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Migration and the EU Global Strategy: Narratives and Dilemmas

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ABSTRACT

Migration did not figure in the European Security Strategy of 2003. Never mentioned as a threat, it was not even mentioned as a risk. Thirteen years later, migration is widely cited in the new European Union Global Strategy. Much richer than the previous security document and global in aspiration, the Global Strategy treats migration as a challenge and an opportunity, recognising the key role it plays in a rapidly changing security landscape. However, this multi-faceted perspective on migration uncovers starkly different political and normative claims, all of which are legitimate in principle. The different narratives on migration present in the new strategic document attest to the Union's comprehensive approach to the issue but also to critical and possibly competing normative dilemmas.

KEYWORDS

Migration; resilience; European Union; European Union Global Strategy; normative issues; justice; security; narratives

The launch of the European Union Global Strategy (EUGS) suffered from “bad timing”.¹ The result of the ‘leave or remain’ referendum in Great Britain held in June 2016, which was interpreted as a setback for the European Union (EU), called into question not only the ‘appropriateness’ of issuing a (global) strategy, but also the very meaning of the European Union as an exemplary and appealing regional integration project. Few commentators have noticed, though, that the words emphasizing the “internal challenges” of the Union were also meant to underline the deep repercussions of the “refugee crisis” on the EU and its member states.² Statements, such as “we live in times of existential crisis [...] our Union is under threat [...] our European project is being questioned” or “never has our unity been so challenged”³ aptly describe the internal crisis generated by the EU’s inability to face the huge migration inflows it has been experiencing over the last three years. Remarkably, it was just a few months before the release of the EUGS that the European Commission admonished several member states for having “resorted to reintroducing temporary internal border controls, placing in question the proper functioning of the Schengen area of free movement and its benefits to European citizens and the European economy”⁴

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¹See for example Tocci, “Interview with Nathalie Tocci”.

²Exceptions to that were, for example, Sidiropoulos, “The EU Global Strategy”, and Mälkso, “From the ESS to the EU Global Strategy”.

³European Union, *Shared Vision, Common Action (EUGS)*, 13, 16.

⁴European Commission, *Back to Schengen*, 2.

Migration is not described as a ‘security threat’ in either the EUGS or any past migration-related document, such as the previous European Security Strategy of 2003. Indeed, this may explain to some extent why it did not appear in a document named “security strategy”. However, in the EUGS, which is a foreign policy strategy as much as – if not more than – a security strategy, migration is probably the most frequently mentioned issue area, discussed with reference to foreign policy objectives (including internal repercussions), geographical areas and the purported values of the European Union. Pointing out the important role that migration plays in the EUGS is the first objective of this article.

The second is to highlight the different rationales of the EU’s migration policy, which are embedded – but identifiable – in the different narratives present in the EUGS (and other documents). Narratives of migration are basically short stories that enshrine a view of who migrants are with respect to the receiving community.⁵ Narratives can function as legitimising stories for specific policy actions, and at the same time gain strength from being put into practice. Much like any other narrative, narratives of migration told by the hosting community are not just neutral descriptive devices, but indicators of that community’s understanding of social relations, as well as factors legitimising political decisions. There has been a wide debate on how securitising narratives of migration have allowed for the adoption of securitised practices towards migration.⁶ Much less attention has been paid to the range of different narratives present in the various EU documents dedicated to migration and now summarised in the EUGS. The second aim of this article is to point them out.

Finally, the third aim is to determine the political and normative dilemmas associated with the adoption of each of the narratives identified. Multiple and possibly competing narratives with respect to a same issue create normative dilemmas in any polity, but even more so in the EU, which represents itself as a principled polity, a characterised power – civilian, normative, ethical, etc. – driven by its norms and values.⁷ What we propose to do in this article is to identify the normative claims in the narratives embedded in the EUGS and the normative dilemmas arising from them.

The article is divided into three sections. The first introduces the elements of continuity and change with respect to the topic of migration found in EU strategic documents, specifically comparing the 2003 and the 2016 strategies of the European Union and retracing what happened between those dates that led to the importance attached to migration in the latter. The second section takes a closer look at how migration is handled in the EUGS and explores the different migration-related narratives. The third explores some of the possible political and normative dilemmas that could arise from them, their referents and their legitimating arguments. A brief concluding section wraps up the article.

⁵Narrative theory has developed widely (see Czarniawska, *Narratives in Social Science Research*). What we do here is rely on a light concept of narrative as a conceptual device that allows us to identify correlations between the characterisation of a social phenomenon in a given society and that society’s representation of the social world (including self/other relations).

⁶In general, the securitisation of discourse on migration has been broadly described. The OHCHR denounced the existence of a “toxic narrative on migration” (<http://www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/Migration/Pages/Shapingthepublicnarrativeonmigration.aspx>), which the OHCHR aimed to reframe through a collective effort. Scholars have long identified processes of securitisation of the public debate in Europe (see, for instance, Allen, *A Decade of Immigration*) and of discourse on migration (see Huysmans, *The politics of insecurity*; Fakhoury, *Securitising migration*; Neal, *Securitization and Risk at EU Border*; Léonard, “EU border security and migration”; Ceccorulli, *Framing irregular immigration*).

⁷cf. Manners, “Normative Power Europe”; Lucarelli and Manners, *Values and Principles*; Aggestam, “Introduction: Ethical Power Europe?”.

