, more than one million migrants and asylum seekers arrived in Europe in 2015<sup>1</sup>. Most of whom were fleeing the armed conflict in Syria, in search of refuge and protection<sup>2</sup>. Such a situation triggered an EU response of increased security at external borders and the involvement of third states through readmission and cooperation

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<sup>1</sup> "Asylum and Migration in the EU: facts and figures," News, European Parliament, last modified July 29, 2021, <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/en/headlines/society/20170629STO78630/asylum-and-migration-in-the-eu-facts-and-figures>.

<sup>2</sup> "Exploring migration causes – why people migrate," News, European Parliament, last modified October 30, 2020, <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/en/headlines/world/20200624STO81906/exploring-migration-causes-why-people-migrate>.

agreements to control and prevent the entry of irregular migrants into the Union. The European Commission proposed several emergency measures to relocate asylum seekers arriving in frontline countries and a European Agenda on Migration<sup>3</sup> which set out measures to address irregular migration flows on European territory. The management of the migration or refugee crisis was, from the outset, focused on the protection of the citizens that make up the common European area through the fight against irregular immigration - from an access control perspective - at external borders to prevent the entry of irregular migrants and the expulsion of an illegal immigrant from Community territory.

Recurrently in EU discourses, we find references to the importance of reducing incentives for irregular immigration<sup>4</sup>. This is understood as improving the return policies' effectiveness to realise effective returns of illegal migrants to their countries of origin, dismantling human smuggling and trafficking networks, and working with partner countries to understand the reasons why migrants decide to come to Europe<sup>5</sup>.

Reducing incentives for irregular migration is the first of the four pillars presented in the European Agenda on Migration<sup>6</sup>, which includes the effective return of migrants as a way to improve migration management in the EU. The Agenda highlights that one of the incentives for irregular migration is the certainty that the return of migrants works imperfectly, with only 39.2%<sup>7</sup> of return decisions issued being expelled. Thus, following the 2015 migration crisis, the European Commission proposed a series of recommendations to effectively implement the return of migrants. In March 2017, the European Commission presented a Renewed Action Plan<sup>8</sup> for an effective return policy in the Union. This encouraged EU countries to increase the removal of migrants as a measure to remove incentives for illegal immigration. In 2018 the conclusions of the European Council's

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<sup>3</sup> European Commission, "Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions: a European Agenda on Migration," *COM(2015) 240 final* (May 13): 2.

<sup>4</sup> Claudia Anamaria Iov and Maria Claudia Bogdan. "Securitization of Migration in the European Union: Between Discourse and Practical action." *Research & Science Today* 1, no. 13 (2017): 7.

<sup>5</sup> Iov and Bogdan, "Securitization," 7-8.

<sup>6</sup> European Commission, "Communication, 2015," 1.

<sup>7</sup> European Commission, "Communication, 2015," 9.

<sup>8</sup> European Commission, "Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament and the Council on a More Effective Return Policy in the European Union - a Renewed Action Plan," *COM(2017) 200 final* (March 2): 2.

migration summit<sup>9</sup> highlighted the increased return of irregular migrants and effective control at external borders, together with greater external action on migration, as the objective to be met in reducing illegal migration in the EU.

The European experience has proven that expelling a person from European territory is not always easy, as it is necessary for the cooperation of the returnees' countries of origin. There must be a prior repatriation agreement signed between the EU and the expelled person's country of origin or transit, and these agreements do not always exist. It is thus easier to prevent these person's entry than to expel them after they have been residing in the EU. Since the migration crisis of 2015, external borders security strengthening has accompanied the external dimension of migration policy and the increase in cooperation and readmission agreements<sup>10</sup> with countries of origin and transit of migrants, to prevent irregular entries and facilitate the expulsion of migrants in an illegal administrative situation within the EU. These agreements with third countries are aimed at preventing the entry of irregular migrants and carrying out an effective return of those who are not legally resident in the territory.

