



1st meeting of the EUROPEAN MIGRATION FORUM

Safe routes, safe futures.

How to manage the mixed flows of migrants across the Mediterranean?

Brussels, EESC building, rue Belliard 99-101 (room JDE 62)

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Summary Report¹

The [European Migration Forum](#) (EMF) has developed naturally from the [European Integration Forum](#) (EIF), of which eleven fruitful editions took place since 2009. Like the EIF, the EMF constitutes a platform for dialogue for the EU institutions with civil society organisations (CSOs), local and regional authorities, and representatives of the Member States (MSs). At the same time, reflecting the new Commission's strategic initiatives for 2015 and its commitment to implement a European Agenda on Migration, the EMF has expanded its scope beyond integration, to adopt a more comprehensive approach, which next to immigrant integration policy includes immigration, border management, asylum and international protection.

The recent political unrest in African and Middle-Eastern countries resulted in growing migratory pressure at the Mediterranean border of the EU. While the scale of the migration flows in the Mediterranean might be among the highest recorded in the last decades, their mixed nature, covering both persons seeking international protection and economic migrants, is hardly a novelty in history. These categories of migrants have traditionally overlapped, at times sharing – sometimes irregular – routes to reach EU territory and using the asylum procedure as a legal channel to gain regular status. The migration pressure in the Mediterranean emphasises once more the demand for cooperation and coordination among the MSs. By the same token, the complex management of migration flows demonstrates the need for multiple levels of governance – the local, national and EU-wide – and combined action between the public and the private sectors.

In this view, the [1st meeting of the European Migration Forum](#) prioritised the discussion on four main themes: *Access to the asylum procedure at the borders; Integration of beneficiaries of international protection; A comprehensive approach to countering migrant smuggling; Providing adequate information in countries of origin and transit.*

The dialogue addressed both strands of mixed flows, acknowledging their respective

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specificities. The aim was to frame the debate within the remit of the EU with a view to feed into the on-going EU policy-making process and its integration with the actions of MSs, regional and local authorities and all relevant stakeholders.

The EMF was introduced by **Luis Miguel Pariza Castaños**, Member of the Permanent Study Group on Immigration and Integration in the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) and **Matthias Ruete**, Director-General, DG for Migration and Home Affairs, European Commission.

Luis Miguel Pariza Castaños welcomed all participants to the Forum and explained its new format. He reviewed the accomplishments of the eleven sessions of the EIF towards the development of an integration agenda, in cooperation with the European Council, the European Parliament (EP), the EESC and the European Commission (EC). He underlined how the EESC in particular was home to civil society. Building upon relationships that were consolidated during the experience of the EIF, the EMF was conceived as the main platform where representatives of migrants and migrants themselves, experts, politicians, and stakeholders from civil society contributed to test, form and reform immigration and integration policies. The EMF represents the place where NGOs, citizens' organisations, and human rights organisations can make their voice heard right in the heart of the European institutions, at the start of a new political cycle in Europe, with the new Commission in power and the renewal of the Parliament. The Bureau of the Forum had decided to adopt a more holistic approach to tackle the question of immigration in its various and layered complexities. The number of participants and representatives in the Forum had been broadened to include stakeholders active on issues of asylum and border policies. The representatives from the NGOs and civil society in the Forum Bureau itself would also be raised to four, in order to increase their influence.

According to **Luis Miguel Pariza Castaños**, the recent events in the Mediterranean provided an incentive for the Forum to ensure it generated input that could feed the EU institutions with first-hand experiences and practices, which would inspire a more effective immigration and integration agenda. The EU should cooperate more with other agencies, such as the UNHCR, as well as the neighbouring countries in the Mediterranean. Saving human lives, welcoming refugees and providing shelter, avoiding migrants falling into the hands of smugglers and international organised crime, should become priority issues in the EU agenda. He especially invited the Forum to consider whether the European asylum system is suitable to deal with situations like we experience today in the Mediterranean.

Matthias Ruete underscored how the new Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker put migration high on the political agenda. The change of name of DG Home Affairs into DG Migration and Home Affairs, in fact, was all but cosmetic and meant to mark a significant shift on how migration would be addressed in the next five years. The EU should endorse a more ambitious agenda aimed not only to respond to crisis and manage emergencies, but most importantly to promote a longer term perspective on how Europeans embrace migration in the construction of the EU, in cooperation with other international agencies.

The Director General confirmed the importance of broadening the goal and core mission of the Forum beyond integration. He reminded the audience the figures provided by Frontex, according to which, in 2014, 228.662 people crossed the Mediterranean, compared to the

76,449 of the previous year; an increment of 277% in one year. More tragically, some 3,000 casualties have been estimated to have occurred in 2014 alone in the attempt to cross the sea and reach Europe. These numbers explained why the focus of the first meeting of the EMF was on “safe routes”. At the same time, though, he recalled that the EU needed to find answers to the presence of irregular migrants in the various EU member states, in addition to more than 600,000 pending requests for asylum. He invited the participants to concentrate the debate on the “safe futures”, meaning to envision a new Europe in 20 year time, able to attract talents and fully integrate them, improving ways of legal access to European countries, as well as to ensure the safety of all people who are really in need of protection, by acting effectively against smugglers and traffickers. He insisted on the need to ensure effective management of the mixed flows not only at borders, but also within the EU, where more convincing arguments in support of integration policies are needed in order to improve the general public’s perception of migrants, often influenced by xenophobic and racist campaigns. In this respect, the new format of the Forum seemed particularly apt, with its more pragmatic, inclusive and participatory approach, its direct interaction with the high political level, and real-life accounts of what is otherwise discussed in theoretical or policy-oriented terms only.

