

## Refugees and Europe: 2015-2030

Lectio Magistralis by [Franco Frattini](#) at the Military Club, Sofia 18th November 2015

**Distinguished Authorities, ladies and gentlemen,**

Thank you for this invitation. Thanks to my dear friend **Solomon Passy** for inviting me here to share some reflections on an issue that is fundamental for Europe and that obviously has profoundly human component: the refugee issue, the issue of migrants. It is a theme that went through the entire Europe: **the Mediterranean, the Balkan, and Eastern Europe as well.**

If we talk about the issue of refugees, we must first consider that this issue affects women, children, men: they are human beings. **We are not talking about numbers**, but about dramatic situations. We are talking about those who are escaping from wars, civil wars, ethnic cleansing, from dramas we often can't even imagine.

And it is clear, therefore, that our Europe - the land of rights and opportunities, that **Europe** which was awarded the **Nobel Prize for Peace** – should apply principles inspired by the rule number one asserting that the dignity of human beings cannot be negotiated. No doubts, uncertainties, shortcuts are allowed.

There is a first issue, an important institutional question we have to face up to. Too often people get confused between the concept of refugee and the notion of migrant. Those are two completely different concepts. **A refugee is a person who gets a special status deemed worthy a particular protection** because he is in the real risk of persecution, war, or dictatorship in the country he escaped from. Migrants, instead, are mostly economic migrants, that is migrants who move from their countries for reasons related to climate change, natural phenomena, famine, all highly dramatic situations, but we cannot certainly confuse those two with each other.

Faced with dramatic situations, **Europe cannot split up**. Europe cannot do again what had happened when, for a long, long time Italy had called for the European countries and the EU institutions, after dealing with the inflow of hundreds of thousands of migrants for years and years: certainly it was mostly the case of economic migrants, but for sure also refugees landed on the southern coast of our country.

Europe's responses were non-existent, sometimes even vague; only a few times statements came, solidarity was expressed to Italy, the need to help Italy was underlined. That was all, nothing else.

When, this year, the plight of refugees, particularly of refugees, began to affect the so-called Balkan route, to involve a relatively small transit through Bulgaria too, but especially from Greece to Macedonia and then to Serbia and to Central and Eastern Europe, then all realized that Italy's appeals to Europe's unity were well-founded appeals, to be taken seriously.

**And Italy today is no longer alone:** is together with Germany, France, Austria, and many other countries that have contributed to major policy decisions of the heads of State and Government of the European Union, which stated the principle that Europe needs to address together the phenomenon of refugees, migrants, and to face together this challenge, because surely migrants or refugees arriving in the Southern and South-Eastern coasts of Europe do not intend to stay either in Greece or Malta or Italy, or Bulgaria: they want to move. All that can take place only with the support of shared rules.

Europe continues to be weak and divided on the adoption of common rules, though. As the European Commissioner, responsible for justice but also for immigration, nine years ago, in 2006, **I proposed a European initiative** for a common law on asylum and the adoption of a common EU list of "safe" countries.

Safe countries are those countries whose citizens cannot rely on political asylum. A citizen coming from **Serbia or Albania** certainly cannot apply for political asylum. But, in the absence of a common European list of safe countries, this has happened in many cases, even recently.

For various reasons Member States did not accept my plan of the year 2006; they thought it was too advanced, too ambitious, and criticized me for having "even" launched the idea of the establishment of a European Corps of border guards. Well, now, nine years later, the Commission intends to propose the establishment of a European Corps of border guards, wants to revive the common list of safe countries, to avoid the absurdity I mentioned earlier, that a citizen of a candidate country for accession to the European Union flees to Germany and asks to be recognized as a political refugee – exhibiting the Serbian passport.

I regret to say that we have wasted a lot of years.

We still have to do much, **because little has been done so far**, even on European repatriation process, on the rules which allow European countries - perhaps together - to arrange a flight for the repatriation of those who cannot remain in Europe; I am referring for example to economic migrants without residence permits and jobless. This requires the consent of the migrants' country of origin; however, it is clear that the Governments of the destination countries do not give their consensus if they have no framework agreement with Europe to adjust conditions, modalities and, let's be frank, financial allowances for that country that takes back its migrated citizens, and therefore must carry their burden, and then asks to be helped.