2003/2016: the rise of migration as a crucial issue

Migration was not explicitly mentioned in the 2003 Security Strategy (ESS), nor implied as a key determinant of the EU's foreign action.⁸ In other words, migration was not considered on its own account but rather as a by-product of other phenomena.⁹

In 2003, the EU was still taking its first steps in the areas of migration and asylum policy, despite the strong mandate received from the 1999 Amsterdam Treaty and the following Tampere Council. Only discussed as a Home Affairs issue, migration was overshadowed by threats like terrorism and organised crime, the former being the main concern prompting the drafting of the Security Strategy. The only dimension of migration that gained attention was the potential trafficking of migrants, a by-product of criminal activities. Indeed, the 2003 document recognised the possibility of migration movements as a consequence of disruptive events, such as conflicts or competition for natural resources. Also, it acknowledged that demographic imbalances could be a potential cause of instability, especially if occurring in neighbouring regions.¹⁰ Still, the document provided no strategic framework for understanding and handling migration – nor was this corrected in the 2008 revision.¹¹

That migration was not dealt with in security terms is not surprising: the phenomenon was certainly present at the time, but it was not perceived as an emergency. However, in the last few years ignoring migration and its strategic dimension is no longer an option. The massive inflow of migrants reaching (or trying to reach) European shores has thrown into question not only the EU's receptive capabilities but also its fundamentals. Since the Arab Spring in 2011, which uprooted many agreements on immigration control between the EU and its member states and North African countries, the EU has been forced to develop its agency in migration matters – without really having the means, or frequently the will, to do so. As a matter of fact, the member states remain fundamental actors in Europe's governance of migration, leaving the EU to cope with different national measures in various areas (from reception conditions for asylum seekers and refugees to national lists of 'safe countries'). At the same time, the Union has had to struggle to maintain and enhance solidarity among the member states to make the overall EU migration system work. Problems like the lack of solidarity (particularly but not exclusively on the part of the Visegrad countries) with the most exposed countries (Italy and Greece) as well as the recent uncoordinated reintroduction of internal border controls in the Schengen area, are serious. The situation reached breaking point when illegal border crossings almost tripled in 2014 with respect to 2013 (almost 285,000 irregular immigrants and asylum seekers),¹² while in 2015 there were more than 1 million arrivals by sea.¹³ The rising pressure of migration demanded a more hands-on kind of action from the Union.

However, two elements already mentioned in the first EU strategic document and later covered much more broadly in the 2016 Global Strategy are worth noting. The first is the strong emphasis on how "internal and external aspects of security are indissolubly linked";

⁸European Union, *Secure Europe in Better World (ESS)*.

⁹On the genesis of supranational governance of migration in the Area of Freedom, Security and Justice, see among others, Kaunert, *European Internal Security*.

¹⁰*Ibid.*, 4, 7.

¹¹European Union, *Providing Security in Changing World*.

¹²European Parliament, "Irregular immigration in the EU".

¹³UNHCR, "Over one million sea arrivals".

the second is the need for an external dimension of what was intuitively perceived to be an internal matter.¹⁴

In 2015, the EU issued two complementary Agendas ('things to do'), one on Security, and the other on Migration,¹⁵ which, combined, set the stage for the future inclusion of migration in the EUGS. The first document, aimed at creating an area of internal security, underlined the need to identify and cope with new challenges, working on both their internal and external dimensions. It clarified that the EU's internal security and global security were tightly nested one inside the other and mutually dependent. This called for closer linkage between Justice and Home Affairs, on the one hand, and Common Security and Defence Policies (CSDP), on the other. It also stressed the need for a "joined-up inter-agency and cross-sector approach" in policy determination, due to the increasing connectedness of the different types of security threats.¹⁶ Furthermore, it specified that "[t]his Agenda has to be seen in conjunction with the forthcoming European Agenda on Migration, which will address issues directly relevant to security, such as smuggling of migrants, trafficking in human beings, social cohesion and border management".¹⁷

Although lacking some of the features expected of a proper strategy, the 2015 Agenda on Migration embodied a well detailed set of conceptions of how migration should be conceived and governed by the EU in the years to come. Aimed at "reaping the benefits and addressing the challenges" of migration, the Agenda on Migration envisages short- and long-term measures to strengthen the EU's ability to deal with migrant pressure, provide adequate integration prospects and respond to "the economic demands of a Europe in demographic decline" (2). All these objectives are central to the EU's existence, its current and prospective capacity to act on a global scale and to "make a positive difference".¹⁸ In order to devise a coherent and effective European policy, attentive to all its dimensions, cross-sector cooperation in development, trade, employment, foreign and home affairs had to be promoted (6). The idea already embedded in this document is that migration – and in particular its external dimension – would be central to the High Representative's work on the forthcoming Strategic Review and the new Neighbourhood Policy. The Agenda on Migration also explained that "[m]igration should be recognized as one of the primary areas where an active and engaged EU external policy is of direct importance to EU citizens". (7)

Clearly, the 2015 Agendas set the ground for the full inclusion of migration in the 2016 Global Strategy. The way migration is actually understood and represented in the EUGS is the topic of the next section.

Migration 'unpacked': multiple narratives

Migration finds a broad and comprehensive treatment in the sixty pages of the EUGS. The richness and multifaceted nature of the concept are reflected in the variety of terms featured in the document: for example "mobility", "border management", "origin and transit countries", "migrants", "refugees", "legal migration", "readmission", "return", "displacement",

¹⁴European Union, *ESS*, 2.

¹⁵European Commission, *European Agenda on Security and European Agenda on Migration*, respectively.