Introductory session – first day

The **introductory session** was chaired by **Luis Miguel Pariza Castaños**. Speakers included **Vincent Cochetel**, Director of the UNHCR Bureau for Europe; **Filippo Colombo**, First Counsellor, Italy’s Permanent Representation to the European Union; **Majid Hussain** and **Milen Eyob**, refugees; **Christian Remøy**, Norwegian Seafarer and **Haakon Svane**, Norwegian Shipowners' Association.

Vincent Cochetel said that migration flows in the Mediterranean region are likely to remain as high in 2015 as in 2014, since the push factors had remained unsolved and even more critical situations rose in the region. Statistics showed that the majority of people left their home countries for humanitarian or political reasons, not economic ones. He noted that the legal instruments to effectively manage the mixed flows towards Europe already existed, but had to be implemented in a more rational and coherent way. A first step would be a more open and secure access to legal entry into Europe and successive integration programmes. One reason why many persons embark on highly dangerous journeys over sea is the lack of legal alternatives. Many people wrongly end up in an asylum procedure, because family reunion provisions, visa regimes, and labour immigration systems malfunction. By the same token, the [Dublin regulation](#) proved to be ineffective, but a few amendments to the current EU asylum system, paired with an adequate allocation of funds and resources to implement it, could already be the answer to many of the criticalities at the Mediterranean borders. Asylum policies and measures should be complemented with integration programmes. Most people arriving as asylum seekers refuse to apply for asylum at many sea borders, because they fear they will be stuck in a country that is not their final destination. The international community should cooperate to improve the current legal structure and enforce it credibly.

According to **Vincent Cochetel**, the credibility of the whole system is a key concept. That requires better distribution of the responsibility among the MSs, international protection being

provided in more rational and fair way, a balance between fair legal access to the EU territory and safe resettlement and return practices, in conformity with the non-refoulement principle. When all these steps are undertaken at the same pace on all fronts, be it at EU level, in individual MSs and in the neighbouring countries, the chances to better manage the mixed flows increase significantly. Furthermore, a more credible system would provide a working model for candidate countries, especially along the Balkan routes, where the asylum system and migration governance are particularly problematic.

Filippo Colombo summed up what Italy tried to accomplish during the recent [Italian presidency of the EU](#) in the field of asylum procedures, international protection, management of mixed migration flows and anti-smuggling. The First Counsellor said that Italy, on the forefront of the management of migratory flows in the Mediterranean, acted with a view to overcome the dichotomy between responsibility and solidarity, as well as that between Northern and Southern European countries. He illustrated the achievements of the [Operation Mare Nostrum](#) (OMN), implemented by Italy following the series of tragic ship wreckages off the island of Lampedusa in 2013. Building on that experience, the Italian presidency pushed forward the on-going framework of the [Rabat Process](#), through the [Declaration of Rome](#), to devise an action plan in cooperation with countries of origin and transit in North Africa that included protection and the respect for human rights in the management of the flows. The Declaration added a new pillar, *Promoting international protection*, to the previous three that imbued the programme: Organising mobility and legal migration; Improving border management and combating irregular migration; Strengthening the synergies between migration and development. Similarly, the Italian presidency organised the EU-Horn of Africa Migration Route Initiative, with the adoption of the [Khartoum Process](#). The guiding principle was to advance a more sustainable approach that included broader international cooperation, increased burden-sharing and communitarian governance.

Filippo Colombo warned about the obstacles that hampered the development of a more comprehensive migration management system, from the criticism about cooperating with countries of origin and transit that are considered part of the problem, to the difficulties in the mechanisms of the “take charge”/“take back” under the [Dublin Regulation](#) – the implementation of the 2013 recast [Asylum Procedure Directive](#) might prove key in this respect - to the support of the public opinion, shaped by media accounts that are creating a panic-climate about an invasion of immigrants in the Mediterranean.

The real-life accounts of what it means to undertake an unsafe journey as the only viable option to reach Europe had a strong emotional impact on the Forum. **Majid Hussain** now lives in Italy as refugee and was forced to leave his country of origin, Nigeria, because of the violent religious conflicts. He witnessed the violent death of family members, relatives and friends; death became the loyal companion on his journey through central Africa to Libya and, finally, Lampedusa, reached through unconceivable hardships and hazards. His testimony was both specifically individual, linked to his personal experience, and dramatically representative of too many other individuals, who have been forced to flee their country and undergo sleep deprivation, inhumane living conditions, mental despair, psychological terror, constant proximity to violence, danger and death. As **Majid Hussain** both candidly and proudly said, just because they wanted to live and stay alive. The journey to and arrival at Lampedusa were very difficult too, with people dead and dying on the boat,

being the object of the enforcement of policies conceived to guarantee security, which, in the context, appeared simply inhumane and absurd: the perception of being treated like a criminal, a law-breaker, who is fingerprinted, subjected to a full, humiliating physical examination and then moved to an overcrowded, under-equipped fenced compound. **Majid Hussain** concluded that he could not and would not identify himself with his current life in Rome, trapped in the condition of a refugee, without the possibility to move to another MS, without perspectives and real chances of an economic future and societal integration in Europe.

