



Towards a Strengthened Democratic Governance in the Southern Mediterranean

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# **The Civic Roundtable 2017**

***Forced migration and asylum:  
Dynamics and policy responses in Europe and its neighbourhood***

**10 to 11 July 2017, Council of Europe, Strasbourg**

## **Report**

prepared by the  
Directorate of Policy Planning

## 1. Introduction

The Second Civic Roundtable on 'Forced migration and asylum: Dynamics and policy responses in Europe and its neighbourhood', co-organised by the Council of Europe and the Association of Schools of Political Studies of the Council of Europe, took place at the Council of Europe headquarters in Strasbourg from 10-11 July 2017. It brought together 31 fellows from different European countries and beyond. 22 were alumni from the 21-strong Network of Schools of Political Studies and 9 were nominated by institutions and NGOs working on issues relating to migration and asylum in countries in which there are no Schools of Political Studies.

This event provided an opportunity for fellows to discuss the dynamics of forced migration and asylum, to reflect on focused policy responses in the Council of Europe context and to exchange on possible ways to contribute to more coherent and effective international and national policy responses to forced migration and asylum.

The discussions were facilitated by prominent international personalities with in-depth knowledge of refugee issues and the fellows' own experience in this field. The list of participants can be found in Appendix I. An Evaluation and feedback from participants is presented in Appendix II. Appendix III offers directions for further reading.

## 2. Keynote speeches

### **Tomáš Boček, *Special Representative of the Secretary General on migration and refugees***

The Special Representative introduced his work, which involves gathering information on how the fundamental rights of migrants and refugees are protected in European countries. Mr Boček stressed that we must be wary of propounding the simplistic dichotomy between refugees and economic migrants, which has sometimes been conflated rather cynically in political discourse. The causes of asylum and migration are not always clear cut, as those fleeing war and conflict have other motivations for seeking a better life in Europe, and those escaping poverty often become the victims of life-threatening situations and human rights abuses during their journeys to Europe.

The Special Representative highlighted some of the common human rights challenges when dealing with the reception, processing and integration of new arrivals. These include border closures and violent pushbacks, as well as ways to provide accurate information to new arrivals, medical and legal services, and psychological support. Unaccompanied children represent a special concern, given their increased vulnerability and exposure to smuggling, human trafficking, sexual exploitation and violence.

He concluded by giving an overview of existing Council of Europe actions to ensure the human rights of migrants and refugees. Some of the most important of these included the CPT's monitoring of detention centres, investments by the Council of Europe's Development Bank in facilities for new arrivals, as well as training for border guards and lawyers processing asylum applications via the Council of Europe's Programme for Human Rights Education for Legal Professionals (HELP).

The new Action Plan on the protection of refugee and migrant children in Europe, adopted at the Committee of Ministers session in Nicosia on 19 May 2017, paves the way for more concrete action in this area.

**Kilian Kleinschmidt, *Founder and chairman of Switxboard, Global Networking and Humanitarian Expertise***

Kilian Kleinschmidt shared some of his professional experiences working with the UNHCR on the ground in Sudan, Kenya, Pakistan, the Western Balkans, and latterly in Jordan.

He stressed first and foremost the need to shape a new narrative about migration and refugees. Instead of victimising people on the move, labelling them as vulnerable or feeling sorry for them, we should see them as citizens of the world who are looking for protection and/or opportunities, and who have the potential to bring about real change. In any case, every one of us is from a migrant background and many famous cities – including Venice – have been built up by refugees.

Although the recent levels of deference shown towards the Convention system are to be lamented, Mr Kleinschmidt also sees that the legal system in place since the Second World War is partly responsible for negative narratives towards people on the move. Its division of people into strict and somewhat arbitrary categories (migrant, asylum seeker, refugee, IDP) has only served to stigmatise, separating people into those who are ‘allowed’ and those who are not. Instead, Kleinschmidt prefers the terms ‘desperate migration’ vs. ‘opportunity migration’.

