

# EVENT REPORT

Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung e.V.

REGIONAL PROGRAM  
SOUTH MEDITERRANEAN

April 2017

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## KAS Policy Forum: Protecting Lives and Controlling Migration

In the context of the EPP Congress in Malta, the KAS Regional Program South Mediterranean on 28 March organized a panel discussion on "Protecting Lives and Controlling Migration" for the delegates and other interested guests. With the event, KAS provided a platform for an engaged discussion on migration, a topic that has emerged as decisive issue in Europe over the last years and has stimulated important debates on how the European Union can and should react to these challenges. The answers to these questions however remain disputed and continue to divide EU member states and to shape domestic debates in European countries.

Panel members included Member of European Parliament David McAllister, Italian Senator Mario Mauro, Libyan civil society activist Zahra Langhi, former European Commissioner Dr. Tonio Borg, and Dr. Basem Shabb, Member of the Lebanese Parliament.

After an introduction by Dr. Canan Atilgan, Director of the KAS Regional Program Political Dialogue South Mediterranean, MEP David McAllister started off the discussion with his input. He stressed the need for more solidarity in Europe in the face of multifold challenges related to migration. In this regard, he particularly highlighted three current challenges: to effectively address the root causes of migration, to ensure that the people entitled to stay in Europe are able to stay, and to manage the quick return of people that are not entitled to stay. Concerning the field of border management, MEP McAllister spoke out in favor of a fully-fledged European border and coast-guard in order to lighten the burden for countries of arrival.

Former European Commissioner Dr. Tonio Borg in his input also highlighted the topic of European solidarity and critically remarked the current practice of "burden shifting instead of burden sharing" that leaves peripheral states – such as Malta, Italy and Greece – feeling abandoned by other European states. And while some moves towards more burden sharing have been made recently, strong opposition from several EU member states prevents further advancement in the matter. With regards to the issue of return and readmission, Dr. Tonio Borg pointed to a lack of political will on the side of many countries of origin and proposed a conditionality mechanism in order to overcome obstacles in concluding readmission agreements.

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Pointing to another aspect of the question of European solidarity, Italian Senator Mario Mauro remarked the failed plan for relocation of migrations within Europe due to the reluctance of several member states to take the intended share of migrants in order to reduce the burden on countries of arrival. Of the 160,000 migrants who were supposed to be relocated under the plan, as of end of March 2017, only 16,340 have actually been relocated (5,001 from Italy and 11,339 from Greece).

Broadening the perspective beyond the EU, Libyan civil society activist Zahra Langhi in her input described the current situation as "humanity in crisis" and thus as critical moment for how the international community upholds its fundamental values. With regards to Libya, one of the main transit countries for migration towards Europe, Mrs. Langhi stressed the continuing instability of the country and the lack of a unified security sector as important factors that continue to destabilize the Mediterranean region. She attributed these problems primarily to the failed policy of state-building in Libya by the international community. Moreover, the issue of migration in the Libyan context is further complicated by the country's legal situation. Libya has not ratified the 1951 Refugee Convention and its Protocol, as well as has passed a national law in 2010 that criminalizes irregular migrants. This decisively increases the vulnerability of migrants in the country and the number of human rights violations related to migration.

Member of the Lebanese Parliament Dr. Basem Shabb also stressed the importance of a functioning state in dealing with challenges posed by migration. With regards to Lebanon, he complimented the EU for its assistance to the country to support its efforts to accommodate the high number of mostly Syrian refugees. However, he also critically remarked an increasing tendency from the EU side to focus on security and anti-terrorism issues in its relation with Lebanon.

During the discussion members of the audience had the opportunity to pose questions and voice remarks to the panelists. Several remarks concerned the current types of instruments of EU migration policy, for example by suggesting new kinds of readmission agreements with countries of origin, by stressing the need to try to make existing instruments work before simply moving on to create new instruments, and by recommending a focus on regional agreements on migration over bilateral agreements. Moreover, the EU-Turkey deal was discussed as potential model for other migration agreements, as it is seen to having successfully disrupted the business model of smugglers by breaking the link between smuggling and access to Europe.

Reacting to questions and comments, Zahra Langhi cautioned against militarized security responses to migration challenges that favor quick fixes over long-term results. She emphasized that solidarity has to manifest itself in a concrete manner as basis for a comprehensive approach to migration which has human rights considerations at the core. Mario Mauro on the other hand suggested a combination of a humanitarian and a security approach as response to migration.

Concluding the discussion, Dr. Basem Shabb and David McAllister turned the attention towards other international actors, such as the Arab League, but also global powers such as China and Russia and pointed to a lack of engagement in the migration response by these actors. While not diminishing the need for a stronger European solidarity in the face of migration-related challenges, the two speakers emphasized the need for global solidarity to better deal with migration on a global scale.