



BULLETIN

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Editors: Jarosław Cwiek-Karpowicz • Anna Maria Dyner • Aleksandra Gawlikowska-Fyk
Dariusz Kałan • Patryk Kugiel • Sebastian Płóciennik • Patrycja Sasnal • Marcin Terlikowski
Katarzyna Staniewska (Managing Editor)

European Neighbourhood Policy Will Not Solve the Refugee Crisis

Elżbieta Kaca

The upcoming revision of the EU's neighbourhood policy should improve mobility partnerships, introduce a civil-military format for border-management missions and enhance cooperation with countries that serve as departure points for refugees to the Union. Expectations that the policy will significantly improve control of migration by the EU's southern neighbours and help end the refugee crisis are not realistic.

EU institutions are currently preparing a review of European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP), challenged by the ongoing refugee crisis. One of the weaknesses is EU migration cooperation undertaken with the bloc's southern neighbours: Algeria, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Morocco, Lebanon, Libya, Palestine, Syria and Tunisia. Although the most pressing issue is to restrict migration flows to the Union through Turkey via the most used eastern Mediterranean route (so far totalling 359,171 detected illegal border crossings into the bloc in 2015), North African countries are transit states for immigrants from Eritrea and sub-Saharan Africa to the EU through the central Mediterranean route (128,619 in 2015).

One of the main goals of the ENP was to create a buffer zone in which countries neighbouring the EU would bear the responsibility to effectively control irregular migration. While the policy has been partly successful in the Eastern Partnership region, where the Union's eastern partners in exchange for lifting or facilitating visa requirements undertook the necessary reforms, the EU's approach to its so-called southern neighbourhood (mainly North Africa and the Middle East), mired in conflicts and characterised by a much larger scale of migration, has mostly failed to deliver.

The Limited Impact on Migration. From the EU's perspective, it is difficult to gain cooperation on migration. The level of EU support for migration-related reforms and programmes in bilateral relations is small. The budget for engagement currently amounts to only €82.4 million in total for the eight countries where such programmes have been implemented (or, 9% of total EU bilateral annual aid). Only three countries among the 10 target partners (Tunisia, Morocco, Jordan) have entered into advanced cooperation with the EU, signing so-called mobility partnerships in 2013 or 2014. The partnerships are a framework for operational cooperation to stem irregular immigration and enhance circular migration, meaning temporary legal employment for foreigners in the EU. These states are interested in receiving EU financial aid and maintaining good relations with the Union, which pushed for these agreements in the period following the Arab Spring. The EU is currently trying to encourage Lebanon, which receives substantial EU assistance for refugees there, to sign such an agreement and so far has managed to establish a dialogue with the country on migration, mobility and security. Other EU neighbours are either mired in internal conflict (Libya, Syria) or do not want to undertake what they might consider to be asymmetric cooperation (for instance, Egypt, Israel): in exchange for vague promises to increase circular migration and facilitate the issuance of visas, the partnerships require partners to agree to readmission rules and cooperation with the bloc's border security agency Frontex, reform their own border management and control irregular migration, fight against human trafficking and improve protection of the rights of refugees.

However, the EU can point to Morocco, which, as a result of its partnership agreement, is negotiating agreements on visa facilitation and readmission, or to the preparations for talks with Tunisia and Jordan on these matters. Moreover, Morocco and Tunisia are negotiating an agreement on operational cooperation with Frontex. From the EU's

perspective, readmission is important because it allows it to deport people who have illegally crossed its border from a country that has signed the agreement.

The impact of the mobility partnerships on its partners choosing to undertake reforms is more limited. Morocco has adopted a new migration and asylum policy and Tunisia has prepared a strategy for border management and a new draft of a law related to asylum and refugee status. While the Union finances reform of migration policy in Morocco (€10 million) and the start of an integrated border management and security reform process in Tunisia (€3 million), according to European Commission assessments these countries still have not carried out the reforms. It is doubtful whether they will fully deliver in this respect. The partnerships are not legally binding, and besides EU political pressure they do not include specific conditions that might be a reference point for the Union. In addition, the partnerships did not offer greater benefits to the partner countries. They have limited scope for increasing the possibilities for people from a partner country to legally work in the EU as they are related mainly to mobility of highly skilled workers and have been signed by only some EU Member States (making the agreements more bilateral than EU-wide).

