



By: *Tomorrow's Affairs Staff*

In developing a new migration policy the EU has not learned the lessons from 2015



The European Union is making a new attempt to restore solidarity amongst its members regarding migrants and asylum seekers. This is the first serious attempt since the collapse of this common value 8 years ago.

During the large wave of refugees and migrants from the Middle East and Africa in 2015, then German Chancellor Angela Merkel said that the EU had a significant problem with internal solidarity.

And she was right. At the time, a large number of EU members refused to share the burden of accepting refugees with other bloc partners, choosing instead to close borders, set up blockades, and tighten border controls.

The migrant wave of 2015 and 2016 was the time of the collapse of the common European migrant policy, and particularly the mutual solidarity that the Union was proud of - until those values had their first test.

With that bitter experience, the EU is attempting to establish a united policy on one of the Union's most important issues for a second time.

A less liberal approach to migrants

However, the way the EU has been seeking a solution does not give much hope that effective compliance will be reached, because it seems that it did not understand the problems that caused the migrant and asylum system to collapse 8 years ago.

Three years after its launch, on Thursday and Friday, the interior ministers of EU member

states will consider A New Pact on Migration and Asylum, a list of fundamental rules with which they expect to solve at least part of the Union's problems regarding the large influx of migrants, and their own relations shaken by those problems.

Last April, the European Parliament gave the green light to a new package of regulations regarding migrants and asylum.

This package seems less liberal and open than all previous ones, including the regulations in force in 2015 that led to a chaotic European attitude towards migrants.

Some new solutions are pretty much right-wing: for example, the EU funds allocated to support the protection of national borders.

They almost adopted an amendment specifically asking the EU to fund the installation of physical barriers at national borders to prevent illegal entry.

An indestructible quota system

For the most part, the quota system for the relocation of migrants within the EU has remained alive in the new European rules, even though the same attempt failed spectacularly during the 2015 crisis.

At that time, European decisions on the relocation of migrants to distribute the burden of the crisis evenly, were rejected decisively in some European capitals, particularly in the East, as unacceptable interference by the Union in sovereign national policies.

This time the member states are left to

determine the quotas voluntarily, that is, the number of migrants they can receive from other EU members.

But also the obligation that in emergency situations, the EU can determine how many members of the Union should accept asylum seekers.

However, the EU has been in an emergency situation for years when it comes to the influx of migrants and asylum seekers, so the question is: Under what conditions the member states would be able to use their right to set their own quotas on how many asylum seekers they can receive?

So far, it seems that there are insurmountable differences between the countries in the south of the continent, which are exposed to the greatest impact of migrants, and those in the interior, which do not want to receive migrants and asylum seekers, apart from the insignificant number of migrants that "regularly" arrive.

While the group of 5 Mediterranean members (Italy, Malta, Cyprus, Greece, and Spain) seek the solidarity of the rest of the bloc regarding the acceptance of migrants and asylum seekers, the eastern members of the EU oppose it.

In an attempt to reconcile these opposing attitudes, Sweden, as the EU's presiding member state, came up with a proposal for monetary compensation from all those who refuse to accept migrants from another EU member state: as much as 22,000 EUR for each migrant "rejected."

Bargaining over the admission of refugees

Although this initiative is still a subject of discussion among EU partners, it seems that it cannot reconcile distant positions, but intensifies them.

Polish Minister of the Interior Mariusz Kamiński said last week that he is against "forced transfer of migrants" and particularly against "gross unfairness" of compensation.

He presented a rather "unfair" calculation, according to which the EU gave the member states 200 euros for each refugee admitted from Ukraine, and threatens to charge 22,000 euros for every migrant whose admission is refused by the relocation mechanism.

Another factor that does not promise that the EU's decisions will be effective or even just, is that it is putting them under pressure from those who land in their countries, where another large wave of illegal migrants is under way.

More than 36,000 undocumented migrants tried to enter the EU in the Mediterranean region alone in the first quarter of this year. That is twice as many as in the same period in 2022 and, at the same time, the biggest migrant wave since 2015.

The greatest burden falls on Italy, Spain, Greece, and the countries in the Mediterranean zone. There is no solution in sight for the distribution of that burden. Not an efficient and fair one.

Fines for those who refuse to accept migrants from the south and east of the EU do not seem like a feasible, long-term policy.

"Migration could be the crisis among all crises facing Europe nowadays for the simple reason that it has become an intractable issue. While the economics of migration asks for millions of

new migrant workers every year, the politics of migration demands a closure of borders”, said Blanca Garcés, a researcher at the Barcelona Centre for International Affairs.