Linked to this is how we react to the present situation in Europe. In Mr Kleinschmidt’s view, we ought to see migration as a chance to show us our own weaknesses. Indeed, the recent ‘crisis’ has revealed that the modern, tolerant, democratic society that we thought we were living in cannot be taken for granted. Receiving new citizens into our societies offers a chance to improve our existing infrastructure and social structures, and to remember key aspects of our post-war societies such as the welfare state. It should also remind us that European integration is at heart a peace-building project, not just the economic project it has largely become.

Further, whilst the UNHCR estimates that there are currently 22.5 million refugees and 240 million migrants globally, Mr Kleinschmidt estimates the number of people on the move to be closer to 900 million. With such large numbers, it is clear that migration cannot be blocked; rather it needs to be managed. The current response – which is to grant small packages of aid to areas in need – does not work and might even be considered inhumane. Refugee camps and similar structures do not recognise inhabitants as individuals; they do not encourage privacy, individual hopes or ambitions. Dehumanising structures also rob these people of some of their basic human rights.

Furthermore, with the global package for humanitarian disasters totalling just 25 billion USD, various crises end up in competition to get the most international attention and thus the most aid. When this aid is distributed, it is rarely done so transparently, meaning that the recipients are often kept in the dark about procedures. On the whole, Mr Kleinschmidt considers that the benefits of development aid are very limited. Instead of continuing the small stream of charity towards developing countries, it would be more effective to help them build up their economies.

After all, no developing country ever got out of poverty through aid. In order to achieve this, Mr Kleinschmidt rather controversially suggested that money going into refugee camps should not be development aid but economic-driven investment in order to help these camps undergo a phase of urban planning and to become functioning cities.

**Giulia Laganà, Senior policy analyst, EU Migration and Asylum Policies, Open Society European Policy Institute**

The realities and fallacies of migration were at the heart of Giulia Laganà's keynote speech. She stressed that Europe is not facing a migration crisis (a 'numbers crisis') but rather a political crisis. With 84% of the world's refugees being in developing countries, and the number of arrivals to the European Union equalling just 0.2% of the population, the numbers alone do not suggest a humanitarian crisis. Yet Europe still seems to be in crisis mode and this way of thinking is mirrored by the fact that reception policies in several countries (notably Italy) are still emergency responses and not well thought-out, sustainable policies.

Ms Laganà moved on to discuss the fallacy that allowing people to die whilst crossing the Mediterranean serves as an effective deterrent to refugees and migrants hoping to make the trip to Europe. She highlighted the key role played by NGOs in stepping in to rescue migrants and refugees near the Libyan coast, particularly since the cessation of European operations such as Mare Nostrum and Frontex's Triton, as well as operations by the Italian Coastguard. Against some claims that this kind of 'taxi service' acts as a pull factor, there has been no indication that allowing 1 in 37 of those crossing the Mediterranean to die (the current death rate) acts as a deterrent in any way. The myths of a high quality of life in Europe are simply too strong in Africa to dissuade people from making the trip and blocking certain routes only leads to migrants finding other, more dangerous passages to Europe. Moreover, an important secondary role of NGOs present on the ground is to be witness to events taking place (including some rather worrying cases of the Italian Coastguard using violence to prevent boats from entering the Italian seas).

One of the real main factors for the continued flow of migrants and refugees to Europe, in Ms Laganà's view, is the strength of the people smuggling operations taking place in Northern Africa, particularly in Libya. Shockingly, many of the profits from human smuggling across the Mediterranean are ending up in European bank accounts. Indeed, the Eurocentric way with which Europe has been approaching the current migrant flows is also a cause for concern. Civil society organisations from both continents must be given a voice in the discussions. What is more, whilst public opinion in Europe has played a central role in informing policymaking, European politicians have rarely considered public opinion in sending countries. In any case, polls have revealed that European publics are largely not as anti-migration as their governments might believe.

Ms Laganà concluded by recalling that the European Union's freedom of movement is one of the greatest success stories in terms of the movement and integration of peoples across the continent and should be hailed as such in public discourse, to remind the population of Europe that coexistence and integration is perfectly possible.