Such external dimension of migration policy is based on the Global Approach to Migration and Mobility<sup>11</sup>. The latter establishes a general framework for EU relations with third countries, based on four pillars: legal immigration and mobility, irregular immigration and trafficking in human beings, international protection and asylum policy. A global perspective on migration is oriented almost exclusively towards controlling borders to prevent irregular entries and deporting people who are residing in an irregular administrative situation on European Community soil. This external dimension of migration policy through migrant readmission agreements and close cooperation with countries of origin and transit of migrants has been intensified since the Stockholm Programme<sup>12</sup> as a fundamental measure in the fight against illegal immigration within the framework of the global approach in which migration policy is managed.

This restrictive approach to migration aimed at preventing the entry and return of migrants in an irregular administrative situation in the EU has led to extensive deployment of security and control

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<sup>9</sup> European Council, "European Council meeting (28 June 2018) – Conclusion," EUCO 9/18 (June 28): 3.

<sup>10</sup>Anna Triandafyllidou and Maria Ilies. "EU irregular migration policies," *Irregular Migration in Europe*, (Mai 2016): 49. (43-60)

<sup>11</sup> James Hampshire, "Speaking with one voice? The European Union's global approach to migration and mobility and the limits of international migration cooperation." *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 42, no. 4 (2016): 573.

<sup>12</sup> Christian Kaunert and Léonard Sarah, "The European Union asylum policy after the Treaty of Lisbon and the Stockholm Programme: towards supranational governance in a common area of protection?," *Refugee Survey Quarterly* 31, no. 4 (2012): 4.

measures at the Union's external borders. The incorporation in the last five years of a 'smart border' system with modern technological systems to identify persons entering EU soil, the transformation of Frontex into the new European Border and Coast Guard Agency, the creation of a European Travel Information and Authorisation System and the establishment in 2015 of Hotspots in frontline countries are evidence of the rigidity and increased security in the management of external borders, as a priority measure in the fight against illegal immigration<sup>13</sup>.

## 2. National sovereignty and European integration

The first measures taken by European institutions, after the arrival of a large number of migrants and refugees in the European Union in 2015, were focused on organising migratory flows and containing irregular migration<sup>14</sup>. The new European Border and Coast Guard Agency, as an illustration of the aforementioned, was created to reinforce Frontex and the EU-Turkey Joint Action Plan<sup>15</sup>, an agreement aimed at reinforcing border controls in Turkey to prevent the departure of migrants to the EU, as well as a commitment to readmit Syrian refugees or migrants irregularly arriving in Greece from Turkey. In addition, in the framework of managing the refugee crisis, the European Commission proposed measures for immediate implementation, including the emergency relocation mechanism to relieve frontline countries that received the highest number of migrants<sup>16</sup>, and the proposal in 2016 to reform the CEAS<sup>17</sup>, including seven interlinked legislative proposals: reception conditions, asylum requirements and agency, biometric database, the Dublin system and asylum procedure, amongst others. But the Member States implemented the responses to these measures haphazardly<sup>18</sup>. Moreover, while the budget increase these measures required for security strengthening and curbing migration arrivals in the EU were approved without hesitation, refugee

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<sup>13</sup> Sabine Hess and Kasperek Bernd, "Under control? Or border (as) conflict: Reflections on the European border regime." *Social Inclusion* 5, no. 3 (2017): 60. 58-68.

<sup>14</sup> Elspeth Guild, Cathryn Costello, Madeline Garlick, and Violeta Moreno-Lax. *The 2015 refugee crisis in the European Union*. Brussels: Centre for European Policy Studies, 2015, 15.

<sup>15</sup> Iov and Bogdan, "Securitization," 12.

<sup>16</sup> such as Greece or Italy  
Hess and Kasperek, "Under Control?" 61-62.

<sup>17</sup> European Commission, "Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament and the Council: Towards a Reform of the Common European Asylum System and Enhancing Legal Avenues to Europe," *COM(2016) 197 final* (April 2016): 4.

<sup>18</sup> Triandafyllidou and Ilies. "EU irregular migration policies," 54.

relocation, reform of the CEAS and the Schengen area of free movement preservation were unspoken or left aside<sup>19</sup>.

The EU-Turkey agreement is worth mentioning here. Initially funded with €3 billion from the EU and member states' budget, rapidly admitted, with the increase of a second additional €3 billion in 2018<sup>20</sup>. This agreement turned migrants and refugees geopolitically into a bargaining chip through an agreement on the retention and admission of deportees in exchange for money and demonstrated the EU's non-compliance with the Convention relating to the Status of Refugees of 1951 by proposing in the agreement a measure of non-refoulement of migrants in which refugees' rights to assistance and protection are violated<sup>21</sup>. Similarly, the creation of the new European Border and Coast Guard Agency to increase security at external borders and speed up the processes of the expulsion of irregular migrants in the EU was swiftly approved<sup>22</sup>.