Significant Assistance to Refugees. Although it is difficult for the EU to motivate its partners to implement the reforms, some countries hosting refugees from Syria (namely Jordan and Lebanon) are willing to receive the assistance to improve the situation of the refugees there. The EU provides substantial resources for this purpose. In 2014, it allocated almost €500 million to help Syrian refugees residing in Lebanon, which had received about 1.2 million citizens of Syria, jumping the percentage of refugees to the population to 25%. For Lebanon, the EU has used various funds, including the European Neighbourhood Instrument (€249.5 million), the Instrument for Stability (€27.6 million), and general humanitarian aid (€182.3 million). Moreover, aid for refugees might be disbursed through two ENP regional programmes that may receive additional support from interested Member States and institutions. The Regional Programme for the Development and Protection assists refugees in Jordan, Lebanon and Iraq (€27 million) and the EU Regional Trust Fund in Response to the Syrian Crisis (also known as the Madad Fund, it has a budget of €40 million) is directed to helping refugees from Syria living in countries bordering the war-torn state. It should be noted, however, that the greatest support for stabilisation and development within Syria and for Syrian refugees, amounting to €4 billion, is provided through Union humanitarian aid.

Limited Options to Support Border Management. The EU's southern neighbours are also likely to take EU support for border management because it does not involve strict conditions and mainly comes as advisory services and equipment. The Union supports the creation of an integrated border management system in Lebanon and in Tunisia and supports several programmes. For example, it gives assistance to secure the Lebanon-Syria border, which is only partially delimited. In this case, the EU provides counselling, training and equipment of various types (nonlethal) for Lebanese security authorities, including the armed forces, internal security forces and customs services (the allocation for the years 2013-2016 is €3.7 million). Regionally, the Union, for instance, is implementing a project to strengthen border surveillance systems in North Africa (called the Sea Horse-Mediterranean network) with a €4.5 million in funds.

The political instability in North Africa and the Middle East hampers the Union's possibilities to deploy classic civil border-management missions, which have been implemented successfully in other regions. In 2013, the EU appointed a civilian mission to Libya (EUBAM Libya) within the framework of Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) and gave it an annual budget of €26 million and a plan for 100 staff to support the Libyan authorities in controlling land, sea and air borders. However, the unstable situation inside Libya forced the mission to be relocated to Tunisia in 2014 and its staff limited to 17 experts, with activities restricted to the organisation of workshops.

Towards Change. In its revision of neighbourhood policy, the EU should differentiate its migration policy between countries interested in enhanced cooperation on migration (Tunisia, Morocco, Lebanon, Jordan) and the others. In relation to the first group, the Union should greatly increase the incentives for achieving results from the reforms by launching circular migration programmes for low-skilled workers and allocating funds for the implementation of adopted legal norms pertaining to migration. For example, in order to ensure the implementation of readmission agreements, adequate reception centres should be created. The EU should also increase spending on better integration of immigrants in these countries: some of them have already become destination countries for migration. The EU incentives should, however, be supplemented by specific conditions on the partners that would enable assessments of the results.

With regard to countries that are not advanced in their relations with the EU, cooperation on border management and in the fight against human trafficking should be further developed. Such cooperation should include countries that are a source of immigration from Sub-Saharan Africa. This is important with regard to better control of the central Mediterranean route to the EU. Also, with implementation of civilian missions and projects hampered by instability in many southern, neighbouring states, the EU should develop a civil-military border management mission through CSDP.

These proposed actions should be backed by relevant increases in funding. As the level of absorption of EU funds in the southern neighbourhood is relatively low (in 2014, only 64% of the funds were disbursed within the framework of bilateral programmes), unused funds for other projects may at the end of the year be transferred to initiatives focused on migration.