## 2. Working groups

The fellows of the Roundtable divided into four working groups to discuss the following aspects of forced migration and asylum:

- Responses to growing populist rhetoric and action against migrants and refugees in Europe
- The role of local authorities and civil society in the reception and integration of refugees at local level
- Unaccompanied and separated asylum-seeking and refugee children and family reunification
- Setting-up a CoE 'Academy for Democratic Leadership' for persons with a refugee background.

Each group was assigned two introducers to guide the discussions and a rapporteur to present the results in the plenary session. Members of the Council of Europe Secretariat acted as moderators.

### **Responses to growing populist rhetoric and action against migrants and refugees in Europe**

The first group discussed the challenges posed by populism in the context of migration, and possible responses to this. The question was approached from three thematic angles: discourse, practical aspects, and coexistence.

Concerning discourse, the group contemplated the role of the media in feeding a populist anti-migrant discourse, the lack of clear terminology on migration, the media's perpetuation of misperceptions by exaggerating phenomena, using emotive terms such as 'overwhelming' and for making the link between Islam and potential threats to Europe. There has been a separation between the reality and the discourse, with the latter being either paralysed or polarised. Solutions to strong populist discourse could include the creation of common narratives which unite those newly arrived with European populations. This involves not ignoring the fears of the populists, but addressing these concerns with the help of a positive discourse.

The second theme focused on practical aspects of countering the populist agenda. The group proposed recommendations such as building sustainable partnerships with all stakeholders across society, including NGOs, local authorities and academia; sharing stories of migrants or refugees who have successfully integrated into their host societies and promoting these people as role models; offering skills training for employment and introducing quotas for employers to bring migrants into professional structures.

Lastly, successful coexistence requires an end to Islamophobia and racism and increased tolerance for other cultures. This can be achieved via personal contact between host communities and new arrivals, and by an attempt to understand other cultural identities and ways of life. Instead of the current system, which usually houses migrants in poorer areas of the country, where services are often already strained, a geographical distribution of migrants and refugees into areas with sufficient opportunities and services could ease tensions.

## **The role of local authorities and civil society in the reception and integration of refugees at local level**

The second working group focused on the role of local authorities in the reception and integration of refugees, noting first and foremost the huge variation in practices across Europe depending on the administrative architecture and the dynamics of cooperation between the national and local levels. Whilst many countries, including Spain, Croatia, Greece and Moldova have a highly centralised system, others, notably Italy are largely decentralised, with local authorities even having the right to grant asylum.

The group considered the advantages and risks of the decentralisation of asylum powers, concluding that whilst local level management might speed up procedures, it might also lead to unequal treatment due to the discretion and potential arbitrariness exercised by local administrations.

Three main conclusions were presented in the context of improving the role played by local authorities and civil societies. Firstly, in order to prevent arbitrary decisions at local level, a national or central monitoring mechanism overseeing the process and ensuring accountability could be implemented. Secondly, a system of voluntary engagement should enable those local authorities who wish to play a more active role, either due to economic or historical reasons, to contribute more. For the sake of solidarity, however, other local authorities should not be allowed total opt-outs. Thirdly, there is a need for more knowledge sharing and statistical evidence; best practices and success stories should be shared and a comparative study should be carried out in order to establish whether a more centralised or a more localised structure is most effective. Finally, the group lamented the fact that there were relatively few examples of concrete action by the local authorities in their countries of origin and saw that this was a key area that could be improved upon.

## **Unaccompanied and separated asylum-seeking and refugee children and family reunification**

The third group was concerned with unaccompanied children and family reunification, sharing experiences from different European countries along the following five thematic areas: age assessment techniques, children who go missing, shelter and accommodation, family reunification and information policy. The group also recalled the sometimes conflicting legal frameworks of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and national asylum laws, noting that as soon as children turn 18, they lose many of their special rights and are left to navigate the asylum system on their own.

The group produced the following recommendations. Firstly, a multidisciplinary, holistic approach should be taken to determining age, including biological, social and psychological factors, not just the commonly-used physical examinations such as knee joint or teeth x-rays. To increase accuracy, two evaluations could be conducted several weeks apart. Procedures should also be accelerated so that the asylum for children is processed before they turn 18. In this vein, a smooth passage from minority to majority could be assured by a transition phase such as the 'contrat jeune majeur' in France.

