



Tackling the Migration Challenge by Diversifying European Solidarity

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Abstract

The issue of migration represents a challenge for the Common European Asylum System (CEAS) and its underpinning principle of European Solidarity. Indeed, this is a topic in which multiple actors are at play, each one with different interests to accommodate. Against this background, it is necessary to refine the understanding of European Solidarity based on the concept of reciprocity and to distinguish among three contexts: Interstate, International, and Transnational. Each context generates its own specific policy recommendations: respectively, enhanced burden-sharing, partnerships with third parties, and a coalition of grassroots organisations.

Introduction

The 2015 migrant emergency has represented a crisis of values (Goździak, Main & Suter, 2020), from which, it is reasonable to affirm, the EU has still not fully recovered. The failure in implementing a “fair sharing of responsibility” (Article 80 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union) and in developing “mutual trust” (Reg. No 604/2013) was a crucial factor behind its mismanagement. Besides being a legal principle, the concept of European Solidarity has often been employed in public discourses to spur cooperative behavior, especially between Member States. Nonetheless, doubts surface as to whether the meaning of European Solidarity has been adequately investigated to date. Indeed, it is often asserted that its alleged ambiguity (Gerrits, 2015) creates room for different interpretations, thereby causing confusion over the concept. In contrast to this, it is argued here that what is

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often deemed as the concept's troublesome vagueness is, instead, nothing but the omission of its strongly contextual nature.

Indeed, different circumstances place equally different demands of solidarity, given that the extent of the actors' relations can vary. The need for contextualization is particularly acute on the issue of migration, characterized by "many facets that need to be weighed together" (IP/20/1706). In light of this, it is thus necessary to diversify the forms of solidarity, here defined in terms of reciprocity, i.e. the production of 'collective goods' justifying a fair re-distribution of both costs and benefits (Sangiovanni, 2013). By highlighting the different interests at stake in three distinct contexts, the required diversification will lead towards a multi-leveled approach which will then account for meaningful policy recommendations.

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1. Enhancing Burden Sharing - Interstate Solidarity

When dealing with Interstate Solidarity in the field of the CEAS, Member States tend to detect the costs, yet not the benefits, that ought to be shared from the production of collective goods. Indeed, the joint management of European external borders

enables the liberalisation of its internal space, the Schengen Area (Balleix, 2014). Evidence of this can be found in the nexus between migration pressure and resurgence of internal frontiers, as shown by the dispute of Franco-Italian borders in 2011, as well as the Schengen suspension in 2015 and 2016 (Larivé, 2015). Therefore, countries that disrupt the CEAS not only endanger the notion of solidarity in respect of migration, but also jeopardize the EU's internal stability, from which they benefit themselves.

While the revision of the CEAS' major shortcoming - i.e. its unjust distribution of asylum responsibilities between Member States (Karageorgiou, 2019) - should be considered as the long-term objective (d'Oultremont & Martin, 2015), it is necessary to adopt a more realistic stance in the foreseeable future. The corrective measure to be implemented in the short-term must focus on burden-sharing, a feasible interim solution aimed at lowering the onus on the worst-affected countries. A mechanism of burden-sharing capable of fostering European Solidarity may consist of an Emergency Safety Net, i.e. an independent and common fund aimed at buffering the worst effects of a migration crisis, along the lines of the Emergency Support Instrument (ESI) triggered during the COVID-19 crisis (COM, 2020).

It is true, that crises, rather than common economic or political trends, create migration pressure (Bijak & Czaika, 2020). Nonetheless, solidarity cannot be merely demonstrated in economic terms, since the material and humanitarian costs borne by the worst-off cannot be 'bought': burden-sharing is not burden-shifting (Newland, 2011), and solidarity should not be reduced to its economic aspect. In this respect, the Safety Net's funding criteria could be



considered as a valuable way to spur material solidarity. Besides the traditional parameters designed to quantify national contributions (e.g. national population or GDP), another indicator should be included: namely, the stances of material solidarity already shown, measurable as – but not necessarily limited to – asylum seekers hitherto accepted. Although the idea of quantifying solidarity might be difficult to achieve, virtuous examples already exist, such as the European Solidarity Tracker created by the European Council on Foreign Relations (ECFR), which collected all the occurrences of pan-European Solidarity shown during the COVID-19 crisis. Using this strategy, material solidarity would stand in inverse proportion to the economic one, discouraging ‘solidarity purchases’.