Milen Eyob arrived to Sweden from Eritrea in 2009 as an unaccompanied minor and is now an active member of the organisation [Voices of Young Refugees in Europe](#). She invited Forum participants to imagine the burden and the responsibility carried by minors leaving their country, home and family, alone. She confirmed how there was nothing but horrible memories associated to her journey. Falling into the hands of human traffickers meant exposing oneself to all kinds of imaginable risks: organs sale is a way to repay the costs of the trafficking organisation, rapes are daily practices. Once in Europe, refugees are often confronted with the question “Why do you focus on the negative and complain? Why are you not just thankful?”. She asked in turn why the discussion is not more focused on the respect of basic human rights. In fact, the refugees’ voices are often ignored and their rights abused. **Milen Eyob** urged to convey more information in the refugee camps outside Europe about the dangers linked to trafficking. The only information the displaced people in those camps get comes from the media and depicts the EU and the USA as safe havens. She confessed a sense of tiredness in participating in conferences and forums, where the refugees’ testimonies move people, but then no real action is taken. She expressed the hope that the EMF could be an exception.

Haakon Svane said that Norwegian merchant vessels have participated in rescue operations in cooperation with the Italian authorities in the Mediterranean. The operations were not something new, but their scale and frequency in the past two years were unprecedented. He noted that the new modus operandi of the human traffickers, especially in the eastern Mediterranean ports, was to pack people on old vessels, which are sent towards Italy without a crew. This constitutes a great risk for the people on board, for the communities of people at the receiving end, and for the environment. He remarked that there were international conventions obliging seafarers to rescue people at sea, and that ship owners respected the obligation to rescue, as well as the obligation to return the rescued to a safe port. It therefore was paramount that merchant vessels involved in rescue operations had the guarantee to be able to disembark the rescued people in the next safe port. However, they increasingly faced opposition from national governments. **Haakon Svane** concluded that it was important to address the issue of health and safety of the crew of the vessels too. The international community should consider sharing more information with merchant vessels about the risks inherent to rescuing large amounts of people among which may be one or more ill-intentioned persons, by for example suggesting amendments to search and rescue operation procedures.

Christian Remøy had been present in a series of rescue operations in the Mediterranean out of Libyan coasts, between the summer and fall of 2014, as second officer on board of a Norwegian merchant vessel. He showed two video clips on the rescuing of hundreds of

migrants. He candidly shared his feelings when for the first time faced with boat of migrants, admitting that the immediate thought was whether it would be safe to approach them or there might be weapons on board; if it were not a health hazard. But the foremost and prevailing attitude was to figure out how to help them. After the first tentative operations, the crew developed a sort of routine procedure. Nonetheless, as **Christian Remøy** underlined, civilian seamen were not necessarily trained to undertake such operations, especially when the task was not just to assist until the Navy came in, but to actually rescue people and take them on board. Some operations went well, others did not. He praised the role of the Italian Navy for the success of the rescue operations, impressed with their skills and capacity to manage the situation. On that basis, he suggested that until a long-term solution to the problem is found, it is important to keep in force rescue programmes as *Mare Nostrum*, with task forces well funded and active in the Mediterranean.

In the following **debate**, most participants agreed with the priorities raised during the opening session. In particular, some members stressed the importance to develop better information and media campaigns, especially targeted at creating a more welcoming environment towards the refugees in the receiving countries, at raising awareness of the risks associated with smuggling and about the procedures to apply for asylum in the country of origin and of transit. Other speakers suggested that increasing development programmes, investments and creating jobs in Africa, was the only solution for the crisis in the Mediterranean. Others expressed their scepticism on the chances of an EU governance of mixed flows, considering the stakes of various interests of MSs and the question of national sovereignty. A few panellists agreed that most national governments did not fully take responsibility in the Mediterranean, but also added that the situation required capacities that go beyond the national remit. Everybody agreed that international and multiagency cooperation was more likely to make the rescue programme more sustainable and effective. Partnership with neighbouring countries was defined essential but extremely problematic, because often not respectful of human rights.

The EMF broke into four thematic workshops aimed at producing short reports to be presented in the final plenary session and delivered to the participants of the High-level session.

The following summary of the workshops solely reflects the authors understanding of the discussions. The final conclusions from the Forum participants are available from <http://www.eesc.europa.eu/?i=portal.en.events-and-activities-european-migration-forum-1-conclusions>

Workshop A: Access to the asylum procedure at the borders

Chair: Stephen Ryan, European Commission; Rapporteur: Kris Pollet, [ECRE](#); Speakers: José Palazón Osma, [Prodein](#); Adriano Silvestri, [European Agency for Fundamental Rights](#); Jamil Addou, [European Asylum Support Office](#); Fabiana Giuliani, [UNHCR Italy](#); Stefan Kessler, [Jesuit Refugee Service](#); Neil Falzon, [ADITUS](#).