¹⁶Such as organised crime, trafficking, market for illicit drugs, terrorism, terrorist foreign fighters.

¹⁷European Commission, *European Agenda on Security*, 4.

¹⁸European Union, *EUGS*.

“displaced”, “reception”, “asylum”, “irregular flow”, “legal and circular channels”, “demography”, “visa facilitation” and “visa liberalization”.

Moreover, the document includes a plurality of narratives when dealing with migration, which correspond to different ways of understanding the phenomenon. None is particularly original, as all had already been drawn on in previous documents (namely the two abovementioned agendas) and many are shared with other international actors, but the combined set of narratives is quite telling of the political and normative dilemmas the EU and its member states are facing. We have identified six such narratives: ‘the economic-societal narrative’, ‘the values narrative’, ‘the security narrative’, ‘the resilience narrative’, ‘the selective narrative’ and ‘the global responsibilities narrative’. For each, we provide a description according to the EUGS and, where possible, evidence of its political implementation.

The economic-societal narrative

The economic-societal narrative refers to migration as an opportunity for the hosting community. The EU recognises that, to be competitive, its economy needs skills which cannot “always and immediately” be found inside the EU’s labour market (7). There is often an imbalance between needs and available skills, and more efforts should be made to match them appropriately through new mobility packages or skills initiatives. At the same time, the Union is well aware that sooner or later it is going to suffer from serious demographic imbalances. The decline in population is going to exacerbate the ageing phenomenon: while the EU will need highly skilled jobs, the working-age population will shrink, and the elderly population will increase substantially,¹⁹ posing challenges on many fronts.²⁰ Making the EU more attractive should hence be given high priority.²¹

In the EUGS, this narrative of migration is signalled by terms such as “mobility” or “human mobility”, and in policymaking terms such as the endorsement of visa facilitation, liberalisation processes and circular migration possibilities. Economic prospects but also societal links are likely to be strengthened by increased mobility opportunities. This argument surfaces throughout the entire document, and mainly refers to candidate states (Turkey), the neighbourhood, as well as Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean. In the EUGS, the economic-societal narrative implies a positive assessment of increased mobility opportunities as they can contribute to the objectives of both the EU and the countries of origin through migrants’ empowerment and remittances.²²

At the policy level, skilled migrants have been guaranteed priority access to the EU through the Blue Card Directive. According to the Directive, the admission of skilled workers and their families is facilitated and the social and economic rights granted them are very similar to those of EU citizens.²³ However the measure has been difficult to implement due to intricate admission and intra-mobility conditions, resulting in the member states frequently pursuing national recruitment plans for highly skilled workers.²⁴

¹⁹Livi Bacci, “L’Europa ha bisogno”.

²⁰Ceccorulli *et al.*, “Europe ‘depopul-ageing’ bomb?”.

²¹European Commission, *European Agenda on Migration*, 14-5.

²²European Union, *EUGS*, 13.

²³Council of the European Union, *On the conditions of entry*.

²⁴See, among others, Triandafyllidou and Isaakyan, “EU management of high skilled migration”.

The values narrative

The values narrative ingrained in the EUGS underlines the importance of upholding the EU's values when dealing with migration. The focus on values is not only presented as a moral imperative, but also as a way of guaranteeing internal coherence and external credibility.²⁵ The EU Global Strategy states that “[l]iving up consistently to our values internally will determine our external credibility and influence”.²⁶ This implies that respect for values is a key ingredient of the EU's external action. In the EUGS, adherence to values also implies respect for domestic, European and international migration law. Hence, “remaining true to our values is a matter of law as much as of ethics and identity”. As the EU's values are understood and presented as universal, this narrative is cosmopolitan in nature. In relation to migration, it implies respecting migrants' human rights at every step of the migration process.²⁷

As for the practices, the values narrative is probably one of the most challenged.²⁸ In the case of asylum, for example, relevant EU legislation makes reference to the 1951 Refugee Convention, the *non refoulement principle* and the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union, in which “the right to asylum” is explicitly stated. Moreover, and differently from other actors on the international landscape, the European Union has significantly extended the meaning of protection, endorsing not only protection from risk of persecution but also from serious harm: this has engendered a new form of protection, ‘subsidiary protection’, that goes well beyond refugee status.²⁹ Also, EU legislation is open to more extensive forms of ‘humanitarian protection’ adopted in member states.³⁰

Nevertheless, the right to asylum and the protection offered by the EU as fundamental rights have been put into question recently by proposals for revision of the EU Asylum System aimed at reducing the number of asylum requests as well as the rights granted asylum seekers and refugees.³¹ While the proposals still have to be evaluated by the EU's institutions (they are currently under scrutiny in the European Parliament), clear signs of a weakened understanding of protection can already be noticed. For example, there is a proposal for introducing mandatory evaluation for ‘sufficient protection’ achievable in other ‘safe’ countries, where exactly what ‘sufficient’ means is not explained.³² With respect to migration management more generally, the European Union's aim to reach common minimum standards has mostly translated into lower levels of protection than those expected and sometimes in diluted safeguards on human rights protection. For example, by remaining vague on the standards for detention of irregular immigrants and asylum seekers, the EU has *de facto* authorised different detention modalities in the member states (in terms of length, structures and living conditions).³³

²⁵On the relation between values and interest in the EUGS, see Youngs, “How to Balance Interests and Values”.

²⁶European Union, *EUGS*, 15.

²⁷The many references to human rights in the text have been widely noticed by commentators, see Doody, “EU Global Strategy under threat”.

