

JOSEP BORRELL

Minister of Foreign Affairs of Spain, former President of the European Parliament

This is not a frequent occurrence, but I would rather speak French today. Migration is a matter of strategy for Europe in three respects.

First of all, from a political standpoint. After the refugee crisis in Syria, the migrant crisis in the central Mediterranean, which has now become more Western Mediterranean, the question of migration entered national political debate in a way that we could not have imagined a few years ago. This has a lot to do with the rise of populism. Migration has been used as a flag bearer and even as an excuse to begin deploying regressive methods that assail the principles fundamental to the right of law and European values. This will have consequences for European construction. We are already seeing debates between “those who want to open the borders and those who want to close it”. The European fortress is an idea on the rise in the Eastern Europe countries. In the United Kingdom, migration is very much intertwined with Brexit and I fear that migration issues will become the most serious risk to the European endeavour in the future: a great divide between East and West.

The second question is the economic outlook. We all need migration and migrants. We will always need them. The reason is quite simple, and we are all aware of it: the difference in demographics between North and South Mediterranean. We are ageing, while the African population is becoming younger and younger. We will need a workforce. Africa's economic growth will not be enough to absorb the growth of its population. This will raise a certain number of difficult choices:

- What kind of economy will we have? It will be a digital economy, where there is no need for jobs.
- Will we be capable of assimilating a workforce that is not too specialised? There will be a mismatch between the labour supply coming from Africa and the need for workers in the European economy.

These are all questions that will be raised by the very significant economic problems ahead.

Ultimately, it is from a social standpoint that there might be the most significant dynamic. We will have to build a complex, multicultural, even multilingual society. How can we guarantee equal opportunity for new citizens who arrive and have major difficulties integrating? What can we do to address the xenophobia that is on the rise everywhere? How can we respect national identities and, at the same time, accept that a growing proportion of the population has other identity characteristics?

I would like to offer, in conclusion, one brief thought: we should not consider migration to be something temporal or cyclical. It is something structural. It is not a question of management, but of strategy for the future. It will not pass, it will amplify. Every discussion at the European level must aim to strike the balance between solidarity and responsibility. In this regard, I would like to say that Spain and the Kingdom of Morocco have shown very strong capacity for cooperation in managing migratory flows unparalleled in the Mediterranean. It is important that the distinction between asylum seekers and economic migration be made very clear. They are not one and the same. If we can make the distinction in our thinking, it must be possible to distinguish on the ground as well.

What is not acceptable is that, three years later, on the Greek isles, there are still thousands of people stranded on the beach and we have not been able to tell them: “you are an asylum-seeker, therefore you are allowed to stay or go to the continent. You are not an asylum-seeker, so go back to Turkey”. There is neither one nor the other. Thousands of people remain in waiting, until the administrative authorities make a decision. We cannot say “there are asylum-seekers, and there are economic migrants”, and then be incapable of sorting them out. We need to combine responsibility with solidarity, and clearly state that agreements must be reached with the countries of origin, in such a way that those not entitled to asylum can go back to their home countries quickly and efficiently. If this does not happen, thousands of people will disperse into the underground economy, which will undermine the foundations of our society. Thank you.



Ali ASLAN

Thank you, Minister Borrell for once again underlining the urgency of this topic, saying rightfully this is not a temporary dilemma that we find ourselves in in Europe, but a long-term problem and a long-term issue that we have to tackle with.