The workshop was characterised by many speakers with rich participation, at the expenses of discussion with and from the floor. The speakers agreed that the EU legal framework, including the [EU Charter of Fundamental Rights](#) and the case-law of the [European Court of Human Rights \(ECtHR\) on Migration](#), has been enhanced with additional safeguards to protect persons arriving at the border against refoulement. Yet, as especially evidenced by NGOs, progress on the legal level contrasts sharply with the deteriorating situation at certain EU external borders. There are several challenges related to arrivals at sea. The journey itself is traumatising and requires specific measures. Often appalling reception/detention conditions in certain MSs, the lack of integration perspectives in the country of first arrival, and scarce quality of the asylum procedure, lead to increasing numbers of asylum seekers refusing to apply for protection in the country of first arrival and refusing identification in order to avoid the application of the Dublin Regulation. Local civil society organisations and local authorities are part of the solution. Yet policy-makers involve them only in the implementation phase and ignore them in the policy-making discussion. More generally, the following points about access to asylum procedure at borders were debated:

- There is a toolbox of measures (resettlement, humanitarian visa, family reunification, lifting of visa restrictions) that can be used by MSs to ensure safe access and reduce the number of refugees needing to resort to irregular channels. Improving the legal channels, especially from the mixed flows perspective, means to further develop the possibilities in the [Family Reunification Directive](#), [Single Permit Directive](#), [Long Term Residence Directive](#), the [EU Visa Code](#). The [Temporary Protection Directive](#) is ignored, including its solidarity mechanisms, in particular in the context of the Syrian Refugee Crisis.
- Ensure mutual recognition of positive asylum decisions and transfer of protection status valid throughout the Union, as laid down in Article 78 [TFEU](#).
- Training of border officials and authorities safeguards effective access to the procedure. On-going initiatives by the European Asylum Support Office ([EASO](#)) and Frontex are positive steps. Such trainings should make clear that the role of border guards is not to enter into any assessment of protection needs.
- An effective referral mechanism at the border, whose primary responsibility lies on the State, is key to guarantee access to the asylum procedure. NGOs should ensure that migrants make informed decisions before referrals to specific procedures (mentioned as a good model of information desk: Fiumicino Airport, Rome).
- NGOs' role in first reception contributes to the overall quality of the system. The presence of cultural mediators and interpreters should be extended to all stages even before first reception and during the rescuing phase. EC and NGOs cooperation should work as a two way process. NGOs should also be informed by the EC about the follow-up taken to address the raised issues.
- The issue of the disposal of the victims/deceased, their identification, contact with their families, etc., should become a protocolled procedure.

Workshop B: *Integration of beneficiaries of international protection*

Chair: Laura Corrado, European Commission; Rapporteur: Ezequiel Iurcovich, [Rete G2](#); Speakers: Petra Hueck, [International Catholic Migration Commission](#); Jasper Kuipers, [Dutch Refugee Council](#); Birgitta Wodke, [Arbeit und Leben Berlin e.V.](#); Hani Abdalmasih Al-Hayek, mayor of Beit Sahour, Palestine.

The workshop approached the topic by putting the human dimension at the centre of the discussion. The participants agreed that integration efforts should start already upon arrival, not only after the status of a beneficiary of international protection is recognised. The discussion stressed the importance of a long-term perspective for the social inclusion of beneficiaries of international protection and of mainstream services. Interaction between refugees and members of the receiving society was defined as key. Integration, in fact, necessarily passes through measures that facilitate access to employment (dialogue with employees' associations, reforming the quota system), language learning, access to housing, public education, basic services on the same basis as the indigenous population. These measures are necessary but not sufficient, if measures to prevent structural discriminations of beneficiaries in the receiving society are not taken at the same time. Key points from the debate were:

- Specific measures are needed for vulnerable groups (minors, disable, illiterate, women with a dependent status, traumatised people).
- MSs, local authorities and NGOs should cooperate and devise together a more generous and articulated use of integration funds and social cohesion funds (i.e. [AMIF](#), [ESF](#)). Policies aimed at integration of refugees should encompass their active and direct participation.
- It is crucial to consider the background and history of the refugees in their integration plans and recognise their qualifications, both formal (degrees, labour and training skills) and informal (social skills).
- Obstacles to the implementation of the [Family Reunification Directive](#) should be removed.
 - Host societies should be the target of integration policies, with information campaigns, revised education programmes, etc.

Workshop C: *A comprehensive approach to counter migrant smuggling*

Chair: Simona Ardovino, European Commission; Rapporteur: Annica Ryngbeck, [Social Platform](#); Speakers: François Decoster, member of the Committee of the Regions; Agnieszka Sternik, European Commission; Michele LeVoy, [PICUM](#).