²⁸For an overview of values and principles in EU foreign policy, see Lucarelli and Manners, *Values and Principles*.

²⁹European Union, *Directive 2011/95/EU*.

³⁰*Ibid.*

³¹See Fassi and Lucarelli, *European Migration System*.

³²European Commission, *Proposal for a Regulation*, 17.

³³European Union, *Directive 2013/33/EU*.

The security narrative

The security narrative draws largely on the idea of an increasingly blurred internal-external divide and the alleged connection between migration and other security threats (especially smuggling and terrorism). This notion has, to a significant extent, informed the handling of migration in the Home Affairs domain.³⁴ In this narrative, the key word is (external) “border management”. The EUGS frequently maintains that “the external cannot be separated from the internal. In fact, internal policies often deal only with the consequences of external dynamics.”³⁵ Addressing challenges that are both internal and external in nature such as terrorism, hybrid threats, cyber and energy security and organised crime, makes external border management a necessity.³⁶ The external border management type of security narrative is, hence, based on the idea that the main rights-holder is the community inside the EU’s borders. It assumes that the protection of borders is a priority and this has implications as far as the management of migration is concerned.

However, as in the Agenda on Migration, the EUGS identifies migrants themselves as another subject of security policy – the target of potential threats originating from outside the EU. In this case, the objective is to “save migrants’ lives” from the networks of smugglers and criminal organisations and the tragedies occurring largely at sea, and to ensure their “safe” arrival in the EU.³⁷

In practical terms, two main developments, both mentioned in the EUGS, have resulted from this dual security narrative: the establishment of the European Border and Coast Guard and the launch of migration-related CSDP operations. The Commission had already underlined the necessity to create a European Border Guard in a 2001 Communication,³⁸ and over the years, a large number of studies and proposals were produced.³⁹ The European Border and Coast Guard, an upgrade of the European Agency for the Management of Operational Cooperation at the External Borders of the Member States of the European Union (FRONTEX), was definitively approved in September 2016.⁴⁰ It involves a “joined-up” approach, as the Global Strategy calls it, meaning integrated border management, including multiple tasks (from border control to search and rescue operations and protection of the Schengen area against illegal immigration); multiple tools (external and internal risk analysis, the return of third country nationals, large-scale technology); and cross-sector cooperation (among the member states, among EU agencies and with third countries).⁴¹

The objective mentioned in the Global Strategy to employ CSDP missions and operations seemingly addresses the internal-external security nexus. According to the document, external policies and provisions should be made “migration sensitive” and consistent with internal ones to deal with the many aspects of migration.⁴² The Agenda on Migration had

³⁴See, for example, Lavenex and Wichmann, “External Governance of Internal Security”; Longo, “Justice and Home Affairs”.

³⁵European Union, *EUGS*, 17.

³⁶*Ibid.*, 20.

³⁷European Commission, *European Agenda on migration*, 3.

³⁸European Commission, *Common policy on illegal immigration*.

³⁹On the genesis of the Agency and its first institutionalisation through FRONTEX, see Léonard, “The creation of FRONTEX”.

On the proposal for the EU Border and Coast Guard, see Rijpma, “Proposal for European Border and Coast Guard”.

⁴⁰European Council and European Parliament, *European Border and Coast Guard*.

⁴¹*Ibid.*, 12.

⁴²European Union, *EUGS*, 50.

already opened the way to such a joined-up approach by recommending that CSDP operations be used “to systematically identify, capture and destroy vessels used by smugglers”⁴³ and that migration become a part of ongoing CSDP missions (specifically in Mali and Niger, which is the main migration route towards Libya) through more attention to border management.⁴⁴ The idea of a “migration component” in CSDP operations in Africa is also envisaged in the EUGS.⁴⁵ The CSDP EUNAVFOR-MED operation ‘Sophia’, launched in the central Mediterranean in June 2015, mirrors this joined-up logic by aiming “to disrupt the business of human smuggling and trafficking in the Mediterranean and [...] prevent loss of lives at sea”.⁴⁶ The mission also aims at securing EU borders, for it has been given a mandate to train the Libyan Coast Guard. Both the instruments analysed interpret the security narrative as one intended to save migrants’ lives while securing EU borders.

The resilience narrative

There is probably no better word than ‘resilience’ to describe the EU’s approach to the external dimension of migration.⁴⁷ Resilience aims to “enable migrants and refugees to stay close to home and avoid taking dangerous journeys”.⁴⁸ It is not a new idea, but has gained particular purchase with the refugee crisis. In a 2003 Document, the Commission explained that developing the asylum system of transit countries so as to turn them into first countries of asylum could allow protection to be delivered “close to needs” and that this would reduce incentives to look for protection in the European Union.⁴⁹ The EUGS builds on these documents and clearly underlines the role of resilience for the EU’s security: “Fragility beyond our borders threatens all our vital interests. By contrast, resilience – the ability of states and societies to reform, thus withstanding and recovering from internal and external crises – benefits us.”⁵⁰

Applied to migration, resilience is mainly invoked with reference to possible new member states, neighbours and surrounding regions – that is, “transit and origin countries”. The resilience approach is supposed to contribute to reducing the number of economic migrants and asylum seekers en route to the EU.⁵¹ This reduction is expected to be pursued through selective engagement with countries of origin, alleviating the conditions leading to migration, improving those countries’ capacity to manage migration, encouraging them to readmit nationals. At the same time, the EU aims to increase education and livelihood opportunities in transit countries. As for asylum seekers, the strategy involves focusing on the root causes of displacement and helping origin and transit countries build up their reception and asylum management capacities (also through the adoption of relevant international obligations – that is, the Geneva Refugee Convention). In both cases, the approach encompasses a variety of tools across different policy areas (development, trade, diplomacy,

⁴³European Commission, *European Agenda on Migration*, 3.