There is also a big problem in investing resources in developing countries, in countries of origin, and there is a problem of granting help to transit countries. I believe for example that transit countries where thousands, hundreds of thousands of would-be refugees remain for months in terrible conditions (I am thinking of **Libya**), I believe that, with the authority of the United Nations, the United Nations refugee agency, those countries should build reception centres and identify places where any person coming from a particular African country can declare his own nationality and fill in the application for political asylum. In this way, even before people arrive on European territory, with the monitoring of the UN refugee agency, we may get informed about people who are eligible and who are not entitled. Frankly, I don't see how a citizen from **Ethiopia or Egypt** could be eligible as a possible political refugee, where an Eritrean citizen, or a citizen who escaped from southern Sudan, have some more reasons to be considered as such.

**That implies that origin countries need help in terms of development, opportunities for growth, and transit countries need for support, by creating structures that would allow a previous screening without handing over thousands and thousands of desperate people into the hands of unscrupulous traffickers.**

And then there is the theme of the traffickers, the fight against the slavers, ... yes this is what we are dealing with. Obviously we've applied rules on international crime which should be further tightened. I think the establishment of a **European Naval Mission** to combat human traffickers was right, but I also think that that mission is in fact paralysed and unable to hit traffickers, and especially to destroy the boats even in ports of origin of these barges because of the difficulty of Europe to get an adequate Security Council resolution: this course without a mandate from the Security Council cannot be done because it would be in the presence of an act of war against this or that country.

There is also an extremely important issue that concerns the reception and integration of arriving people, whether they are recognised as refugees, or they are economic migrants looking for work. I believe that beyond the national efforts of individual countries, Europe must strengthen its legislation to punish severely, even with confiscation measures, economic businesses and entrepreneurs that sweat migrants and refugees through the use of illegal employment.

**Too many countries, including Italy, my own country, know the drama of the exploitation of seasonal workers being illegally hired: it's a real slave market, from the hands of the trafficker to the**

hands of slave trader, who uses them and that makes them work as it happened centuries ago. They are paid five euros per day, maybe ten euro in my country, where life is a bit more expensive, working to pick tomatoes and oranges.

Well, we can't allow soft punishment or no punishment at all for the entrepreneurs indulging in this horrible exploitation of human beings. Controls would be needed, more stringent laws would be needed and, above all, a broader collaboration to identify those cases should be necessary, rewarding undeclared workers who cooperate with the police by giving them a regular job, provided that their complaint has led to the arrest of the unscrupulous entrepreneur who had brought them to work illegally.

But the theme of a correct reception of migrants also brings us to address the theme of integration in our society, because it is obvious that those who want to live in one of our countries, in Bulgaria, in Italy, in France, countries that are European democracies, must learn as their first rule that the Constitution and the laws of the country where they live must be observed, no ifs and buts.

**It is clear then that, if on the one hand we must** - and we will - certainly accept those who abide by the rules, paying taxes, sending their children to school, on the other hand we will meet very serious difficulties in accepting those who refuse to do that. The observance of the Constitutions and of the rules of our countries, cannot be subject to any relativist interpretation. I mean, someone says " I have my traditions, I have my rules, I have my culture, I have my religion". ... This is not possible, the law of every country and the cohabitation rules dictate that anyone who accepts, wants, demands to live in a country - such as my own country, for instance – that person must respect the rules of my country. And this may not be subject to any derogation, because otherwise we are giving the message, deeply wrong, that the Italian State accepts those who do not respect the laws. Frankly, I think this is inconceivable.

**Even more inconceivable is what happens today, after the horrible terrorist attacks on Paris** and on all of us: young people living as our neighbors, in our cities, enjoying freedoms, and plotting against our societies, to kill innocent people belonging to the same democratic States, like France, Belgium in this case, where they use to live. Our democracies shouldn't be afraid of those terrorists but should be much tougher on dealing with these blasphemous Muslim extremists: life prison, hard prison conditions, complete isolation, and please, never speak about dialogue or try to understand!! And European Muslims, too often silent, should cry all together "not in the name of Islam".

