

European Interview

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“Immigrants who fit in well can add value to European society, stimulate it and facilitate its opening onto the world”

European Interview with Jacques BARROT, former Vice-President of the European Commission for Transport, then for Justice, Freedom and Security, member of the Constitutional Council of the French Republic, former minister

1. In the present unstable geopolitical context in North Africa, around 20,000 migrants[1], mainly from Tunisia, have entered the European Union illegally. This movement has fed European concern, contrasting with support for the democratic revolutions ongoing in these countries. How do you see the present tension? How can Europe show that it supports the countries in Northern Africa?

Excessive fear has been maintained by simplistic populist response without there being any estimation of what the real dangers are. It is true that the situation in Libya could be the cause for real concern because of the great number of sub-Saharan Africans living there. But tension would have not been so high if all of Europe had stood together. The European Union must help the “Arab Spring” by increasing aid to these young, nascent democracies.

2. The recent Franco-Italian controversy over the reception of Tunisian immigrants has led to a request for the “reinforcement in the governance of the Schengen Area”[2]. Do you think it desirable to reform the Schengen rules? Is it really possible? Is it politically feasible?

If all the Member States had accepted to take on some of the Tunisian refugees each there would undoubtedly not have been any need to question the Schengen rules. But we have to admit that not all of the Member States have implemented what is required of an internal European borderless space, notably as far as monitoring external borders and movement from one Member State to another is concerned. As a

result there has been a real confidence crisis between the Member States. It is now urgent, as requested by the European Commissioner for Internal Affairs, Cecilia Malmström, to give the European Commission the responsibility of ensuring that these rules are implemented and if necessary for it to authorise exemptions that will enable the re-establishment of internal border controls in the event of serious, specific circumstances. However guidelines should be enough without having to question rules that are specific to the Schengen area and which are a precious asset for all Europeans.

3. On 3rd May last, the European Commission published a Communication on migration which calls for a strengthening of existing measures[3]. In your opinion does this communication include the right ingredients, particularly in terms of implementing properly the “principle of solidarity and the fair sharing of responsibility between Member States” as far as immigration is concerned and as set out in article 80 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union?

The communication is in line with the immigration and asylum pact. It has the merit of clarifying the different points of migratory policy: severity with regard to illegal immigration but openness towards legal immigration that is necessary to correct the demographic weaknesses of Europe and that shows generosity with regard to asylum seekers. The communication points to necessary relocations for an equitable spread of the burden, therefore making it easier to bear. This extremely balanced communication should lead to a more European, perceptive

1. European Commission Communication on Migration, COM(2011) 248 final, Brussels, 4/05/2011, p.5. http://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/news/intro/docs/1_FR_ACT_part1_v4.pdf

2. Letter from the President of the Italian Council, Silvio Berlusconi and French President Nicolas Sarkozy to the Presidents of the European Commission Jose Manuel Barroso and of the European Council Herman Van Rompuy, 26/04/2011, http://www.elysee.fr/president/root/bank_objects/Lettre_conjointe_FRITavri11%5B1%5D.pdf

3. Communication by the European Commission on migration, op.cit. http://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/news/intro/docs/1_EN_ACT_part1_v11.pdf

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reception of migrants and also to greater harmonisation of already existing rules in the Member States.

4. You have already been Commissioner for Justice, Freedom and Security. This portfolio is now split between Cecilia Malmström, responsible for Internal Affairs and Viviane Reding, responsible for Justice, Fundamental Rights and Citizenship. Does the separation of these two posts illustrate a more security inclusive approach to immigration by the European Commission and even on the part of the European Union?

I campaigned to maintain unity and a policy that must simultaneously guarantee the security of all without threatening their legitimate rights. But the division of the portfolio takes on board the sheer number of problems to be addressed in an area of freedom, security and justice. It is true that the annexing of migration policy was not self evident. Finally the President of the European Commission, J-M Barroso, chose to annex the migration policy to the portfolio of the Commissioner responsible for Internal Affairs. He did this because of Cecilia Malmström's personality and because she has two assets: the first being that she belongs to a liberal group and the other that she is Swedish. But nothing in the future obliges the Commission to do the same again. One day maybe migratory flows will demand that one Commissioner only be devoted to this policy.

