

Good Morning

Ladies and gentlemen,

I am very honoured to have been invited here today.

Allow me to thank Mr. Clewett for the invitation to this conference and to Ashoka. Initiatives such as these are crucial. They bring not only added value to policy making, but also stimulate cross-border, European cooperation.

As you know migration, asylum and integration are one of the most debated topics in Europe these days.

Let me start with a few numbers: since 2014, roughly 15.000 people died trying to get to Europe through the Mediterranean. But according to Amnesty International, the number of deaths can be up to three times higher. A bit over 1.5 million arrived at our shores. Roughly, for the past 4 years, one in every 100 people arriving at our shores died. The number of asylum requests in Europe between 2014 and 2017 was of approximately 4 million. Integration and asylum, indeed migration broadly, are one of the biggest, if not the biggest, challenge that Europe will face in years to come.

I do not surprise anyone when I say that, as human beings we have a moral obligation to protect those that have their life threatened. I trust there is also no surprise when I say we, as Europeans, each and every Member-State, are legally obliged to protect those same people. The Geneva Convention, originally drafted to protect Europeans fleeing the war, imposes such obligation.

In the European Union, in particular, we have approximated our laws on the recognition of status of refugee; we have developed a set of rules, the so-called Dublin System, to determine the responsibilities of each Member State. We have established a European Asylum Agency as well, with the objective of providing support to Member States. Finally, we created Eurodac, an information system that works as a central registry for asylum requests. To this

complex web of instruments we have agreed to call the Common European Asylum System. We recognised we have no internal borders and are - *de facto* - a single territory, also for asylum purposes.

However, the influx of asylum seekers in the past four years has demonstrated that this system is not working. Italy and Greece faced themselves with an influx of people no Member State alone could have managed. We had countries welcoming over a million refugees in one year, like Germany, and others like Slovakia or Hungary, which preferred to offer barbed wire to Greece than to receive a single asylum seeker.

That is why we in the European Parliament have been struggling for a true common European asylum system. One that works and, above all, that truly protects those that need protection.

I - Point of Departure

Allow me to go back in time for a moment.

In 2014, we had a humanitarian emergency, with people dying by the thousands in the Mediterranean. In parallel, in a single year, over a million people arrived in Europe requiring asylum and mostly through Greece.

Parliament, at the time, called for a holistic approach. We required urgent action to stop people from dying, while at the same time we urged a complete reform of the Common European Asylum System.

The European Commission came up with a European Agenda for Migration, that is a roadmap of what needed to be changed. Parliament endorsed it and so did Council. It was 2015.

Unfortunately, in the next three years - until today - thousands kept on dying in the Mediterranean. We have increased the level of security of our borders to a whole new level but the Common European Asylum System remained pretty much the same.

This is my first message to you today: three years have gone by and most of the problems on migration and integration have not been solved. We have only been reactive.

II - Where we are today

So where are we today, after all?

The number of approved instruments relating to the security of our borders are more than ever. Suffices to say that we have a European Border and Coast Guard, with more competences, human and financial resources than could imagine a few years ago and it likely they grow even more before 2019. We have approved new information systems and revised existing ones. It has never been harder to enter the territory of the Union.

Today, however, I would like to further focus on asylum. The reform of the European Asylum consists essentially of seven instruments:

1. The new European Asylum Agency

I was shadow rapporteur for this file and we have reached a political agreement with the Maltese presidency, in 2017. Ever since, the council has refused approving it, pending agreement on all other instruments. We have a massive new border agency but not an asylum agency. It seems security measures are approved much faster than those that require actual solidarity.

2. Reception Conditions Directive,

3. Qualification Regulation and

4. Resettlement Regulation

In all of them, the considered “easy ones”, it is possible that a political agreement might arrive still this month. Council doesn’t really want any changes to the current status quo. Several Member States want even less than what we have today.

5. Eurodac Regulation

The database that will allow to better protect asylum seekers, but also better return those that are irregular migrants. No adoption is foreseen.

6. Asylum Procedure Regulation and

7. the Dublin Regulation

These two regulations are crucial. They will essentially define whether or not there will be a true European Asylum System, where solidarity between EU countries truly exists. But they will also ensure that asylum seekers have indeed better chances to be integrated. Parliament has been waiting for months for the Council to start negotiations. Nothing has happened so far. Only this week, Ministers met and the outcome was that 11 want one thing, 17 something

completely different. Member States will try to reach a Principles' agreement with Prime-Ministers and heads of government later this month. The odds are not very favourable.

Parliament has done its part. We have pushed for a true overhaul of the Common European Asylum System and we are ready to negotiate.

However, the political climate in Europe is very divided and extreme. Recent elections (France, Germany, Poland, Hungary, Slovenia, Italy or Austria) have demonstrated that populists movements, founded in euro-scepticism and anti-migrants feelings, are here to stay.

The next Member State to hold the Presidency of the Council will be Austria, whose government is formed by a coalition with the extreme right. It is predictable also that European elections will most likely observe an increase of the fringes, eurosceptics and anti-migration movements. These two elements make me believe that the near future will not be easier for migrants and asylum seekers in Europe.

This is my second message to you today: the present for migration, asylum and integration is surely not good nor ideal. But the outlook is not better: Europe might remain divided and with a broken common European Asylum System.

III - the role of civil society

Against this background, the role of civil society is very important.

In Portugal, PAR - Plataforma de Apoio aos Refugiados - powered an entire society to welcome asylum seekers and refugees. Due to their role promoting european values, this organization was awarded the European Citizens Prize last year.

Much of what Portugal was able to do in this context, it was due to the action of PAR. But also much of the national consensus around this issue comes from the actions of PAR and many other civil society organizations.

I believe, civil society organizations and social entrepreneurs have the ability to react faster and offset the effects of inaction by Member States and Europe and can be an engine for social change. Indeed, examples like those that will be presented during this Summit are very important.

By being innovative, by mobilizing civil society and being active on the ground, you are a force against populism and extremist views, which are based on mistrust and misinformation. But at the same time, you provide a valuable contribution to the democratic process: policies are better developed if they have your contributions.

This is my third message to you today: the democratic process can very much profit from your engagement, from initiatives such as this.

IV - Conclusion

Allow me to conclude.

In these few minutes I tried to provide you with an overall picture of what is happening in Europe in the domain of Migration, Asylum and Integration in Europe.

It is impossible to understand what is currently happening in Europe without understanding how we got here. **This was my first message to you today: three years have gone by and most of the problems on migration and integration have not been solved. We have only been reactive.**

I also attempted to look at the current landscape and anticipate what we might expect in the near future. **This was my second message to you today: the present for migration, asylum and integration is surely not good nor ideal. But the outlook is not better: Europe might remain divided and with a broken common European Asylum System.**

My last message to you was that **your engagement is crucial to help us** change the current status quo.

In the European Parliament, we aim to give voice to citizens, to push for the right solutions, to push for more Europe and more solidarity. But we need Member States also to act, we need national audiences to see the advantage of a single European voice.

We will keep on working for this, but your engagement, your input in this endeavour is indeed fundamental.

Thank you.