



MANAGING MIGRATION IN THE MEDITERRANEAN

Professor Stephen Calleya

Migration is not a new phenomenon. People have always travelled the world seeking adventure and a better life. Today the term migration is being used very loosely and as a result has undermined the positive contribution that legal migrants are making on a daily basis in the world.

For starters, It is essential to distinguish between migrants and asylum seekers or refugees. The latter have specific protective rights recognized by the United Nations and should not be included in any debate on migration.

Migrants are those who have decided to voluntarily leave their place of origin and move somewhere else. Throughout history migrants have been part and parcel of global development by contributing to the productivity of their new home. Maltese and Gozitans have been part of this trend especially after the Second World War when they moved to places like the United Kingdom, Canada, the United States and Australia.

But there is a big difference between orderly legal migration and illegal human trafficking. Today the latter type of activity has grown into a very lucrative business network with tentacles everywhere including the Mediterranean.

In the past decade the entire Mediterranean has witnessed different waves of migrants flowing through and from Africa to Europe. The west, east and central Mediterranean have served as routes through which people are smuggled on a regular basis. Located in the center of the Mediterranean Malta is in the front line of such activity and is having to address the challenge of illegal migration on a full time basis.

Regrettably Malta has not found the type of solidarity one would expect



from the European Union when it comes to tackling this phenomenon. Or to be more precise the EU has not succeeded in persuading its member states to adopt a common collective approach when it comes to managing the challenge of illegal migration in the Mediterranean.

The EU border control agency Frontex has not been provided with the resources necessary to be an effective mechanism equivalent to a Coast Guard. Instead, maritime and aerial missions are temporary in nature and thus lack the capability to undermine human trafficking in the Mediterranean on a permanent basis.

Of even greater concern is the fact that most EU states, including those who are members of the border free Schengen Agreement, regard migration as a national issue and thus seek to avoid sharing the

responsibility of assisting migrants. Malta, the smallest country in the EU, together with other Southern European states, has thus had to address the regular arrival of migrants in an ad hoc manner, not knowing exactly how such episodes will play out.

It is clear that this trend has to stop. It is completely unacceptable to expect the smallest EU member state to be able cope with the flow of migrants across the Central Mediterranean without international support. The incoming EU Commission must deliver a more comprehensive migration policy that facilitates separating legal from illegal migrants.

Malta has been leading by example in this regard. It is time for the rest of Europe to commit to such an agenda if we are to avoid an escalating humanitarian catastrophe in future.