



By: *Tomorrow's Affairs Staff*

# The European deal on migrants - a response to the political shift to the right



It took the European Union 8 years to consolidate after the collapse of its former shared system for accepting refugees and asylum seekers under the wave of more than 2 million illegal migrants.

Until now, EU members have each tried to manage the influx of migrants in their own way, leaving the EU with few shared policies and procedures.

Last Wednesday, the **political deal** between the 3 most significant EU institutions - the Council, the Parliament and the Commission - ended a long period of confusion within the EU, during which accepting asylum seekers, border control, and asylum system became a first-rate political issue.

After 3 years of harmonisation, the new EU Pact on Migration and Asylum is the result of concessions amongst EU partners.

## Tightening the treatment of asylum seekers

The new European agreement shifts the focus away from the extensive rights and benefits for migrants and asylum seekers and on to receiving countries, in contrast to the shared framework that collapsed in 2015 and 2016 in the face of a wave of over 2 million migrants from the Middle East and Africa.

Its objectives are to strengthen controls on entry into the EU, discourage people smuggling, and increase the standards for asylum in European countries.

“Europeans will decide who comes to the EU and who can stay, not the smugglers. It means protecting those in need”, **said** Ursula von der Leyen, EU Commission President, welcoming the new deal.

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The lengthy and complex negotiations were successful because of 2 key factors. First, pressure on European leaders to reach a decision by the end of their mandate, which would mark their term, increased in anticipation of the European Parliament elections next June.

After the Pact received political approval last Wednesday, the only thing left is the documentation and procedures for its implementation. Hopefully, this will be completed in time for the June elections.

The passage of the European deal on migrants and asylum seekers was motivated primarily by political considerations. The decision was reached during a time when there were many, often violent, pro-Palestinian protests, which caused anti-immigrant sentiments across the EU and cast doubt on whether the current liberal standards are what Europeans desire.

## Shifting the political scene to the right

The harsher solutions in the new management system for migrants and asylum seekers are also the result of the European political public shift to the right. This shift has been ongoing since the great migrant crisis of 2015-2016 but culminated with the opening of migrant corridors after the COVID-19 pandemic.

During that period, protagonists of anti-migrant politics (Italy last year, then Finland, a part of Greece, and finally, the Netherlands at the end of November) formed several influential European governments.

In such circumstances, the European tightening of the entry regime for migrants and asylum seekers comes as a response to a trend affecting the entire Union. This trend has particularly intensified since Hamas attacked Israel on October 7 and the wave of pro-Palestinian protests across Europe, which often turned into anti-Semitic actions.

## The proposed reform entails the expeditious prohibition of illegal entry, border centres to accommodate asylum seekers, and the prompt expulsion of individuals whose asylum claims are denied

The new regulation envisages a shared European treatment of asylum seekers, who, in the future, will have to wait for their claim to be resolved at the EU's external border. This means that they will not, as before, be able to travel from one EU country to another without a resolved asylum status.

A solidarity system amongst EU member states was also devised. This method was sought unsuccessfully for a long time - taking over a certain number of migrants from the countries that suffer the most pressure from migrants, such as Italy and Greece.

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The new framework encourages cooperation on migrant management with countries outside the EU, so they are the first barrier to the arrival of illegal immigrants.

This model has been implemented with varying degrees of success or as an action of one EU member state, such as Italy and the Netherlands, and Tunisia at the beginning of the year, or earlier Turkey, where the previous German government led by Angela Merkel took the lead.

## Political consequences

On the first day of its adoption, the new Migrant Pact's political ramifications were evident and will serve as grounds for internal conflicts inside several EU member states.

The German Greens, coalition partners in the government of Social Democrat Olaf Scholz, are already experiencing internal turbulence between the leadership and displeased members, dissatisfied with the tightening of policy on migrants.

One outraged official of the Greens called the European deal an "anti-human isolationist package" and demanded that Germany withdraw its consent.



*Emmanuel Macron: If we don't want the RN to come to power, we have to deal with the problems that feed it*

On the same day the European migrant pact received the green light in Brussels, French President Emmanuel Macron celebrated the passing of a similar domestic law, also more restrictive than before.

However, critics accuse him of shifting to the right with such moves and taking some solutions from right-wing opponent Rassemblement National (RN) Party of Marine Le Pen.

"If we don't want the RN to come to power, we have to deal with the problems that feed it", Macron said in an interview.

Stricter migrant regulations have practically become a European standard that many will not be satisfied with, not only among international humanitarian organisations, which are already protesting but also among political competitors of the current governments.

The first significant test of their balance of power will be in a little more than half a year,

in the elections for the European Parliament, where it is already clear that the principal topic will be the treatment of migrants and asylum seekers.