The emergency refugees relocation mechanisms between member states' decisions were assessed with a relocation quota estimated according to the average rate threshold of each EU Member State<sup>23</sup>. The aim was to guarantee persons in need of international protection could enjoy their rights in the country where they would be resettled. However, not all member states complied with the migrant quota set by the EU and others even refused to take in refugees<sup>24</sup>. Such obligation was explained by the solidarity principle and aimed at acquiring a fair sharing of responsibility in terms of asylum, border controls and migration policies<sup>25</sup>. But, the member states who refused to take in the allocated number of refugees showed to be against said values of responsibility and solidarity between states and violated some fundamental provisions that were supporting the migration policy<sup>26</sup>. In addition, some measures set in place by the Member States under the appearance of public security defence and Territory threat, such as - but not exclusively - border controls, questioned the viability of the Schengen free-movement area. Consequently, such countries

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<sup>19</sup> Guid et al. "The 2015,".

<sup>20</sup> European Council, "European Council meeting (18 October 2018) – Conclusion," EUCO 13/18 (October 18): 3.

<sup>21</sup> Gerda Heck and Sabine Hess, "Tracing the effects of the EU-Turkey Deal," *Movements. Journal for Critical Migration and Border Regime Studies* 3, no. 2 (2017): 37-38

<sup>22</sup> Hess and Kasperek, "Under control?" 63.

<sup>23</sup> Felix Biermann, Nina Guérin, Stefan Jagdhuber, Berthold Rittberger, and Moritz Weiss. "Political (non-) reform in the euro crisis and the refugee crisis: a liberal intergovernmentalist explanation." *Journal of European Public Policy* 26, no. 2 (2019): 248.

<sup>24</sup> This includes the Czech Republic, Hungary and Poland. Those countries had, for this reason, to go through an infringement procedure from the European Commission.  
Neža Kogovšek Šalamon, "The principle of solidarity in asylum and migration within the context of the European Union accession process." *Maastricht Journal of European and Comparative Law* 24, no. 5 (2017): 690-9.

<sup>25</sup> Šalamon, "The principle of solidarity," 688-689.

<sup>26</sup> Biermann, et al., "Political (non-) reform," 252.

demonstrated to prioritise the sovereignty of their country over the EU's aim of supranationality. At least when it came to solving common European issues such as Migratory policies<sup>27</sup>.

Therefore, we can state that the migration and refugee crisis taking place in Europe has shown a deficiency in the EU's solidarity responsibility of the member states in meeting the refugee relocation quota and reaching an agreement to improve the distribution of asylum applications, together with an asylum procedure common to all states. A lack of interest in resolving common migration policy issues that affect migrants first and foremost, and in turn demonstrates the crisis of integration and governance in the EU, present since the beginning of the European integration project.

### 3. European disintegration

The European Integration was marked by a rather rapid consensus among the Union's Member States since the beginning of the Treaties of Rome on topics such as trade and monetary interests. The aforementioned gave rise to the European Economic Community - EEC -. But also, and more recently, the European Green Deal project together with an exhaustive list of funds, policies and regulations. However, these member states have not been so confident in their decision-making in fields such as political integration. Several precedents illustrate this such as the 1950s failed project of the European Defence Community<sup>28</sup> or the next decade intergovernmental commission attempt that aimed at presenting the Member States with a project for political unity while respecting the identity of each country. What characterises such years is a prevailing disagreement which culminated with a political crisis of the empty chair in 1965<sup>29</sup>. The crisis was caused by the change in voting methods in the Council, where a qualified majority replaced unanimity voting in certain areas. This led France to withdraw from Community meetings. Thus, in the absence of political unification between the Member States, the European Political Cooperation was called for in 1970, extended a few years later in the soon to become Single European Act of 1986<sup>30</sup>. That Act, which

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<sup>27</sup> Dogachan, Dagi. "EU's refugee crisis: from supra-nationalism to nationalism?." *Journal of Liberty and International Affairs* 3, no. 03 (2018): 10.