⁴⁴*Ibid.*, 5.

⁴⁵European Union, *EUGS*, 36.

⁴⁶European External Action Service, *European Union Naval Force*.

⁴⁷On the external dimension of immigration and asylum policy, see Lavenex and Uçarer, “The External Dimension of Europeanization”; Boswell, “The ‘external dimension’ of EU Immigration” and Monar, “The EU’s growing role in AFSJ”.

⁴⁸European Commission, *Establishing a New Partnership Framework*, 5.

⁴⁹European Commission, *Towards a more accessible asylum system*.

⁵⁰European Union, *EUGS*, 24.

⁵¹See Pastore, “Relazioni Euro-Africane e migrazioni”, 243.

education, health, security, etc). If effective, resilience could have a positive impact on third countries in the long term, as it envisages an overall improvement in living conditions; at the same time, though, it implies transferring most of the duties of migration management to those countries.

The idea that migration management involves the engagement of third countries was already well ingrained in the EU system before the EUGS. As a matter of fact, strategic reflections on the ‘external dimension’ of the Area of Freedom Security and Justice, requiring third states to improve their migration management capacities, date back to 2005.⁵² The 2011 Global Approach to Migration and Mobility inspired by the Arab Spring events urged the creation of Mobility Partnerships as comprehensive packages of measures agreed upon with third states.⁵³ Through these (and others) forms of cooperation, the EU has tried to negotiate readmission agreements with transit countries envisaging the return of also third country nationals. Results have been poor, however, as international law only obliges countries to accept the return of their own nationals. In recent years, new impulse has been given to the negotiation of readmission agreements with countries of origin, particularly in Africa.⁵⁴

The Emergency Trust Fund for Stability “addressing the root causes of irregular migration and displaced persons in Africa” agreed upon at the Valletta Summit between European and African partners on November 2015 went exactly in the direction of “retailoring some of the EU’s assistance with the aim of visibly improving citizens’ wellbeing”.⁵⁵ This tool is aimed at “promoting resilience” especially in the Sahel, Lake Chad, Horn of Africa and other areas of North Africa.⁵⁶ Comprehensive approaches have been envisaged for different countries,⁵⁷ with the aim of establishing new Partnership Frameworks (“compacts”) to ensure that development and Neighbourhood Policy tools “reinforce local capacity-building, including for border controls, asylum, counter-smuggling and reintegration efforts”, while addressing the root causes of irregular flows and displacement.⁵⁸

The selective narrative

The selective narrative refers to the aim of the EU to attach ‘priorities’ to different categories of migrants. One example is the need to ensure the “orderly and managed” arrival of persons in need of international protection.⁵⁹ The EUGS endorses the argument and supports the “safe, regulated and legal” arrival of refugees. The main logic behind this narrative maintains that chaotic arrivals cannot be accepted; conversely, orderly arrivals, managed for example through resettlement plans, would ensure a safe journey and proper treatment for persons in need. The best example of this approach is the EU-Turkey Statement, signed in March 2016. The political deal between the EU Heads of State or Government and the Turkish

⁵²European Commission, *Strategy on the External Dimension*.

⁵³European Commission, *Global Approach to Migration*. On the limits of creating a Global Approach to Migration and Mobility, see Hampshire, “Speaking with one voice”.

⁵⁴As reported in a Commission document, “Regional Development and Protection Programmes are focused on providing protection to those in need, but also on enhancing resilience of refugees, internally displaced persons and host communities”. European Commission, *European Agenda on Migration*, 10.

⁵⁵European Union, *EUGS*, 26.

⁵⁶European Commission, *European Union Emergency Trust Fund*.

⁵⁷European Union, *EUGS*, 27. Priority countries of origin and transit are Senegal, Mali, Niger, Nigeria and Ethiopia.

⁵⁸European Commission, *Establishing a New Partnership Framework*, 2.

⁵⁹*ibid.*, 13.

government aimed at substituting irregular immigration with legal channels of resettlement in the EU for Syrian refugees. In accordance with the statement, all new irregular immigrants or asylum seekers crossing from Turkey to the Greek islands as of 20 March 2016 were to be returned to Turkey. At the same time, for every Syrian returned to Turkey, another Syrian is supposed to be resettled in the EU. Hence, the message conveyed is that only “Syrians arriving through regular channels” are eligible for international protection.

Although not mentioned in the EUGS, the relocation and hotspot systems for the internal management of the refugee crisis also follow this logic aimed at supporting order. Both systems ‘sort out’ people in clear need of international protection (defined by nationality) to be re-distributed among member states, distinguishing between those generally eligible for international protection and those to be returned because ineligible. Selection dynamics are also observable in the increasing importance attached to ‘safe country’ concepts (safe country of origin, first country of asylum and safe third country) as criteria in examining asylum requests.⁶⁰ In this case, the identification of a safe state to which a migrant can be returned is considered a discriminant between founded and unfounded or inadmissible asylum requests. Priority access into the EU is also granted to skilled migrants through the Blue Card Directive as mentioned earlier.