The participants of the workshop considered how to reduce the risks and harm that migrants are exposed to in a situation of irregular migration, and how to counter smuggling activities. The starting point was earmarked in respecting the human rights obligations when apprehending migrants in an irregular situation. As the most effective tool to prevent

smuggling, the speakers vouched for the need to expand regular channels to the EU for protection, employment and family reunification, including more opportunities for low-skilled employment (beyond seasonal workers). They suggested to develop an EU Implementation Plan comprising all European regulations protecting migrants, irrespective of their status, placing the migrants' human rights at the centre (e.g. [Victims' Directive](#), [Employers Sanction Directive](#), [Anti-Trafficking Directive](#); further inspiration to be drawn from the publication [The EU rights of victims of trafficking](#), 2013). Additional key points of discussion were:

- A firewall should protect migrants and CSOs that report smugglers, violence and abuse by employers, landlords or partners, without risk of being deported (good practices exist at regional and local level).
- Enable migrants to access basic services without fear of being reported and providers to provide services without fear of repercussions, e.g. by revising the [Facilitation directive](#) to exempt humanitarian assistance at entry, transit and residence (see [FRAs opinion 2014](#) on the growing trend towards criminalization and how CSOs can help).
- Empower the CSOs, especially from the diasporas, to carry out information campaigns about the risks associated to irregular routes and contacts with smugglers, as well as to debunk myths that surround regular and irregular migration (e.g. evidence that large numbers of irregular migrants enter regularly, see [EC Clandestino project, 2009](#); no substantial evidence that regular migration channels or enhanced protection for vulnerable migrants are pull factors).

Workshop D: *Providing adequate information in countries of origin and transit*

Chair: Philippe Fargues, [MPC](#); **Rapporteur:** Marco Cilento, [European Trade Union Confederation](#); **Speakers:** Jeppe Winkel, European Commission; Lorena Lando, [International Organization for Migration, Tunisia](#); Fawzi Masad, City Manager of Greater Amman Municipality, Jordan; Brahim Dhouafli, Kebili Governorate, Tunisia.

The discussion in the workshop started from the premise that instability in Africa and Middle East would persist in the coming years, generating larger displacement of people toward the EU, and that the most adequate tangible action would be improvements of living and working conditions, especially as result of more investments in development cooperation programmes, mobility partnerships, provision of services and support of democratization processes. The participants agreed that a communication strategy should be built starting from the country of origin, aimed at promoting legal channels for migration, which need to be sufficiently available and well-functioning. Information should be tailored on the specific context in each origin/transit/destination country, along two main lines: a) raising awareness: about risks and dangerousness of irregular arrivals and of criminal organisations, rules on repatriation; b) information on opportunities: how to obtain a visa, a residence or working permit, recognition of diplomas, job offers, role of CSOs, including trade unions . The following points were also debated:

- The nature of mixed flows requires different approaches in information campaigns. In addition, migration dynamics change fast and information strategies have to be continuously adapted.
- EU, MSs, regional and local authorities should partner with the CSOs and the diasporas to implement more effective, extensive, comprehensive, and better tailored communication strategies. MSs consular services should also be involved.
- Communication strategies based on audiovisual, social media and short movies (providing individual testimonies) have proved effective and well-received, especially among young generations.
- Dissuasive campaigns are unlikely to discourage people fleeing violence and extreme poverty. New initiatives should take into account results of a comprehensive independent assessment of the effects of previous campaigns performed by EU, MSs and CSOs.

At the end of the first day, **Irini Pari**, President of the Permanent Study Group on Immigration and Integration in the EESC, **Eyachew Tefera** and **Ezequiel Iurcovich**, current members of the EMF Bureau, introduced the candidates for the election of two additional Bureau members.

At the start of the second day, the four **Workshops** reconvened to finalise the discussion and draft the conclusions to be presented in the plenary session by the rapporteurs, **Kris Pollet**, **Ezequiel Iurcovich**, **Annica Ryngbeck**, and **Marco Cilento**.

Plenary session – second day

The **Plenary session** was chaired by **Belinda Pyke**, Director for Migration and Mobility, European Commission – DG Migration and Home Affairs. Speakers included **Kashetu Kyenge**, Member of the European Parliament, and **Eugenio Ambrosi**, IOM Regional Director for the EEA, the EU and NATO.

Kris Pollet, from Workshop A, in addition to the key points summarised above, presented two policy recommendations: Involve CSOs and local authorities both in the design and the implementation of first reception, identification and referral policies; Cooperation between CSOs and authorities must be based on a clear understanding of their respective roles. The role of civil society organisations is not to fill the gaps when the authorities fail to meet their obligations.

Ezequiel Iurcovich, from Workshop B, stressed in particular the importance of the context in which integration programmes are provided (upon arrival, in the receiving society), the centrality of a long term perspective for social inclusion (with the recognition of qualifications as essential step as well as access to employment), and the need for a multi-level and multi-actors governance and coordination (EU, national, local, public and private).

Annica Ryngbeck, from Workshop C, listed seven concrete proposals: 1) respect the rights of migrants in an irregular situation, in the drafting and implementation of an EU plan against

smuggling; 2) develop and implement (additional) regular migration channels to the EU for protection, employment and family reunification; 3) create a firewall between immigration control and access to justice and services for migrants; 4) revise the facilitation directive to exempt humanitarian assistance from criminalisation; 5) consider circumstances of aggravation and mitigation when prosecuting smugglers; on this point the workshop had a big discussion but from the civil society point of view it was considered important; 6) put in place an implementation plan for the EU and MSs comprising all European regulation protecting migrants, irrespective of status; 7) debunk myths and misinformation about migration (central role of CSOs).

Marco Cilento, from Workshop D, insisted that information campaigns should be tailored to specific contexts in origin and transit countries and to different groups of migrants, possibly through the establishment of info points and desk offices, in cooperation with local authorities and in partnership with CSOs. He stressed the importance of an independent assessment of previous campaigns by EU and MSs authorities in collaboration with experts and activists.

