

## Special Symposium of *Comparative Migration Studies*

*After the Arab Spring: EU Asylum and Migration Policy in Flux*

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In recent years, asylum issues have become increasingly contentious in Western Europe and have been at the core of electoral campaigns in several EU Member States (Kaunert, 2009; 2010; Kaunert and Léonard, 2012). In several countries in the European Union (EU), populist or radical right-wing parties campaigning on an anti-immigration platform have achieved strong electoral scores, including the True Finns in Finland, the Freedom Party in Austria under Joerg Haider and, more recently, Heinz-Christian Strache, the National Front in France, the Northern League in Italy, the People's Party in Denmark, as well as the Freedom Party under Geert Wilders in the Netherlands. As a result of the often salient character of asylum and migration during electoral campaigns, many states have seen frequent policy reforms in the area of asylum and migration. However, in most countries, strong rhetoric on migration matters is not exclusive to radical parties, but rather permeates the whole electoral debate. This can be seen in the promises made by politicians such as David Cameron and Nicolas Sarkozy to considerably reduce the number of migrants if elected, which they made during their electoral campaigns in 2010 and 2012 respectively. Thus, European governments widely see migration as a challenge and their migration policies in need of reform. In many cases, these national debates have been inexorably linked to reflections on (national) identity and – especially since 2009 – economic fears. Migration from outside the EU has become an ever more politicised area in domestic spheres which has shifted upwards to the European level and even outwards towards the external sphere (Lavenex, 2006).

At the same time, regime change in several states in the Middle East has also led to significant migration flows, prompting renewed talks of 'migration crisis' in several European states and further changes to policies.

The protests and uprisings for dignity, justice and responsive governments in the Middle East and Africa herald a political, social and economic transformation in the Mediterranean region. A number of countries (e.g. Egypt, Tunisia, Libya) are going through transition from authoritarianism towards more inclusive political regimes, whilst others (e.g. Jordan, Morocco, Syria) are struggling to avoid radical political regime changes. These require a review of conditions for successful regime changes and transition to democracy, since the region has long been defined as resistant to change by both academics and policy-makers. These significant societal developments have very significant implications on the potential for asylum and migration cooperation across the Mediterranean. This symposium examines the extent to which, if any, the Arab Spring has influenced asylum and migration cooperation across the Mediterranean. Traditionally, European states and the European Union have been criticised for prioritising their security concerns, such as terrorism, irregular immigration, and crime, over encouraging democratic reforms in the Southern Mediterranean. In other words, the balance between democracy and security was perceived to be heavily tipped towards the latter, at the expense of the former. The recent Arab Spring and the political changes that it has unleashed make it necessary and topical to re-examine the cooperation between Europe and North Africa on these asylum and migration matters. What has been the impact of the Arab Spring on asylum and migration cooperation across the Mediterranean? What is the resulting new balance between democracy and security in the relations between Europe and North Africa?

In addition, asylum and migration are also policy issues on which the EU has been increasingly cooperating, in particular since 1999. The Stockholm programme adopted in 2009 foresees the development of a 'Europe of responsibility, solidarity and partnership in migration and asylum matters', which would have a 'dynamic and comprehensive migration policy' based on the so-called 'Global Approach to Migration', a Common European Asylum System (CEAS) and an integrated border management system for the EU's external borders. In turn, these EU policy developments have had a significant impact on the national policies of the Member States. The influence of the EU over the Member States is set to become increasingly important as the EU seeks to go beyond minimum standards to adopt common standards with respect to various issues, most notably in the field of asylum. This special symposium is focused on recent developments in the European Union as it moves towards the consolidation of various measures on migration and asylum. The entry into force of the Treaty of Lisbon in December 2009 and the implementation of the Stockholm Programme on

the Area of Freedom, Security and Justice (AFSJ) provide the backdrop to the analysis in these articles.

The contributions to this special symposium consider aspects of the highly complex and multi-faceted approaches to asylum and migration at the European level, especially after the Arab Spring, which provided an important new background to some political debates in Europe. This special symposium begins with Paoletti's article on the impact of the Arab Spring on the Italian migration policy and discourse. Her article analyses the relationship between the emergency rhetoric used by politicians and the policies implemented in Italy in response to the inflow of migrants from North Africa in 2011, notably the language used by policy-makers and the way in which it translated into the concrete policies adopted. On this basis, she also examines the implications for the EU-Italian cooperation on asylum and migration policy after the Arab Spring.

Völkel conducts a similar analysis at the level of the European Union. He starts from the basic observation of two conflicting targets of EU asylum and migration policy: security versus human rights, which according to him, lead to paradoxical EU migration policies. In his view, the 'increasing perception of (uncontrolled) immigration as potential security threat has led to a migration approach that is mainly based on defence and deterrence' (Völkel, this issue). With a specific focus on the Mediterranean region, his article reveals five paradoxes, whereby EU immigration policies not only fail to reach their objectives, but also achieve opposite results.

Finally, Mitsilegas examines the EU asylum system itself. His article analyses how national asylum systems interact under European Union law, following the criteria of allocation of state responsibility to examine asylum applications set out in the Dublin Regulation. His article tackles two key concepts in the evolution of European asylum law in particular: the concept of solidarity and the concept of trust, the application of which has been demonstrably weak in the EU asylum system.

Overall, the contributions to this special symposium examine two inter-related phenomena: the Arab spring with its asylum and migration implications for Europe, as well as the national and European policy dimensions of the EU asylum and migration systems. The Geert Wilders and Nigel Farage of Europe will continue to securitize foreigners for electoral gains – but, the important question is how Europe reacts to internal securitization from populists, as well as external pressures from events. Time will tell.

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