The global responsibilities narrative

Starting with the first lines of the EUGS, the EU makes clear that global action is necessary to address the root causes of conflicts and poverty and “champion the indivisibility of human rights”,⁶¹ all objectives that inevitably touch on migration. Humanitarian duties are clearly globally shared responsibilities, at least in the way they have been intended in recent decades, and should involve joint efforts of UN agencies, emerging players, regional organisations, civil society and local communities.⁶²

In the realm of migration, it is especially with respect to asylum that global responsibilities have taken on particular importance. Accordingly, collective efforts should be made to offer safe haven to people forced to leave their residence and to alleviate unequal burdens weighing on the countries most affected.⁶³ In concrete terms, this notion has resulted mostly in resettlement programmes. Considered a “durable solution” by the same UNHCR,⁶⁴ resettlement involves the transfer of displaced persons identified by the organisation as in clear need of international protection to another state that can provide protection and other rights.

However, resettlement plans are only implemented on a voluntary basis and handled by national states and some EU member states do not have such programmes. In July 2016, the European Commission proposed a Union Resettlement Framework, conveying the message that a common EU approach has to be developed and that resettlement should be a binding EU mechanism regulated by common specific procedures.⁶⁵ This might be a way for the EU to comply more effectively with its share of global asylum responsibilities and show its agency in this respect.

⁶⁰European Commission, *EU 'safe countries of origin' list*.

⁶¹European Union, *EUGS*, 17.

⁶²European Union, *EUGS*, 28.

⁶³See, for example, Gibney, “Refugees and justice between states”.

⁶⁴See <http://www.unhcr.org/solutions.html>

⁶⁵European Commission, *Establishing a Union Resettlement Framework*.

The narratives presented above provide a picture of the complex and multifaceted approaches to migration as envisaged by the EU, and attest to the importance of migration in its foreign and security policy. The coexistence of different and even contradictory narratives creates tensions in the EU's governance of migration. For instance, the border protection security narrative clashes with the global responsibility narrative as EU border protection could lead to the adoption of measures that are less attentive to migrants' rights or simply prioritises the security of the internal space over that of migrants. The next section specifically addresses the political and normative dilemmas arising from the arguments underlying the described narratives.

Political and normative dilemmas of migration narratives

In the following, we discuss some of the political and normative dilemmas engendered by the various narratives. Narratives are taken one at a time for the sake of clarity, however some dilemmas arise precisely at the intersection of more than one narrative. Keeping narratives and dilemmas separate allows us to distinguish various actors (such as, the EU, member states, third countries and migrants, among others) and objectives (such as, the protection of EU borders, EU values, global responsibilities, security), without diminishing the complexity of the phenomenon.

Dilemmas of the economic narrative

The EUGS's insistence on the economic narrative is well motivated. As seen, the EU suffers from a serious demographic deficit that needs to be dealt with. The selection of skilled migrants (as envisaged in the selective narrative) is a way of balancing out that deficit that is profitable for the European job market. However, as Massimo Livi Bacci argues,⁶⁶ time matters. Livi Bacci reckons that massive immigration can effectively serve this purpose only on the conditions that 1) the timespan is a generation, 2) that net immigration amounts to around 1-2 million migrants per year, and 3) that long-term, properly funded policies complementary to integration prospects are put in place.⁶⁷ Realistically speaking, these conditions are probably too difficult to fulfil for an actor that has already shown strong deficiencies in addressing the current situation.⁶⁸

A further dilemma of the economic narrative has to do with internal resources: the EU may be forced to strike a balance between accepting massive migration without the resources to handle it, on the one hand, and having to privilege the provision of effective reception, access to the welfare system and integration tools for a restricted number of migrants, on the other.⁶⁹

In normative terms, attracting skilled migrants might pose dilemmas with respect to the migrants' countries of origin: the EU's insistence on certain skills as a criterion for selection of migrants (evident in the proposal for the revision of the Blue Card Directive)

⁶⁶Livi Bacci, "L'Europa ha bisogno".

⁶⁷*Ibid.*, 934.

⁶⁸The arrival of more than one million asylum seekers in 2015 is considered an exceptional event, but solidarity among member states in terms of burden sharing (mainly through the relocation plan) has nevertheless fallen short.

⁶⁹See, for example, on this point, Ruhs, *The price of rights*.

may result in a brain drain in underdeveloped countries. At the same time, these resources are essential if the EU is to remain competitive and able to compensate for a diminishing and ageing population. In other words, attracting skilled workers from abroad may help the EU cope with its economic and demographic needs, but may also negatively affect the economic and social needs of the countries of origin.

Dilemmas of the values narrative

Insisting on values and the rule of law, the values narrative poses more than one dilemma. The EU has always stood out for positing values as the touchstone of its external credibility and influence.⁷⁰ Accordingly, the most apparent problem is non-respect or the non-prioritisation of some of the EU's values. This refers particularly to the EU's failure to privilege the protection of human rights over control of migrant flows.⁷¹ Recently, there has been criticism of an ever more restrictive asylum system that clashes with the right to asylum enshrined in the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union.⁷²

Clearly, this is not just a matter of non-compliance, as there are some intrinsic normative dilemmas involved in being a value-led polity. No matter how correct its behaviour, the EU will always be confronted with the moral conflict between protecting its own citizens and its institutional achievements (a legitimate aim which is a value in itself), on the one hand,⁷³ and providing assistance to an enormous number of incoming migrants, on the other. The Statement with Turkey is but one of the EU's recent provisions that explicitly raises questions about the EU's values by challenging the compatibility between protecting EU territory and asylum seekers' rights. This is a manifestation of the irreconcilable clash between the EU's communitarian and cosmopolitan "universal" souls, which poses more troubles to the EU than to traditional Westphalian states because of its self-representation as a value-driven polity.⁷⁴

Finally, given that respect of national, European and international law is equally central to the EU's values, it is remarkable that these layers do not exist coherently and harmoniously side by side as far as migration is concerned. National and European law may display significant differences, as far as the rights, integration possibilities and requirements of migrants, as well as family reunification opportunities and detention modalities, to name just a few, are concerned. Some national legislations are quite restrictive with respect to certain values the EU supports; and recent legislative proposals of the European Commission, such as those contained in the reform of the asylum system, seem to follow a restrictive path as well.⁷⁵ Some seem to pay lip service to largely shared fundamentals of international law (e.g. the *non refoulement* principle) while instead serving the EU's interests.

