Common immigration policy for Europe: principles, actions and tools

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The Committee on Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs adopted the own-initiative report drawn up by Simon BUSUTTIL (EPP-ED, MT) on a Common Immigration Policy for Europe (principles, actions and tools), **strongly supporting the establishment of a common European immigration policy** founded on a high level of political and operational solidarity, mutual trust, transparency, partnership, shared responsibility and joint efforts through common principles and concrete actions, as well as on the values –enshrined in the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union.

General considerations: MEPs reiterate that the management of migration flows must be based on a coordinated approach, taking into account the demographic and economic situation of the EU and its Member States. They therefore regret that, so far, too little has been done to establish a common legal immigration policy. According to MEPs, a common immigration policy must be flanked with an effective policy for the development of the countries of origin and requires the establishment of a common asylum policy. Moreover, MEPs note that **immigration into the EU is not the solution** to overcome the challenges faced by developing countries.

In addition to these general consideration, MEPs make the following points:

Prosperity and immigration: several points are covered in this area, including the following issues:

- **legal migration**: according to MEPs; legal migration continues to be necessary in order to address Europe's demographic, labour market and skills needs owing to the effect of demographic decline and ageing on the economy. Moreover, **regular migration must be the alternative to irregular immigration**. In this context, MEPs support the development of national "Immigration Profiles", with labour market needs being a central aspect of these profiles, while avoiding the brain drain in countries of origin. MEPs call on the Commission and Member States to develop mechanisms, guidelines and other tools to facilitate circular and temporary migration as well as measures, in cooperation with the countries of origin, to offset the loss of human resources, offering concrete support for the training of professionals in key sectors. They also call for measures for the integration of legally staying third-country nationals by providing them with opportunities to learn the language of the host country and by giving them an improved ability to support their children's development. Moreover, immigrants from so-called third countries should be granted the right to mobility within the EU when legally resident in a Member State ;
- **integration**: according to MEPs, integration should be based on social inclusion, anti-discrimination, equal opportunities, namely through the possibility of access to health, education, language training and employment. While they support integration efforts by the Member States as well as by regular migrants, MEPs consider that further progress is needed to promote the adjustment of the immigrants as well as the host population. According to MEPs, a good integration process is the best tool to eliminate mistrust and suspicion between native citizens and migrants and is fundamental to removing any xenophobic ideas or actions. They encourage the development of mutual learning mechanisms and the exchange of best practice between Member States as well as the inclusion of migrants in their own integration process. MEPs call on the Member States to **provide migrants with the opportunity to vote in local elections**. They also call for financial support for the structural and cultural integration of immigrants (for example, via programmes in the field of education). They call for other measures to combat discrimination and to promote the **integration of immigrant women** into the host society.

Security and immigration: MEPs note the problem of border management and make the following points:

- **integrated border management**: MEPs stress the need for a comprehensive master plan setting out the overall objectives and architecture of the EU's border management strategy. The architecture should include an analysis of the effectiveness of the existing border management systems of the Member States. MEPs stress, however, that integrated border management should strike the right balance between ensuring the free movement of a growing number of people across borders and ensuring greater security for EU-citizens. They therefore call for an assessment on the feasibility of an integrated four-tier approach, whereby checks would be carried out systematically at each stage when immigrants are travelling to the Union. MEPs propose, in particular, the replacement of current national Schengen visas with **uniform European Schengen visas**, allowing for equal treatment of all visa applicants. They also call on the Council to adopt arrangements based on solidarity among Member States with a view to sharing the burdens arising from border policing and to coordinate the Member States' national policies;
- **irregular migration**: MEPs consider effective **combating of irregular immigration** as a crucial part of a comprehensive EU migration policy. They therefore regret that effective decision-making in this field is hamstrung by the insufficient ability of the Member States to really work together. MEPs express their shock at the human tragedy that is caused by illegal migratory sea routes and call for urgent action to **stop this human tragedy** once and for all and to reinforce dialogue and cooperation with the countries of origin. Recalling that irregular immigration is often operated by criminal networks, MEPs stress that Member States have a shared responsibility to save lives at sea. Therefore, efforts must be redoubled in the fight against organised crime, human trafficking and smuggling at EU level. MEPs also consider it is essential establish **cooperation agreements** with the countries of origin. MEPs also call for the reinforcement of the mandate of FRONTEX in order to extend its coordination capacity and its ability to coordinate permanent missions in areas which face high migratory pressures. Emphasis should also be placed on increasing FRONTEX's risk analysis and intelligence gathering capacity. MEPs support, in particular, the establishment of specialised FRONTEX offices to better assess the specific situations at maritime borders to the South. They also call for further developments on the concept of a European Border Surveillance System (EUROSUR) also by improving coordination between Member States;
- **returns**: MEPs consider that that migrants who are staying irregularly on the territory of the Member States have to be required to leave the territory of the European Union. They therefore call on the Member States to ensure that returns are conducted with due regard to the law and the dignity of the persons involved, giving due preference to voluntary return. In particular, they call for a system of Return Counselling Services to be established in closed and open accommodation centres as well as for monitoring and support for social and professional reintegration mechanisms for migrants having been returned. MEPs also stress the need for a genuine European dimension in return policy through the **mutual recognition of return decisions**. Moreover, they call for the strengthening of co-operation, including through consular co-operation, and legislative provisions with a view to establishing a **European "Laissez Passer"** issued to illegally residing third-country nationals with a view to facilitating readmission to third countries.

Solidarity and immigration: MEPs consider both coordination between Member States and ways to improve cooperation with third-countries:

- **coordination between Member States**: MEPs deeply regret the fact that Member States have demonstrated insufficient solidarity in the face of the growing challenge of immigration. They call for an urgent review of the Framework Programme on Solidarity and Management of Migration Flows for the period 2007-2013 and its four financial instruments. Overall, MEPs welcome the set of measures proposed by the Commission in this area (including the recast of several fundamental texts, such as the Dublin regulation or Eurodac);
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cooperation with third-countries: lastly, MEPs regret that cooperation with third countries has not achieved sufficient results, with the notable exception of Spain's co-operation with third countries, such as Senegal and other countries in sub-Saharan and north Africa. MEPs therefore call for targeted support for third countries of transit and origin to help them build an effective border management system. They stress the importance of a development policy in third countries of origin or transit as a means of addressing the challenge of immigration at its roots. They call for an improved co-ordination of the Union's immigration and development policies, taking fully into account strategic objectives such as the Millennium Development Goals. They stress the importance of establishing Migration Information and Management Centres, as the one inaugurated in Mali in October 2008, which can contribute significantly to tackling migration problems by addressing the concerns of the potential migrants. Moreover, they stress that all agreements with countries of origin and transit should include **chapters on co-operation on immigration** and calls for an ambitious policy with third countries on police and judicial co-operation to combat international criminal organisations engaged in human trafficking.