



WELCOME ADDRESS

Jeanine Hennis-Plasschaert

Member of European Parliament

shaping migration strategies

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patterns - practices - policies

Ladies and gentlemen,

Good morning!

On behalf of my colleagues Ewa Klamt, Ole Christensen and Jean Lambert it gives me great pleasure to welcome you all to today's conference 'Shaping Migration Strategies'. It is an honour to have you here.

I consider the programme as impressive. We are proud to welcome in particular

- Vice President of the European Commission, Mr Frattini - responsible for Justice, Freedom & Security
- Commissioner Spidla - responsible for Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities
- as well as, former Prime Minister of The Netherlands and former UN High Commissioner for Refugees - Mr. Lubbers

Migration is without question a global phenomenon with numerous causes and effects. In a world of increasing regional conflicts, large differences of wealth as well as a growing mobility, the management of migration flows will be increasingly important and difficult at the same time.

For a number of years now the European Union has been increasingly confronted with the so-called 'mass' arrival of asylum seekers and irregular migrants, causing emergency situations and creating enormous challenges for receiving countries in terms of accommodating these arrivals and also processing their requests. It has to be said that, in general, the arrival and reception of migrants (including asylum seekers) as well as the return of irregular migrants do raise important humanitarian and protection concerns.

Does the European Union have the right answers to address these problems and concerns? Without wishing to minimise the scale of the challenge faced, it should at the same time be realised that over 70% of the world's refugees are hosted in developing countries. Clearly, the EU Member States should not lose sight of this in accepting their share of global responsibility.

Unfortunately, European responsibilities and international obligations are often undermined by all kinds of national interests. It cannot be denied that the migration debate, at least in most Member States, is increasingly sensitive. Very regular the differentiation between asylum seekers and illegal migrants is not made, integration problems are dominating the debate, people feel that national social welfare systems are at stake and if considered 'appropriate' migration is even linked to terrorism. An open, honest and transparent debate on migration seems hardly possible nowadays. The management of migration flows, while fully respecting all relevant treaties, is therefore indeed to be considered as one of the most complex fields of policy making.

At the same time it cannot be ignored that the reality of ageing and demographic changes will necessitate rethinking migration policies. Considering current migration flows, the decline in the EU working age population will entail a fall of about 20 million employed people between 2010 and 2030.

One way or another, an EU common policy towards migration will be of crucial importance the coming years.

Today's conference gives us the opportunity to discuss, to debate, to exchange views as well as best practices. It gives the opportunity to get an insight of what has been achieved, and even more important: of what should be achieved.

Let me conclude by thanking all people involved in organising today's event. The co-operation was (and still is) a great pleasure.

I will now give the floor to today's chairman, Mr De Ruijter. Mr De Ruijter, many thanks for joining us! The floor is yours.