Kashetu Kyenge, took then the floor and stated that the challenge was how to convert the inputs from the Forum into actual policies of the European institutions. The Italian MEP agreed especially on a few points that emerged from the discussion, such as: the need to get out of the emergency logic, since that would hinder any real planning and management; to put respect for life and human rights always first; to respect the principle of non-refoulement as well as tailor different policies for the various categories of migrants. She expressed her commitment to promote a holistic approach towards immigration through her political action. She noted that immigration had been dealt with mostly in securitarian terms and that each MS adopts directives and measures according to their national political climate and the political orientation of the government. She contested the criminalisation of migrants, including the undocumented, since they are first and foremost human beings. She invited Europeans to face their fears by accepting immigration as a structural trait of their societies. She further developed her point and added that the answer to most of the problems related to immigration in Europe was to build a more cohesive, respectful, integrated society. **Kashetu Kyenge** hoped that a policy change towards a more communitarian governance of migration was possible with the work of Commissioner for Migration, Home Affairs and Citizenship, Dimitris Avramopoulos, and action of the Committee on Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs (LIBE) of the EP, one of the few Committees able to co-legislate. She invited to provide more legal channels for those who are forced to leave, and to act more decisively on the causes behind poverty and desperation, smuggling and trafficking.

Eugenio Ambrosi invited the participants of the Forum and the EU to put everything into the right perspective and avoid framing the discussion in terms of “humanitarian emergency” and “migration crisis”. The number of people crossing the Mediterranean sea is, in fact, considerably lower when compared to flows of refugees and migrants currently taking place in other regions of the world. He further reinforced the argument by mentioning the number of Syrian refugees in the whole EU, circa 150,000, as opposed to the 1,6 million – and counting – that Turkey had welcomed. The EU should abandon the crisis mentality and should stop contradicting the political dream of a community born from the ideas of equality, democracy, human rights. He argued that it was a duty for the EU to apply principles of the

[European convention on human rights](#) (the most important treaty for the EU) to migration in a long-term perspective.

Eugenio Ambrosi explained how racism, xenophobia, and anti-immigrant political parties and movements, were the outcome of a lack of information, correct media reporting on migration, and communication from the EU institutions. The real crisis is that the working age population in the EU will shrink by 15 million in 10 year and this calls for a liberalisation of the legal channels for migrants and foreign students, as well as easier access for them to the labour market. He concluded by stressing the importance of solidarity as the guiding principle to devise and implement immigration and asylum policies that distribute responsibility equally among the MSs. That would not necessarily make policies more effective but rather, and equally important, more credible in the eyes of origin and in transit countries. The EU should be able to show its MSs are able to cooperate, before asking other countries to do so.

In the following **debate**, one participant criticised Frontex for being too costly, ineffective to save lives and an expression of a securitarian only approach. **Kashetu Kyenge** suggested the solution was to change the scope and functioning of Frontex to a search and rescue EU agency, along with border patrol. Several speakers agreed that the Dublin regulation had to be modified so that asylum seekers and refugees could move freely within the EU once their status was granted. **Belinda Pyke** confirmed that the Commission was aware of the CSOs eagerness to see immediate results and assured that efforts were constantly made to transfer the inputs from the Forum into actual measures.

The newly elected Bureau members were announced. In the category European-level organisations, Kadri Soova from PICUM had been elected, while the winner in the category national organisations was Yonous Muhammadi from the Greek Forum of Refugees.

Final reporting and remarks

Thomas Huddleston presented the picture painted by participants of the main drivers and consequences of mixed migration flows in the Mediterranean. While the world is experiencing the worst refugee crisis since the Second World War, with most languishing or strand in developing and often war-torn countries, the EU is not experiencing anything like a refugee or migration crisis given its high level of development and low number of new arrivals. The root causes of war and human rights violations are unlikely to change anytime soon. The challenges for EU Member States to respond were not new or unknown. Instead, Europe's real 'crisis' is an internal political crisis for the EU's common policy to show responsibility and solidarity to do its fair share in this world refugee crisis just across its land and sea borders. He also reiterated the perspective of participants working outside the asylum system, who clearly see a 'demographic crisis' and a need for more labour migration and inclusion to maintain their shrinking labour forces and provide for their growing elderly populations.

The importance of consulting and cooperating with civil society was a major cross-cutting message highlighted by the rapporteur. Civil society participants underlined their central role played by civil society in facilitating access to services and justice as well as the provision of information. Notwithstanding these varied roles for practitioners, NGOs and local authorities

reiterated that they have neither the mandate nor the means to compensate for structural problems or a lack of investment. NGOs and local authorities can help to make safer routes for mixed migration flows in the Mediterranean so long as EU and national authorities provide more legal immigration channels, more structures and resources for SAR and a greater commitment to the long-term social inclusion of refugees and migrants. In this light, the EMF was seen as a major opportunity to create a new consultative forum of and led by civil society. Participants wanted to inform EU policy developments and give feedback on concrete proposals and legislative initiatives from relevant EU institutions. For the next EMF, further reflection would be required to design the structure and preparation of a civil society-led forum as well as on the appropriate follow-up to the EMF recommendations by the EU institutions.