<sup>28</sup> Douglas Webber, "How likely is it that the European Union will disintegrate? A critical analysis of competing for theoretical perspectives." *European Journal of International Relations* 20, no. 2 (2014): 343.

<sup>29</sup> Douglas Webber. *European disintegration?: the politics of crisis in the European Union*. Macmillan International Higher Education, 2018.

<sup>30</sup> Webber, "How likely is it, "346.

amended the Treaty of Rome, provided for the extension of the Union's competencies through the creation of an Internal Market and the recognition of new competencies in various fields, including monetary policy, environment and foreign policy cooperation as well as economic and social cohesion. One of the greatest triumphs of in-between states integration also occurred during these years, in the process of European construction. The right of free movement and residence of persons within the EU was initiated in 1985 with the Schengen Treaty. The creation of this area of free movement was initially signed by France, Germany, Belgium, Luxembourg and the Netherlands, and is one of the pillars of the European project. This creation was accompanied by a debate regarding the concept of free movement of persons, between those states that agreed on the application only for citizens of European territory. This implied internal border controls. But also those that advocated the free movement of persons and the total suppression of borders in Schengen. The Schengen Agreement entered into force in 1995 and was integrated into EU law in the Treaty of Amsterdam in 1997<sup>31</sup>.

Two years later, the Presidency Conclusions of the Tampere European Council reported on the achievements of the single market, monetary union and the capacity to take on political challenges, so far in the shared space of the Union, pointing to the importance of the creation of a common European asylum system by the Member States working together. According to it, a common asylum system should include common standards for all states on the reception procedure for asylum seekers, as well as common forms of subsidiary protection for all persons in need and a comprehensive approach to migration oriented towards human rights and development in the countries of origin and transit of migrants<sup>32</sup>

Later, in the Hague Programme, the continuity of this common policy based on solidarity and fair sharing of responsibilities between the Member States was pointed out to establish a common asylum procedure in the EU<sup>33</sup>. This led to the common provisions for close cooperation between the Member States as set out in the Lisbon Treaty on border control, asylum and immigration in the framework of a common migration policy<sup>34</sup>. One year after the entry into force of the TFEU, paragraph 6.1 of the Stockholm Programme reiterated the need for migration policy to form part of the EU's foreign policy within the framework of the global approach to migration and cooperation

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<sup>31</sup> Eleina Danescu, Robert Goebbels, Martina Kneip, and Joana Da Silva. "The origins of the Schengen Area-historical scrutiny." (2020).

<sup>32</sup> Conclusions, Presidency. "Tampere European Council." *Council of the European Union* (1999).

<sup>33</sup> European Union, "The Hague Programme: Strengthening Freedom, Security and Justice in the European Union", (December 13).

<sup>34</sup> De Witte, Bruno. "The Lisbon Treaty and National Constitutions More or Less Europeanisation?." *The Lisbon Treaty and National Constitutions* (2008): 25.

with third countries in fighting against irregular immigration. This marks the start of the development of readmission and cooperation agreements with third countries in the field of the fight against irregular immigration and the protection of EU citizens in the EU area of freedom, security and justice<sup>35</sup>.

To summarize the above, we can say that border control and the management of migratory flows in the EU, within the framework of the area of freedom, security and justice, is a joint commitment of the Member States and the EU institutions, based on the principle of solidarity between States and the equitable sharing of responsibility, also in financial matters. Both the migration issue and external action are areas of action that fall within the national sovereignty of the states, which has led to disputes arising from the determination of shared competence in the area of freedom, security and justice and the fight against irregular immigration since the entry into force of the Treaty of Lisbon. The voluntary transfer of sovereignty from the Member States to the European institutions, to pursue common interests in the field of migration policy, is not an easily digestible issue, often causing delays in the approval of measures in the field of migration. A question of national sovereignty of states, which has been diminished since the Treaty of Lisbon, in which legal acts relating to the area of freedom, security and justice are now subject to the intergovernmental procedure since it ceased to be of an intergovernmental nature. Now, they are subject to the ordinary legislative procedure of qualified majority voting and co-decision. This change in decision-making confers new shared competencies on the Union, among which the area of external relations and migration<sup>10</sup> stands out. It is also in this Treaty that legal personality is granted to the EU, which is empowered to sign international agreements in areas of shared competence, such as migration.