Secondly, greater sharing of information between different national actors would allow for closer control of missing children. More transparent information policies on how the asylum procedures work (right to family reunification, protection from deportation, possibility of taking legal action, etc.) would also reassure children and allow them to make plans for their future. Lastly, a matching between foster families and unaccompanied minors would allow for higher rates of settlement within families rather than in reception centres, and would prevent the risk of detention, which is currently very high in some countries, such as Greece.

### **Setting-up a CoE 'Academy for Democratic Leadership' for persons with a refugee background**

The fourth group worked on the Council of Europe proposal to set up an Academy for Democratic Leadership, which would run an annual training cycle for persons with a refugee background. The group considered different aspects of the proposal including the partners, profiles and desired outcomes of the academy, coming up with the recommendations set out below. They also recalled that, as well as benefitting from such a project, refugee participants also have much to offer to it.

The group suggested that the board should select participants with the most distinguished profiles in order to keep the quality high. They also preferred to open the scope to include migrants and not just refugees. Partners for the Academy must be selected carefully, and the group proposed working with the Intercultural Cities network as a starting point for cooperation.

In terms of content and curriculum, the group proposed that networking actions between the refugee participants and actions in the local community or city could be important. So too could giving the new arrivals a space to express how they themselves see their integration into host societies or what they feel host societies could do to help them. The curriculum could also take on a dual technical and thematic approach, combining technical and practical skills such as communication, budgeting, civic and political participation, with thematic areas such as democracy, intercultural societies and the rule of law. In addition to thematic content, the group emphasized the importance of implementing networking actions.

Questions of tangible outputs and the sustainability of the project were also raised, and the group felt it important to ensure that capacity building would have a cascading effect and would not just be relevant for the duration of the annual cycle. The group suggested that the Academy could act as a consultative platform for the Council of Europe regarding migrant and refugee related questions.

## Appendix I

### List of participants

#### Fellows

<b><i>Surname</i></b>	<b><i>First name</i></b>	<b><i>Nominating Organisation</i></b>
Abdelrasoul	Mahmoud	Civic School of Political Studies (SPS Greece)
Alami Merrouni	Saâd	Citizenship School of Political Studies (SPS Morocco)
Alujevic Grgas	Brankica	Academy for Political Development (SPS Croatia)
Aykut	Ayça Sümeýra	European School of Politics in Istanbul (SPS Turkey)
Buczowska	Teresa	Immigrant Council of Ireland (Ireland)
Cristei	Aliona	European Institute for Political Studies (SPS Moldova)
Durnyeva	Tetyana	Ukrainian School of Political Studies (SPS Ukraine)
Dursun	Kenan	European School of Politics in Istanbul (SPS Turkey)
Fico	Evis	Academy of Political Studies (SPS Albania)
Ghazaryan	Armen	Yerevan School of Political Studies (SPS Armenia)



Gulina	Olga	School of Civic Education (SPS Russia)
Horvat	Maja	Academy for Political Development (SPS Croatia)
Hrnjak	Jelena	Belgrade Fund for Political Excellence (SPS Serbia)
Jankovski	Zlatko	School of Public Policy Mother Theresa (SPS "Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia")
Joannon	Barbara	Forum Réfugiés-Cosi (France)
Jungwirth	Tomas	Visegrád School of Political Studies (SPS Visegrád)
Käckmeister	Hannes	Rat für Migration (Germany)
Kapitonava	Tatsiana	East-European School of Political Studies (SPS Belarus)
Kostitsi-Papastathopoulou	Zoe	Civic School of Political Studies (SPS Greece)
Maimone	Elisa	Italian Council for Refugees (Italy)
Makhon	Said	Citizenship School of Political Studies (SPS Morocco)
Markaj	Manuella	Pristina Institute for Political Studies (SPS Kosovo*)

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\* All references to Kosovo, whether to the territory, institutions or population, shall be understood in full compliance with United Nations Security Council Resolution 1244 and without prejudice to the status of Kosovo.