⁷⁰European Union, *EUGS*, 15.

⁷¹Amnesty International, *The Human Cost of Fortress Europe*.

⁷²For a critical position on the impact of EU asylum policies in the EU, see ECRE, "Time to Save the Right".

⁷³Grevi, "A global strategy for European Union"; Dijkstra, "Introduction: one-and-a-half cheers"; Mälksoo, "From ESS to EU Global Strategy".

⁷⁴Cf. Lucarelli and Manners, *Values and Principles*.

⁷⁵Menéndez, "The refugee crisis".

Dilemmas of the security narrative

The political and normative dilemmas of the security narrative may be easier to identify, as they are often associated with the securitisation of migration.⁷⁶ Both security objectives of the EU (saving migrants and protecting external borders) have been widely discussed.⁷⁷ Scholars have argued that the ‘save the migrants’ rhetoric mixes security and humanitarian approaches in order to make the EU’s action more urgent (we need to act before they risk their lives), or more restrictive (we have to prevent them from putting their lives at risk) or to shift the focus of the ‘crisis’ onto the migrants (we need to face the humanitarian crisis).⁷⁸ Much literature also insists on the negative implications that ensuring secure borders may have for migrants.⁷⁹

While both security objectives are central to the Union, the question arises whether the prioritisation of either goal may impact (negatively) on the other – that is, if they are to some extent incompatible.⁸⁰ This is a point that has frequently been made against the *Mare Nostrum* search and rescue operation, led by Italy between 2013 and 2014. The expectation to be saved at sea, so the argument goes, encourages migrants to attempt the journey, and since they resort to the services of ruthless smugglers, this actually subsidizes their business activity. All of this results in ever more massive and chaotic arrivals in the EU with negative repercussions on the EU’s reception capacity and European societies in general. That being so, saving migrants’ lives at sea – the argument goes – is not in compliance with a moral obligation, but rather with misplaced humanitarianism, with negative consequences for both migrants (who are prompted to keep risking their lives) and European societies.⁸¹ The counter-argument, is that not saving lives at sea with search and rescue operations, makes us responsible for the lives lost, as the root causes of migration are such that migrants would decide to take the risk of travelling by sea anyway.

Dilemmas of the resilience narrative

The EU’s aim to help build up capacities on migration and asylum management in the origin and transit countries is in line with what has been suggested by global migration agencies. For example, in 2003, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees recognised that asylum is most effective when it is close to needs – hence close to the states from which people escape.⁸² In a similar way, if migration journeys may put migrants’ lives at risk, then addressing the causes that trigger the outflows in the first place seems a suitable strategy.

⁷⁶The literature on the securitisation of migration is ample; see, for example Buzan, *People, states and fear*; Buzan, Wæver and De Wilde, *Security, a New Framework for Analysis*; Huysmans, *The politics of insecurity*; Neal, “Securitization and risk”. For recent approaches see, for example, Fakhoury, “Securitizing migration” and Ceccorulli, *Framing irregular immigration*.

⁷⁷On the contribution of FRONTEX to the securitisation of migration, see, for example, Léonard, “EU border security and migration”.

⁷⁸See, for example, Musarò, “Cosmopolitan solidarity vs. national belonging”. For a critical review of the role of ‘crisis’ in the consolidation of control practices and techniques of governing, see Jeandesboz and Pallister-Wilkins, “Crisis, Routine, Consolidation”, and Perkowski, “Deaths, Interventions, Humanitarianism”.

⁷⁹See, for example, Campesi, “FRONTEX”; Human Rights Watch, “EU policies put refugees at risk” and Triandafyllidou and Dimitriadi, “Deterrence and Protection”.

⁸⁰A *European Agenda on Migration* recognises that we are facing a “difficult balancing act”, 2.

⁸¹“UK axes support for Mediterranean migrant rescue operation”, *The Guardian*, 27 October 2014. <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2014/oct/27/uk-mediterranean-migrant-rescue-plan>

⁸²European Commission, *Towards a more accessible asylum system*.

However, what precisely does resilience mean in the case of the EU and third countries? The critical observation that can be made is that, with the aim of enhancing third countries' resilience to cope with migration, the EU is in fact "eternalising the burden".⁸³ Arrangements like the EU-Turkey deal or the newly-launched compacts with African countries raise a number of ethical issues over the EU's externalisation of migration management to make up for its ineffectiveness: the burden of migration management is left in the hands of third (transit and origin) countries, which can then be blackmailed in the form of conditionality (the so-called 'more for more' approach). In other words, the EU can be accused of externalising burdens and keeping a patronising attitude with respect to these countries. The primary aim in this case is control of migration, not the development of better living conditions for would-be migrants.