**There is also an issue relating in particular to the plight of the refugees from Syria** who have invaded the countries in the region for years (this is the fifth year after the start of the Syrian crisis). That is a dramatic problem, because it affects millions of human beings, but also because it has made (and still makes) countries close to Syria fragile. I think of Lebanon, of Jordan... It seriously puts the endurance of a great country such as Turkey to the test; Turkey generously hosts a huge number of refugees, but now it lets Europe know that its patience and forces have a limit.

**We have righteously confirmed Turkey that Europe** stands ready to help, not only economically but also economically. Better if Europe would address the same message to Jordan and Lebanon. In those countries in fact, up to a quarter of the population, if not more, comes from Syria and then they are refugees. And certainly the most important thing of all is that the tragic situation of Syria could finally evolve in a positive way.

Here, once again Europe is called to act but unfortunately Europe has not acted so far. Perhaps Europe is not acting because of the lack of a unified political will, since the divisions between Member countries on this point are strong; perhaps Europe is not acting because it has objectively a great weakness, due to the fact that we have not a common foreign and defense policy.

Syrian refugee drama will be mitigated only when we find a stable solution for the future of Syria.

**American disengagement counted heavily**, and that is true also for the errors of our American friends, who initially thought of a military action directed against Assad, then they started to understand that Assad's death could not happen from day to night. Finally, when the Russian Federation, together with Iran, have given start to their concrete action on the ground, it was finally understood that a coordination between the main actors in the region was inevitable.

**The meetings which have taken place and are still being held in Vienna** are absolutely relevant: there United States, Russia, Turkey, Saudi Arabia and Iran sit around the same table to think about the way to end this drama, about the way to destroy (and I use the word "destroy" because it is the appropriate one) Daesh terrorism which is threatening the whole world, and about the steps to bring in a democratic political system in Syria, surmounting Assad's regime with that gradual approach that only a political settlement can identify.

To do that, we need the agreement of the regional powers, going from a simple consultation to a real collaboration between Russia and the United States on the Syrian soil; the entire international community must share the will to help afterwards, transition, development.

These are the many things that Europe should do, and that were done only partially. However, they are challenges that do not concern only Europe, nor the individual European Union countries that are too small, or very small - even the greatest among them - in comparison with the global nature of these challenges. Immigration, a global phenomenon, cannot be ruled from Rome or Sophia or Paris: it can be ruled only together, involving Africa, a continent which can give great opportunities, but - if left to itself - will certainly arise very delicate and hazardous conditions whose highest possible price will be paid by all of us Europeans. **The EU-Africa meeting in Malta**, a few days ago, left intact the mutual distrust and the differences of opinions.

And so, in conclusion, solidarity among European countries is necessary because the issue of migrants or refugees is not an issue of this or that country, but of all of them; solidarity towards the countries of origin that should be assisted for promoting their economic revival and creating conditions for development. Then we need strategic actions and policies in order to stabilize the Middle East, which is a time bomb for the whole world, from Syria to Iraq, to Afghanistan, where the Caliphate is taking root. Moreover, a collaboration between police forces and border guards is necessary to have a European system that can really crush human trafficking across the Mediterranean, as well as on terrestrial and Balkan routes, and finally mark our Europe's redeeming.

Wish I could forget the scenes of TV channels around the world which have shown children and women, who have nothing to do with terrorists or suspected terrorists, climbing over barbed wire and driven back by Governments of democratic countries that pride themselves, quite rightly, upon the fact they belong to the **European Union and NATO**. I would like to delete those images and remember only the images of thousands and thousands of people that all our countries' brave men and women of the police forces engaged in rescue have saved at sea.

**I wish I could remember those scenes, and not the scenes of police beating the Syrian women fleeing war.** Those scenes have marked a dark moment in the history of Europe, and I believe that we should put them behind us saying with great frankness that if we want an integrated Europe, if we want a political Europe, if we all believe in Europe's future, then Europe must be an actor on the international scene. In the case of the terrible scenes we've seen, Europe was not an actor: Europe has shut itself in the selfishness of Nation States and missed the big challenge that it could have faced and won.

All that is not over yet; we will have a lot to prove. **I hope that the upcoming evidence Europe will give, will be up to our past and to the future we wish to have in front of us instead.**

Thank you.