Medina-Traxler	Julia	Österreichischer Integrationsfonds (Austria)
Megrelishvili	Guram	Tbilisi School of Political Studies (SPS Georgia)
Müller	Claudia	Österreichischer Integrationsfonds (Austria)
Muñiz	Ramiro	Spanish Commission for Refugees (Spain)
Porchia	Marilù	Associazione per gli Studi Giuridici sull'immigrazione (Italy)
Rašović	Neli	School of Democratic Leadership (SPS Montenegro)
Sabeti	Somita	City of Gothenburg (Sweden)
Smailbegovic	Lea	School of Political Studies (SPS Bosnia and Herzegovina)
Zmiyenko	Oleksandra	Visegrád School of Political Studies (SPS Visegrád)

## **Experts**

Kilian Kleinschmidt - *Founder and Chairman of Switxboard (Vienna)*

Giulia Laganá - *Senior Policy Analyst at Open Society European Policy Institute (Brussels)*

Despina Syrri - *Director of Civic School of Political Studies-Symβiosis (Thessaloniki)*

## **Council of Europe Secretariat**

Tomáš Boček - *Special Representative of the Secretary General on Migration and Refugees*

Matjaz Gruden - *Director of Policy Planning*

Michael Remmert - *Deputy to the Director of Policy Planning*

Yuliya Kochneva - *Project Assistant*

Suzette Saint-Marc - *Administrative Assistant*

Federica Genna - *Trainee*

## **Association of the Schools of Political Studies**

Jack Hanning - *Secretary General*

Lauren Mason - *Administrative Assistant*

## Appendix II

### Evaluation and feedback from participants

31 fellows participated in the Civic Roundtable 2017. 22 were alumni from the Schools of Political Studies and 9 others were nominated by institutions and NGOs working on issues relating to migration and asylum.

At the end of the Roundtable, an evaluation form was distributed to participants. The response rate was 84%.

The mean score for each of the questions asked is given below (on a scale of 1 to 5, where 1=lowest and 5=highest).

Relevance of approach to the theme: 4.5

Relevance of programme structure: 4.4

Relevance of contribution by Kilian Kleinschmidt: 4.6

Relevance of contribution by Giulia Laganà: 4.7

Satisfaction with origin and profile diversity of participants: 4.5

Satisfaction with opportunity for networking: 4.5

Satisfaction with opportunity for peer learning: 4.4

Satisfaction with the possibility to express one's point of view: 4.7

Satisfaction with group work exercise: 4.3

Extent to which Civic Roundtable improved knowledge on CoE's migration policies: 4.0

Many participants expressed their satisfaction with the quality of the discussions and the chance to meet colleagues working in the field in order to share best practices. Recurring general comments included: a desire for the group work sessions to be slightly more guided or structured; clearer definitions of the desired outcome of the group work; assignment of participants to groups in advance to allow time for preparation on the specific topic.

## Appendix III

### Useful reports cited during discussions

Alexander Betts and Paul Collier. 2017. *Refuge: Transforming a Broken Refugee System*. (Penguin Random House)

Council of Europe. 2017. *Action Plan on Protecting Refugee and Migrant Children in Europe* ([search.coe.int/cm/Pages/result\\_details.aspx?ObjectId=090000168071484e](https://search.coe.int/cm/Pages/result_details.aspx?ObjectId=090000168071484e))

Goldsmiths, University of London. 2017. *Blaming the Rescuers* ([blamingtherescuers.org/report/](http://blamingtherescuers.org/report/))

Länsstyrelsen Stockholm. 2016. *Lost in Migration: A Report on Missing Unaccompanied Minors in Sweden* ([www.lansstyrelsen.se/Stockholm/SiteCollectionDocuments/Sv/publikationer/2016/R2016-28-lost-in-migration-webb.pdf](http://www.lansstyrelsen.se/Stockholm/SiteCollectionDocuments/Sv/publikationer/2016/R2016-28-lost-in-migration-webb.pdf))

UNHCR Libya and IMPACT Initiatives. 2017. *Mixed Migration Trends in Libya: Changing Dynamics and Protection Challenges* ([www.alticonsulting.com/insights/mixed-migration-trends-libya-changing-dynamics-protection-challenges/](http://www.alticonsulting.com/insights/mixed-migration-trends-libya-changing-dynamics-protection-challenges/))