Moreover, what if migrants are kept in third countries because the third countries are believed to be resilient given the EU's efforts, but living conditions in the countries of origin have not been improved? It is clear that 'resilience' is a long-term effort, but the EU may be tempted to anticipate the effective achievement of resilient states and societies to meet its short-term objectives. This is another dilemma related to the resilience logic.

Dilemmas of the selective narrative

The selective narrative makes it possible to draw a clear dividing line between "persons in need of international protection" (according to EU criteria) and economic migrants (or 'false' asylum seekers). Yet, it also gives priority to skilled (wanted) over unskilled migrants (less necessary for the EU's competitiveness). This implies creating categories in a domain that generally eschews classification. The EU is not blind to this reality: "Every person's migration tells its own story. Misguided and stereotyped narratives often tend to focus only on certain types of flows, overlooking the inherent complexity of this phenomenon, which impacts society in many different ways and calls for a variety of responses."⁸⁴ Yet, migration as a practical policy issue requires some kind of systematisation and predictability. It is in this vein that the demands in EU documents for "order" in the management of migration and for "ordered and legal" arrivals have to be interpreted. Inevitably, though, with classification comes selection and possibly prioritisation. This is clear, for example, in the frequent tendency in recent years to base arguments on nationality criteria, using them to assess vulnerabilities (the relocation programme, hotspot system,⁸⁵ resettlement plans, return of irregular immigrants and safe countries concepts).⁸⁶ Clearly, the risk is that the EU could lose sight of the subjectivity of each migrant, regardless of his/her nationality or any other categorisation.

Dilemmas of the responsibility narrative

Finally, the responsibility narrative plays up the need to share responsibilities in the management of a complex, multifaceted and global phenomenon.⁸⁷ Ideally, responsibility should

⁸³See, for example, Wagner and Anholt, "Resilience as the new leitmotif"; Palm, "Did 2016 Mark a New Start?" Further on externalisation, see Dover, "Toward a Common EU Immigration Policy".

⁸⁴European Commission, *European Agenda on Migration*, 2.

⁸⁵For a critical analysis of the hotspot system, see ECRE, "Implementation of hotspots".

⁸⁶See for example ECRE, "ECRE Comments".

⁸⁷See, on this point, Newland, "New approaches to refugee crisis".

be shouldered irrespective of whether one is directly affected or not by a given event: accordingly, ‘wealthy’ countries can reasonably be accused of having neglected their global responsibilities in the current refugee crisis.

This narrative stresses the need to share responsibilities with third countries. This goes almost uncontested *per se*.⁸⁸ The real dilemma is whether the burden the EU bears is fair compared to that of third countries (such as Lebanon, Jordan or Turkey), especially in light of its capabilities and its declared adherence to a set of principles that have informed its action in the past, such as the “responsibility to protect”.⁸⁹ This dilemma is mirrored perfectly in the logic underlying global resettlement, which is, in principle, aimed at sharing the responsibilities weighing on the most affected countries, but in practice has been poorly used if compared to the latter’s real needs. A broader dilemma concerns the scope of the EU’s responsibility and questions the feasibility – and even the legitimacy – of the EU’s ‘global’ action on migration, a dilemma that the EUGS seems to have addressed by identifying and giving priority to some geographical regions over others.

Each narrative rests on a rationale that entails political and normative dilemmas. We have pointed out some of the main ones, with no pretence of having been exhaustive.

Conclusions

Migration has gradually become a key issue in the European Union, challenging its effectiveness, its coherence and its credibility, both internally and externally. While absent from the 2003 Security Strategy, migration took centre stage in the 2016 EUGS.

A close analysis of the narratives used in this and other documents, as well as the policy measures legitimised by these narratives, has revealed the EU’s many approaches to migration, torn between the intent to respect its values and principles and the call for safe and orderly arrivals of migrants and asylum seekers on EU territory. None of the EU’s narratives (nor the respective approaches) clearly prioritises the safety of the EU’s territory over that of the migrants. Yet, a closer look shows that the EU’s choices are sometimes affected by the aim to protect its borders and territory from a (perceivedly) excessive inflow.

There are objective difficulties and subjective weaknesses behind the EU’s struggle with migration. On the one hand, striking a balance between the economic and demographic needs of the EU (which would call for more, and selected migrants), fear of the divisive role of migration among the member states (which would call for less, and more ordered inflows), and the need to uphold EU humanitarian values (which would call for saving the migrants’ lives and respecting their rights, including not sending them back to unsafe areas) is indisputably difficult. The result is a ‘compromise approach’, legitimised by different narratives, partially complementary, partially at odds with each other. On the other hand, the EU’s economic and demographic need for massive immigration could probably be met through immigration if the EU were internally cohesive and if it and its member states invested significantly in migration and integration policies, to be implemented according to the principle of (domestic and international) solidarity.

Yet, such management of the process is conditional in any case on a slowdown in the current pace of immigration,⁹⁰ and none of these conditions seems likely to be met in the

⁸⁸See, for example, Crawley *et al.*, *Destination Europe?*.

⁸⁹See, for example, Oxfam, “Syria Refugee Crisis”.

⁹⁰Livi Bacci, “L’Europa ha bisogno”.

foreseeable future. As a consequence, the most plausible scenario remains one in which the EU is more and more severely criticised by its member states and citizens, transnational non-governmental organisations and international actors (third countries and international organisations), for its (allegedly substandard) ability to cope with migration. A more attentive reflection on the political and normative dilemmas listed above is in order to design policies that are not just compromises between different interests, but also deliberate political choices resonating with what the EU aims to stand for in the world.

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