



Supporting the Public Services Sector
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A HUMANITARIAN BORDER POLICY IS POSSIBLE IN EUROPE

Although it may surprise those who keep harping on the cliché, Schengen has nothing to do with the migrant crisis that the EU has experienced in recent years. If the agreement had not existed, the crisis would have happened anyway. It is easy to see why. Before reaching their final destination within the free movement area, migrants crossed several international borders to enter the EU and through the Balkans. There have also been attempts to stop migratory movements at the borders of the Schengen zone by suspending the treaty. Without the general European public being aware at all, France has been doing so for years at its border with Italy, but, contrary to expectations, has found that the number of refugees entering the country and filling out asylum applications has increased despite strict border controls and tens of thousands of people being returned to Italy. Is France now going to build a fence? And Switzerland?

We face many urgent problems in Europe at the moment: how can we ensure that the rescues in the central Mediterranean continue, and where should those rescued be taken to safety? How can conditions on the Greek islands be improved before and after the coming winter? How can the EU help to free more people from Libya's appalling detention centres? What needs to happen to stop the rise of political parties that want to eliminate the right to asylum altogether? How can the EU help displace people from countries like Lebanon and Jordan as it has done in Turkey?



These are all questions to which, at present, we do not have adequate answers or clear policies. The debate on asylum and migration is dominated by hysteria and inoperative proposals.

The idea of suspending Schengen and reintroducing border controls to stop illegal movements has never been justified. Similar experiments were carried out at the Austrian-German border. There has never been a fence between the two countries, and so far, no sensible person has called for one to be erected across the border from one end to the other. And even if such a fence did exist, assuming we overlook the human suffering it would cause, it would only serve to divert refugees to other countries. We have seen this in Hungary, whose fence caused refugees to head for Austria and Germany, which Orbán later blamed for letting them in.





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A serious policy must pay attention to the external borders; the first borders refugees cross to enter the EU. A coalition of southern European countries – Spain, Italy, Greece – as well as others such as France, Germany, the Netherlands, Austria and Sweden, which host the majority of refugees arriving since 2015, needs to take the lead and open a real debate on how to control illegal migration at these borders jointly.



Humanitarian solutions with majority support are possible. We need a common policy for the countries concerned based on three pillars: swift asylum procedures in reception centres in the countries on the European side of the Mediterranean; rapid repatriation arrangements from these centres; and voluntary distribution among a coalition of countries financed by the European Union, of those who obtain refugee status. Those who believe in human rights need to show concretely that there are alternatives to the situation of recent years and the harsh slogans of the populists. We need moral realism to combine safeguarding the right to asylum with border control, which must result in a policy capable of winning majorities.

This also means stopping migration in the Balkans, whether in Serbia or Bosnia, which makes no sense. On Schengen territory, the EU's real border is between Bulgaria and Turkey and, in the Aegean, between Turkey and Greece. This is where policymakers need to focus their attention and develop and implement responsible policies that guarantee the rights of refugees while establishing firm control over our external borders.

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