

Migration is a Peace Issue!

One of the thirty persons on our planet is a migrant. For hundreds of thousands of years human beings have been on the move. It is stated that about 240 million people are on the move in the world today. More is to come! Our globalised world is confronted with migratory flows. The reactions against migration are growing as well.

Migration is the subject of the day!

1. In Belgium, on 17 February and 16 July 1964, the government has signed an agreement with the governments of Morocco and Turkey to make migration to Belgium possible.
2. Early October 2013, we saw the Lampedusa boat tragedy people with mainly refugees coming from sub-Saharan Africa. Several of them are unaccompanied boys and kids. Almost every year, the Mediterranean Sea turns into a graveyard as hundreds of men, women and children drown in a desperate bid to reach the European Union.
3. On 9 February 2014, a small majority (50, 3 %) of the Swiss population voted in a referendum for a stop of mass migration.
4. The number of Syrian refugees is close to 2.5 million and 1 of 3 Syrians has been forced to leave their home.
5. Bulgaria is currently hosting over 7.600 Syrian asylum-seekers and refugees. In Bulgaria, which is the border between Turkey and the EU, the government authorised the building of a fence to keep Syrian refugees out of the country. That fence will be completed by mid-March 2014.
6. On 16 February 2014, a co-pilot of Ethiopian Airlines high jacked the plane to Geneva requesting for asylum in the country.

When one discusses the issue of migration almost everybody has his or her opinion about it. Right wing parties and sectors of the media are feeding the general population with anti-migrant

feelings, “they” against “us.” “Our territory is full” is a statement many times made by populist politicians and opinion makers. The narrow interests of people get more attention than the expression of solidarity with those who are in need. The global debate, in most of the European countries is polarised. You are in favour or you are against new migration. In most of the cases “fear” is fed to justify the restrictive policies against new migrations. I notice a lack of political leadership in most of the EU countries on this issue. Right wing parties and the media are filling the gap and that is not in favour for those seeking asylum.

Because of the revolutions in communications and transport, but also because of the power of networks, migratory flows have been gaining in density and intensity, from South to North, but more in particular within the South – from China to Africa – from the East of Africa to South Africa.

The push factors of migration are well known: misery or poverty, persecutions or discriminations, civil war, climate change, etc. At the same time people thirst for freedom and are looking for a job. Women, who are the majority of number of migrants, are not at least looking for family reunification, more than before they are looking for a job. Women want to play their role in our market place. Some of these women risk ending up in the hands of traffickers and “disappear” in prostitution or illegal activities.

The link between migration and security can be seen in the field of terrorism risks, import of diseases, and an increase of criminal activities. Critics are also arguing that the influx of more migrants is weakening our social services as well (schools, social, security, etc.)

It becomes clear that the routes of migration become more complex. It is important to question the root cause-effect relationships between all the social, political, economic and security challenges posed by migration in today's globalised world. Clearly, migration is a peace issue.

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