Sergio Carrera, [Centre for European Policy Studies](#), praised the relevance of the refugees' testimonies and real-life accounts on what happens in Italy, Greece, Ceuta and Melilla. He deemed them a powerful means to contrast the securitisation and criminalisation of international migration. In addition, he said that only the experience on the ground allowed for a true assessment of the implementation of the EU legislation and actions. He acknowledged that the role of the EU has been increasingly proactive on questions of migration, borders, and asylum. The Forum made very clear that there was a gap between law and practice. He suggested that perhaps radical reforms were not necessary, if the EU were able to implement the current legal framework according to the principles that inspired the Union – the rule of law, democracy and respect for human rights. He argued that the key words to adopt were scrutiny and accountability. The civil society and migrant organisations should scrutiny and help the EU and the MSs to ensure that the right principles inform the daily practices of the authorities. It was dramatically evident that this was not the case in the Mediterranean, where refugees and migrants' rights were violated. The EU had also prime responsibility to monitor how the funding was used. **Sergio Carrera** pointed at the increasingly dominant role of the military in the implementation of asylum and immigration policies, which might raise questions of accountability.

The 1st EMF was concluded by a **High-level session**, chaired by **Irini Pari**, President of the Permanent Study Group on Immigration and Integration in the EESC. The speakers were **Dimitris Avramopoulos**, Commissioner, European Commission for Migration, Home Affairs and Citizenship; **Iliana Iotova**, Vice-Chair of the LIBE Committee, European Parliament; **Henri Malosse**, President of the European Economic and Social Committee; **Michel Lebrun**, President of the Committee of the Regions.

Irini Pari introduced the speakers sharing first her impressions on what seemed to be an extremely stimulating and promising start for the EMF, where participants from more than 200 organisations and agencies exchanged with passion, honesty and a true commitment towards making a change in the field of integration and immigration policies. She mentioned in particular the moving testimonies of refugees and activists working at borders and sea. The main lessons learned in the two-day discussion, she said, were about the importance to adopt a long-term perspective and a holistic approach, strengthen solidarity and trust building, not only among MSs, the EU and neighbouring countries, but also between the refugees and the EU institutions.

Commissioner Dimitris Avramopoulos thanked the EMF for the inputs provided and declared he wanted to contribute substantially to the debate, sharing his ideas and approach. He started by saying that he had worked with migrants throughout his entire political career. He confirmed that migration was on the top of the agenda of the EC and of all MSs. He stated that everyone was moved by the tragic events in the Mediterranean but, beyond the emotional reactions, that deaths in the Mediterranean were unacceptable. He believed a decisive and coordinated EU action could not be delayed to solve what was mistakenly framed as a problem of Southern European countries only, while it was clearly a pan-European and human rights issue. He then listed a series of measures that the EU could already enforce better: access to asylum procedure and assistance to refugees, urge the MSs to fully implement the [Common European Asylum System](#), and establish a European programme for the resettlement of refugees. He committed the Commission to discuss with MSs how to distribute a more balanced share of refugees, to present a comprehensive approach to assist migrants in need of protection, asylum seekers, refugees, smuggled people, to reinforce borders in respect of migrants human rights, to open legal channels and support integration. He stated that, as guardian of the Treaties, the Commission would not allow any re-nationalization of the policies and that Europeans should remember that many of them were migrants in the past. According to the Commissioner, better results could be expected, if migration was embedded in all internal and external policies of the EU.

Commissioner Dimitris Avramopoulos said that many people were looking towards Europe for protection and economic opportunities. He argued that mixed flows brought challenges, and vouched for a consistent coordination with civil society in tackling the challenges. He focussed on smuggling, which exposes people to unsafe and inhumane conditions. Migrants pay fortunes to smugglers. To protect people from these criminals, the EU improved police measures and increased the numbers of arrests; promoted campaigns to raise awareness against smuggling in many countries, such as Pakistan, Ethiopia, Niger. He declared that the fundamental rights of those who are being smuggled should be respected. He admitted that smugglers are very well organised in flexible networks that transcend borders, using social media and new technologies to coordinate, and sometimes States lag behind. That is why a transnational cooperation with country of origin and transit, NGOs and international agencies, was a cornerstone of the fight against smuggling. CSOs, local and regional authorities should be involved in debunking the myths about smuggling and irregular migration. In fact, bottom up information campaigns proved to have more impact on people than institutionalized campaigns. Lastly, the Commissioner asked for the Forum participants' support to help the Commission promote positive narratives about migrants and refugees and make sure they have their place in European societies. Only if different sectors of the European civil societies pitched in, a real change in the perception of public opinion on migration could be achieved. He remarked that populist movements and xenophobic discourses were on the rise in Europe, describing refugees and migrants as a burden and a threat. He noted how their economic, societal and cultural contribution to the development of the EU was too often sacrificed at the altar of electoral politics. He reminded that when the integration process was successful and access to labour market facilitated, migrants and refugees were a great resource and produced wealth for the society. The Commissioner concluded noting that a successful path towards integration needed to start from the very beginning of the migrants' journey, as it was pointed out during the workshops. He mentioned the inter-agency *Praesidium Project* (UNHCR,

International Organization for Migration, the Red Cross and Save the Children), aimed at strengthening the management capacity for mixed migration flows arriving by sea, particularly to Lampedusa and other coastal areas in southern Italy, as a particularly significant example of partnership between institutions and CSOs.

