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Closing speech at the European Conference on Migration

Check Against Delivery
Seul le texte prononcé fait foi
Es gilt das gesprochene Wort

European Parliament

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Ministers,

Honourable members of the European Parliament,

Ladies and Gentlemen

Having gone through this intensive day and a half I must say I am positively reassured and surprised.

I am positively reassured because it is now clear to me that I am right to concentrate a great deal of my time and energy in trying to forge a common European immigration policy. It attests to its importance that in such a serious moment for our common security, so many important and distinguished actors have found time to attend this event.

I am also surprised – and now allow me to be provocative - because I find so much convergence of views on the way to go ahead. Why should I be surprised? Because the way matters seem to evolve through the EU institutions would not lead me to think so easily that there is such a high degree of convergence. Let us therefore translate our political will into practice, speed up our work and produce much more deliverables than we manage to at the present pace.

How can I describe such an emerging consensus? As minister Duquesne points out, our political line is somewhere between “0” immigration and right to immigration. We are ready to welcome many third country residents if necessary. Necessary for political reasons of theirs or necessary for economic reasons of ours. But we do not simultaneously wish to abdicate of the right to decide who should live among our national communities.

This implies a recognition of the right to asylum under the Geneva Convention but also a recognition that procedures should aim at finding out quickly those that are – and are not – likely to benefit from its protection. We should also harmonise the grey area of “subsidiary protection” going beyond Geneva. The simple fact that this category has been developed in our Member States’ law is proof of the fact that our humanitarian traditions are well alive. As many of my colleague Ministers of Interior have said Europe has no reason to pale as far as our humanitarian efforts are concerned.

I therefore hope that the asylum legislation package put forward by the Commission – comprised of an instrument on reception conditions, an instrument on procedures, an instrument on the definition of refugee and subsidiary protection – can soon be approved by the Union’s decision makers. The Commission has done its part of the job.

But the Commission is open to new ideas. If the necessary consensus is there, we are ready to develop concepts such as the one stop shop procedure for international protection, resettlement plans and analysis of asylum requests at or near the trouble spots rather than in the Member States. Resettlement plans, in particular, have the merit of organising the transportation of those in need rather than forcing them into the hands of traffickers.

It is also recognised by all that much efforts should be employed to bring about greater integration of our migrant communities. And that some degree of family reunification and that the attribution of a generous catalogue of rights is important to foster such policy aim. And that such catalogue should include the right to free movement.

I therefore hope that the Commissions proposals on family reunification and rights of third country nationals can be met by a consensus of the Union's decision makers. Again here, the Commission has done its part of the job.

What about migration for labour market purposes? We have to recognise – and the Commission always did – that not all Member States have the same needs. I see that some see admission for labour market purposes as just plain reality whereas others are reluctant to even open a discussion on the subject.

Should that be a reason for concern for a European Commissioner needing to find a consensus among 15 different Member States and among them and the European Parliament ? Can a European immigration policy be developed starting from such different standpoints?

Yes, because we have never proposed much more than flexible instruments the sole really binding aim of which is to require Member States to be transparent about their actual immigration policies. None of the proposals on economic migration put forward by the Commission brings about one single admission into the territory of the EU.

The policy we suggest at this stage accomodates both those that think that the boosting of the competitiveness of their economies depends on an actively open immigration policy as well as those that think that that should only be a last resort solution. Our proposals simply request that such information be pooled in order for a frank assessment of the inter-relation of the different national immigration policies to take place.

In order to put this into practice, the Commission has proposed a policy mix based on two types of instrument:

- A directive on admission for labour market purposes setting how such admission should take place if Member States decide to admit imigrants. Although Member States are at all times free to restrict immigration for purely political reasons the principle is that if a posting is not fulfilled within a given deadline, industry would be authorised to find a worker from outside the Union. A preference is given to our partners which are currently negotiating adhesion treaties with us;
- A flexible and soft law open coordination method based on the adoption of annual Council guidelines. Which are themselves based on the presentation by Member States of annual plans. Such guidelines would orientate our work on the following aspects: co-ordinate our approach to migration management; the inter-play of illegal and legal channels for admission into the EU; the reinforcement of the fight against illegal immigration; a policy and procedures for opening up the labour market to third country nationals; integrating migration issues into relations with third countries; the development of integration policies. The model of this approach is the method that has been applied with so much success in the employment area.

Yesterday, many of my colleagues Ministers of Interior spoke about their immigration laws or draft laws. The open coordination method is the ideal place to test their soundness and effectiveness. We can share among ourselves what results – and mistakes – they produce and thus shed light on the policies of us all. However, we should also avoid that the producing of national laws entrenches national positions in such a way that a consensus among fifteen becomes simply too difficult.

However, on economic migration also, we have done our job and our proposals are there. I heard nothing which makes me think I should change direction. I am comforted by the positive opinion from the European Parliament. I therefore hope that we have helped consolidate the conditions necessary for a quick approval of our programme. Again, the Commission has done its part of the job.

The general concept that emerges from this interplay of initiatives has to be completed by a security dimension. As I said yesterday, the Commission will soon produce a communication on illegal immigration putting forward many suggestions on aspects such as the common policing of the future common border or enhanced visa cooperation – both “ex ante” and “ex post”. On the common policing of the future common border it would in particular be important to obtain results as soon as possible from the feasibility study currently being prepared by Italy.

Last – but certainly not least – meaningful and complete partnerships have to be entered into with third countries that are willing to play ball. As it is often said, “you need two to tango”. However, I am encouraged with meaningful dialogues that have started to emerge such as with the People’s Republic of China. I am also eager to develop a meaningful cooperation with Morocco.

Ladies and Gentlemen. The Heads of State and Government are meeting before Christmas in Laeken to review the progress achieved on the Tampere conclusions. Let us not waste that opportunity. After all, Heads and State and Government do not focus on this policy area every couple of months. And let us do our best to obtain from them a push ahead to pursue our programme. Along the lines I have heard here yesterday and today and which comfort me in that the Commission is heading in the right direction.

Thank you for your attention.