2. Establishing Partnerships with Third Countries - International Solidarity

Nolens Volens, the concept of European Solidarity cannot only be inward-looking, especially since migration policy’s approach has shifted towards an externalization “which moves the burden on to third countries” (Balleix, 2014). Accordingly, European policymakers must cement deeper ties and establish “comprehensive partnerships (*compacts*)” (COM, 2016) with third states of origin and transit, both in the name of migrants’ safety and Schengen’s security. Nonetheless, foreign countries often hold the belief that cooperating might be unilaterally beneficial for the EU, and therefore disadvantageous. By way of illustration, the Blue Card Initiative, aimed at attracting highly-qualified non-EU workers via legal migration “who can fill the posts that cannot be filled by EU citizens”

(DG EPRS, 2015), has been accused of fostering brain drain. Given that solidarity ought to be fairly reciprocal, policies shall strive to ensure equal advantages to third parties (Balleix, 2014). On the EU side of interests, cooperation must focus on establishing legal and *in loco* channels of asylum applications in third states. The creation of legal channels would counter human smuggling and tackle one of the biggest fallacies displayed by the refugee crisis: that is, the implicit assumption that applying for asylum required the illegal entry into Europe, with the risks to life involved in that (Ibid.).

The creation of institutionalised humanitarian corridors should be coupled with the development of a ‘hotspot approach’ (Karageorgiou, 2019) offshore, aimed at assisting accepted migrants in the further process of registration and fingerprinting. When dealing with third states’ own interests, a distinction must be drawn between countries of transit and origin. Cooperation with the former should not only be ensured by investing in high-interest economic and infrastructural areas via development aid, but also by fostering real interdependence, e.g. involving them in the joint management and allocation of the European Safety Net aforementioned.

As for countries of origin, a strategy aimed at fostering cooperation would be a subsidisation of remittances. Remittances represent an important resource for several developing states, sometimes accounting for no less than 24 % of GDP (Ibid.). Therefore, a way to secure biunivocal solidarity may consist of linking the Blue Card Initiative to remittances, by easing liquidity transfer costs, streamlining procedures (d’Oultremont & Martin, 2015), and

subsidising remittances with generous interest rates.

3. Gathering grassroots associations together - Transnational Solidarity

In light of its hyper-contextuality, the account of solidarity so far adopted – based on reciprocity – does not exclude disinterested and altruistic forms of solidarity: quite the contrary, those are much needed. The construction of a different narrative concerning migration is primarily necessary to counter the populist and anti-immigration rhetoric (d'Oultremont & Martin, 2015), as well as to provide legitimacy to future policies. Both objectives must be achieved by collecting stances of voluntary solidarity via a bottom-up approach aimed at showing to the wider audience that inclusion and integration are mutually beneficial (Ibid.). Such a need must be translated into real policy by gathering, under a unique umbrella, grassroots organisations, intended to interact with people belonging to other cultures, and integrate them into the job market and the country's social fabric.

Compared to other NGO migration networks, such as the European Council on Refugees and Exiles (ECRE) or the European Migration Network (EMN), this organisation would specifically turn to the opinion of the public with the aim of creating a new dialogue regarding migration; its communication strategy would showcase the cross-national nature of the project and involve EU citizens into activities that would otherwise remain niche. This is the only way to fully implement the principle of Transnational Solidarity and directly address EU citizens. Lastly, multilateralism of visions would be ensured by gathering associations

with different values and purposes, such as Civil Society Organizations (CSOs), Faith-Based Organizations (FBOs), university initiatives, youth movements and trade unions.

Conclusion

This policy brief offered a different insight for tackling the migration challenge in a way that allows policymaking to be concrete, effective, and fully respectful of solidarity. An all-encompassing issue, as migration, requires a diversification of solidarity in order to accommodate all the interests involved. A pragmatic, yet bold strategy, can be adopted by coupling interstate mechanisms of burden-sharing in conjunction with third-country partnerships and further involvement of civil society in all its possible forms.



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