Iliana Iotova congratulated the Bureau on choosing the topic of the EMF, as particularly timely and poignant, and suggested to expand the focus of the debate beyond the Mediterranean on to land-borders too. She said that sea and land border issues could not be tackled separately, since they are deeply linked. She stressed how the quick evolution in the threats and dangers connected to the mixed flows needed a global and holistic approach. She mentioned the example of the foreign fighters to reinforce her point. On the other hand, migrants and refugees continued to face serious violations of their human rights, the size of crossings grew exponentially, the conditions of the journey deteriorated. She suggested that new resources and solutions were required. She gave account of the activities of the EP that already adopted four resolutions relating to influxes of refugees and announced that the LIBE committee would start an own initiative report on the situation in the Mediterranean. The LIBE Vice-Chair praised Italy's *Mare nostrum* programme and declared that surveillance of maritime borders coordinated by Frontex should be boosted, criticising the *Triton Operation* for not developing a clear implementation framework and a clear divisions of responsibility. She added that patrolling and rescuing was only one aspect of the solution and that the Dublin system needed to be seriously re-examined, since it lacked fairness and solidarity and disadvantaged MSs on the external borders of the EU. The EP already addressed the need for a more equal distribution of refugees, as in the [11 September 2012 Resolution on enhanced intra-EU solidarity in the field of asylum](#), promoting new physical relocation instruments. The EP called for a more rational approach in the distribution of the beneficiaries of international protection, which would include several indicators, such as the size of the country, its population, GDP, unemployment rates, etc. The EP also worked to ensure that at least 20% of [Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund](#) were earmarked to promote the integration of legal immigrants. **Iliana Iotova** expressed concerns about the respect of reciprocal obligations stated in the 2013 [Agreement between the European Union and the Republic of Turkey on the readmission of persons residing without authorisation](#), considering that Turkey was the main transit country for illegal immigration to the EU. She invited the Commission to strengthen the controls and policing of the borders between Turkey, Greece and Bulgaria, with the economic contribution of all MSs, as a prerequisite for a relaxation of the Visa arrangements.

Henri Malosse urged the Commissioner to act quickly along the lines he announced, communicating great hope. He insisted on the urgency to act because migrants, public opinion, and NGOs could not wait, especially when proposals of limiting Schengen were already on the table. The President of the EESC recalled Europe's recent past of war, divisions, and displacements, to cast a shadow of shame on the current attitude of Europeans towards people in need of protection, especially when other less developed countries are welcoming much higher numbers of refugees. He insisted that the implementation of a common integration and border policy should be shared between MSs immediately. If this was not the case, he envisaged more difficulties in tackling the task of managing mixed flows, but also serious risks of re-nationalization and the failure of the EU project. He suggested that Europe should open safe paths for refugees, rescuing them from the hands of smugglers and

traffickers, to whom they recur because the EU failed to create legal channels for them. He proposed to ban the word “illegal”, when it comes to migrants and asylum seekers, since it criminalises human beings who simply seek a safer and more peaceful life. He argued that asylum should never be treated as a privilege or a humanitarian concession, since it is a right enshrined in the principles of the [United Nations Charter](#). **Henri Malosse** concluded by praising the relationship consolidated with CSOs during the years of existence of the EIF and the new format of the EMF. He declared that the EESC would probably expand the same model of dialogue and coordination to other policy spheres.

Michel Lebrun emphasised the role of local and regional communities as foremost partners in welcoming migrants and implementing most of the integration policies. He said it is the regional and local administrators’ duty to assure a path to economic and social integration of migrants, through partnerships with local administrations in other MSs and neighbouring countries. He admitted he was touched by the Commissioner’s statement that migration was going to be high on the EC agenda. He found it unacceptable that the Mediterranean was considered a cemetery for many migrants. Passivity was not an option, when 3000 people had perished in the Mediterranean and flows kept increasing. In order to find a solution for economic and humanitarian problems, he suggested the EU institutions take the lead in close cooperation with local and regional communities. He added that there were plenty of examples of functioning partnerships between EU regions and regions of countries of origin and transit, but they needed the financial support of the EC to consolidate the results. The President of CoR called for a coordinated mobilisation among all European decision makers, including mayors, local administrators, to achieve stability in the Mediterranean, promote development, encourage and guarantee integration. He underlined the key question was the political will to act. Successively, he cited a few practical initiatives he wanted to share with the participants of the EMF, adopted by the [Euro-Mediterranean Regional and Local Assembly \(ARLEM\)](#), a permanent political forum of which he is co-chair. In December 2014, ARLEM took practical steps for the creation of new governance structures in the Euro-Mediterranean region, that envisage involvement of tens of mayors and regional authorities, working in partnership to promote education and development programmes, information campaigns about risks of irregular migration, implementation of voluntary returns, increase cooperation on the management of EU external borders. These types of actions and platforms favour the establishment and the exchange of good practices on asylum and migration, essential to better define policies in the future. The members of ARLEM helped create a dataset of numerous good practices, as well as produce a series of viable short-term solutions in the management of mixed flows, circular migration and development programmes, while safeguarding fundamental rights. **Michel Lebrun** concluded with the proposal that CoR co-organise the next EMF.