5. The term immigration includes several aspects; legal immigration (labour migration, family grouping, students, visas, etc.); refugees and asylum seekers; integration issues. Do you think that an EU policy on immigration should adopt a multi-faceted approach or be specific with regard to each of these aspects?

Of course each of these aspects has to be approached from a specific angle. Illegal immigration implies border control and tracking criminal organisations of smugglers. Regular immigration demands better knowledge of employment markets that are still excessively compartmentalised and a more open policy, notably towards students. As for asylum policy – this is an absolute duty. However it is true that the good management of migratory flows demands a partnership of confidence with the countries of origin. In this dialogue we have to privilege a global approach including European development aid.

6. The Schengen area also comprises an aspect of the EU's internal policy with Romania and Bulgaria requesting entry. The Council seems divided over this; the Hungarian Presidency seems in favour and some Member States, such as France and Germany, are against[4]. On 2nd May last, the European Parliament's Committee on Civil Liberties approved a report that supported a decision by the end of 2011.[5] Do you think that Romania and Bulgaria will be able to join the Schengen area in 2011 given the evident problems of corruption these countries have?

We have to be consistent and coherent. Once Bulgaria and Romania have done what is necessary to ensure the monitoring of their external borders and have become totally involved in the Schengen information system I cannot see how we can refuse their entry into the borderless area. But progress still has to be made in terms of monitoring and supervision. There remains however the monitoring and supervision mechanism and the progress that these two Member States have to make in the fight to counter corruption and to create an independent legal system that is free of political pressure and the dangers of corporatism.

7. The countries of Europe seem to be caught between the devil and the deep blue sea, by this I mean between demands for migratory control on the part of the populist movements and the need for immigrant labour over the long term given demographic trends in Europe. What do you think?

The European Union and the Member States must not give in to short sighted populist views that feed on the fear of unemployment and in which there is an undercurrent of xenophobia. It is not by withdrawing into their shells that nations will prepare for their future. On the contrary the fight against unemployment requires a dynamic forward-looking attitude. The demographic problem will emerge sooner or later in two forms; the first will transpire in an inadequate birth rate and secondly in the need of a better balance in age groups to the benefit of those who are working. Finally immigrants who fit in well add value to European society, stimulate it and facilitate its opening onto the world.

4. "Denmark against early Schengen Enlargement », Euractiv.com, 3/05/2011, <http://www.euractiv.com/en/enlargement-denmark-early-schengen-enlargement-news-504392>

5. " Bulgaria and Romania ready to enter the Schengen area" European Parliament, 2/05/2011, <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/fr/pressroom/content/20110502IPR18523/html/La-Bulgarie-et-la-Roumanie-pr%C3%A0tes-%C3%A0-entrer-dans-l'espace-Schengen>

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8. Is the issue of immigration one on which European political parties all have different views and programmes and therefore isn't it a theme to be used to politicise European debate?

Yes, the problem of the optimal management of migratory flows deserves in-depth debate in which all of the major political groups should participate. From this point of view there is an area in which healthy debate could take place. But the advantage of holding these debates on a European level is that we can avoid excessive electioneering and partisan attitudes. From this point of view the European Parliament shows us the way to go. Let's hope then that the main political trends will give more voice to their opinion and offer voters real choices for the future.

9) You are the one who saved the European satellite navigation programme, Galileo, whose first two satellites will be launched in the 3rd quarter of this year from Kourou in French Guyana by Soyouz». What does this programme mean for you? Is its cost justified? What advantages can we expect of it?

Galileo, the European GPS project, is moving forwards but too slowly in my opinion. This programme aims to set in place a cutting-edge global satellite navigation system providing a reliable, precise positioning service worldwide (down to one metre) and which is

under civilian control. Today only 18 satellites of the 30 have been purchased. We may have to wait until the EU's next multiannual budgetary framework in order to add 2 billion € necessary for the acquisition of all of the ground equipment and 12 additional satellites. It seems that the savings made will provide for the order of six extra satellites. We shall have to find funding for the six others. How unenthusiastic our Member States are! We should realise that Galileo will provide 60 billion € in added value to the European economy over 20 years in the shape of additional revenues for many SMEs, which will be able to take advantage of new trade outlets opened up by a multitude of programmes. Yes, Europe has to win the race that is now on with China and Russia, who are also going to have their own geo-positioning system.



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