Although the Treaty of Amsterdam granted competencies to the European Community in matters related to border control and irregular immigration, never until the entry into force of the Treaty of Lisbon had the EU had the official competence to develop a foreign policy action such as the signing of readmission agreements with third countries in migratory matters, including the expulsion and repatriation of persons in an irregular administrative situation. In this sense, both foreign relations and migration, which are closely linked to state sovereignty, have been conditioned by the voluntary transfer of the exercise of power from states to European institutions. Although since the beginning of the EU integration project, at the time when it was still the European Community, the member states have granted the institutions of the Union the power to relate to

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<sup>35</sup> European Commission, "Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament and the Council: Evaluation of EU Readmission Agreements" *COM(2011) 76 final* (February 23): 6.

other subjects of international law in certain political spheres. The transfer of powers has not been an easy task, as demonstrated by the shared competencies in the institutional framework of migration policy and external action in the EU's founding treaties. A common foreign policy has become necessary since the establishment of the area of freedom, security and justice and the management of the EU's external borders by the member states, in the absence of border controls in the European internal space.

## Final reflections

The management of the EU's migration policy is focused on controlling external borders to prevent the entry of irregular migrants, conditions of stay in European territory and the expulsion of those who are residing illegally or who do not meet the conditions for asylum applications to obtain refugee status. A migration policy is structured in parallel, where the rights of third-country nationals residing legally in the EU are specified on one side. And on the other, return and expulsion guidelines are implemented for migrants residing illegally in the EU.

In addition to this, the EU's institutional discourse has negative connotations in the identification of irregular migrants as a threat to the welfare and security of EU citizens, in the context of the fight against illegal immigration. European migration policy stands out for its manifest emphasis on otherness as defined by the construction of the category of migrants based on their identity, which relies on the euphemism of third-country nationals to refer to foreigners from outside the EU. A migration policy management has generally led to a loss of rights for migrants, where the only measures that seem to be approved without objection among member states are those related to increased security, control and expulsion of irregular migrants from European territory. One that defines success numerically, both in terms of accounting for the reduction of arrivals and the expulsion of irregular migrants from EU territory, and in terms of the increase in migratory readmission agreements and cooperation with third countries in the fight against irregular immigration.

The supposed harmonisation of migration policy within the framework of the integration of the European project is not precisely common immigration and asylum policy. Rather, the Europeanisation of public migration policy is still in the process of formation, especially concerning the integration of immigrants. Thus, the field of integration of legal migrants remains in the realm of state sovereignty, with the EU limiting itself to setting policy priorities and measures to assist governments, without interfering in their national laws. A lack of common guidelines for member

states in the fundamental area of migrant integration contrasts with the raft of common policies for the control, persecution and forced return of irregular migrants in the EU.

Many years have passed since the Hague and Stockholm Programme. But the common asylum procedure proposed in the Tampere Programme is still waiting for the Member States to reach an agreement and approve the measures to reform the Common European Asylum System, among other measures, to achieve a common asylum system, where the rights and dignity of people who come to the EU in search of international protection are respected. All of the above proposals require greater cooperation from the member states, and are governed by the principle of solidarity and fair sharing of responsibility in the framework of policies on border control, asylum and immigration. Given that both migration and external action are areas of action that fall within the national sovereignty of states, the shared competence of member states and European institutions in this area leads to controversy in every EU decision.

Undoubtedly, it is the lack of solidarity that prevails over individual interests and the reluctance of member states to cede sovereignty - even when common interests require it - that has been the trigger for the problematic management of migration issues in the EU and the main reason why member states have not reached an agreement on what the Common European Asylum System should look like as part of a successful EU migration policy.

This principle of solidarity is taken as the cornerstone of decision-making to reach an agreement between states, stipulated in EU integration itself. Thus we can affirm we are facing a European integration crisis and not a migration crisis in the EU. A crisis of European integration that dates back to the very origins of the European continent's integration project and that puts individual interests above common interests that have little to do with the strengthening of solidarity in Europe, which supposedly inspired the signing of the TEU thirty years ago, in 1992.

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