

1 MIGRATION AND BORDER MANAGEMENT: CHALLENGES AND PERSPECTIVES FOR REFORM

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This contribution reflects the opening speech of the MAPS Jean Monnet Conference held at the University of Malta on 25 March 2022. It is meant to give an overview of the issues discussed at the conference and in the chapters that follow.

Life as the underdog is tough. Let me clarify: I do not pity migrants, but I feel for migrants' causes, for their plight. Before proceeding further, I must emphasise that what I am about to say is purely my opinion. I have always remembered that whole nations have been built based on European migration: North America and Australia, to name but two. So, I consider resisting migration today ironic, given Europe's past performance in other continents.

Secondly, I have always remembered that birds, all kinds of animals and marine species migrate and cross whole continents and oceans as part of their natural reproductive cycle or merely to survive, to escape hunger and thirst. It is no wonder, it should come as no surprise, that human beings seek to do the same. Look at Ukraine, for example. I heard on BBC radio yesterday that it is the largest people displacement since World War II. It happens. Migration from Africa happens, too.

A small remark on territoriality: having territory is a trait we share with at least some other species. I recently watched a documentary about male lions – how a male lion will fight another male to the death if he dares enter his territory. So, territoriality may be a natural phenomenon for some species, including humankind. However, it is also a fact that countries, boundaries, nations and national identities are recent artificial creations to serve a purpose: preserve the status quo within the state. Years ago, I read a book called *States, Nations and Nationalism from the Middle Ages to the Present* by Hagen Schulze (English translation). Schulze accuses poets and writers of shaping literature to evoke a spirit of nationalism in their respective countries. At the same time, wars were largely responsible for the transition of the national mentality from the intellectuals' minds to the masses. According to Schulze, with the Great War (World War I), the whole society was at war, and the hour of the state had come. It has been so ever since.

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So, we have raised artificial borders, we have made life very difficult for foreigners unless they are wealthy and willing to spend money in our 'territory' and we exploit migrants, leaving them to do the menial jobs that the locals do not wish to do. I have personally visited detention centres, including outside Malta, and have been amazed at what I perceive as a complete and utter failure of governments, for there is no other way to describe healthy people being confined to zoo-like conditions. I shook my head in initial disbelief a few years ago, when an earlier Prime Minister of Malta went on record saying that Malta profits from foreign workers because they pay national insurance but do not remain here long enough to claim a pension. In time, I realised that this was indeed the case. I was once assisting a foreigner and accompanied her to a government entity. The official asked me, 'Why does this person not simply return to her country? Who told her to come to Malta anyway?'

So, here I am talking about foreign workers, not migrants, but you get the picture. Look at the general approach to foreigners: they either serve a purpose or are not welcome. I sincerely hope that things will change and that the younger generation will do better as they grow up accustomed to living in a multiracial and multicultural society and will be more ready to embrace foreigners, including migrants, and not consider them to be some 'invasive species'. I trust that initiatives like today's will help to make this happen, this change, this move towards an easier transition for migrants to a better life.

Of course, there is the other side of the coin: migrants must do their part, namely, do their utmost to be law-abiding persons. I am in no way suggesting that migrants are any more criminal than the local population of any country, Malta included. You find less well-meaning people everywhere. Migrants must try to integrate and contribute to the nation's growth, thus advancing their cause.