Six Takeaways on European Migration Management since the Adoption of the Global Compact for Migration

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The Global Compact for Migration (GCM), an agreement codifying and facilitating global migration management, was adopted by an overwhelming majority of countries in December 2018. Several reservations notwithstanding, it should be seen as a milestone achievement in international cooperation on migration. It showcased once again, however, divisions on the issue within and between EU Member States. A year on, this paper draws several conclusions about European migration management: divisions in transatlantic relations weaken global attempts at migration management; externalisation may be an effective tactic but deals with fickle governments are a bad strategy; for now, migration is no longer a central, politically defining issue in Europe, and the narrative about migration is increasingly being shaped by new actors.

On 19 December 2018, the GCM—the first global framework for migration management—was adopted by 152 countries in a UNGA vote.[1] By putting forward 23 principles of safe, orderly, and regular migration, the document meant to facilitate international cooperation in managing this phenomenon so comprehensively for the first time.[2] The GCM was negotiated and adopted in parallel to another agreement, the Global Compact on Refugees (GCR), in which the aye-voting countries agreed on the principle of burden- and responsibility-sharing in their response to refugee movements. Given the large approval of the GCM and the GCR, they should be seen together as an achievement and necessary first step in international cooperation on managing migrant and refugee movements.

In the GCM vote, only 17 countries abstained or voted against. But among these 17, as many as nine were European countries. A year after the adoption of the GCM, which stirred the migration debate in Europe anew, several general conclusions can be drawn specifically for the European attempts at migration management. This paper discusses six of them that have repercussions more broadly than just in the EU.

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[1] "General Assembly Endorses First-Ever Global Compact on Migration, Urging Cooperation among Member States in Protecting Migrants," 18 December 2018, https://www.un.org/press/en/2018/ga12113.doc.htm.

[2] For more about the GCM, see: P. Kugiel, "Prospects for the Global Compact for Migration," *PISM Bulletin*, no. 61 (1132), 24 April 2018, and P. Kugiel, "Signing the Global Compact on Migration (GCM): One Step towards Better International Cooperation," *PISM Spotlight*, no. 87/2018, 14 December 2018.

1. The global north—the U.S. and the EU—should lead the efforts in migration management but, divided, are unable to.

Forced migration, refugeeism included, is generally the most dangerous form of irregular migration for the origin country, the migrant, and the host country, and it touches mostly inhabitants of the global south. It is, therefore, with the global north—the richer, more privileged and powerful part of the world—that a particular responsibility for migration management rests. The global north—mostly Europe and North America—is home to just 5% or 4 million people of concern[3] out of the total number of 75 million (within the larger number of 272 million international migrants in 2019).[4] Even if as many as 82 million or 30% of all international migrants live in Europe, the majority of them were born in a country of the global north[5] and/or are regular/legal international migrants. Given the wealth, power, and institutional advantage of the global north, it should lead the efforts in migration management but is unable to due to stark internal divisions.

These divisions were revealed in the vote on the GCM. The U.S. voted not only against the GCM but also against the GCR with an ostentatious goal of undermining any multilateral effort at migration management and weakening the appeal of the compacts internationally. The vote once again revealed divisions in the EU that are deep enough to be replicated also in global forums. Hungary, Poland, the Czech Republic, Italy, Austria, Bulgaria, Latvia, Romania, Switzerland and Slovakia voted against, abstained or were absent, respectively. The particularly interesting decision was that of Hungary, Poland and the Czech Republic to vote against the GCM—three European countries to take such a stance out of only five globally (alongside the U.S. and Israel). Since the compact is legally non-binding, they did not have to oppose it even if they planned not to implement its provisions. Yet, they decided to make a political statement with their criticism of the agreement to underline their unwillingness to cooperate on migration. Even among the three there were different explanations for their "nay". Hungary called the GCM "this unbalanced, biased and pro-migration document", and migration "a dangerous phenomenon."[6] Poland explained that GCM is "not the right instrument to manage migration and does not serve the best interests of Poland and its people" with, for example, the difficulty in implementing detention standards.[7]

Internal ideological reasons, the pressure of the anti-immigration social media narrative that besmirched the GCM[8] and the ostentatious demonstration of Hungary that its government on principle would oppose any decisions on migration coming from Western and Northern Europe were behind the negative decisions about the compact in Europe. Apart from the U.S., Hungary was the only European country to reject both the GCM and the GCR. The Hungarian stance on GCM influenced the position of Poland and the Czech Republic, which most likely would not have been the case if the U.S. supported the GCM. American leadership in favour of the agreement would have outweighed the vociferous Hungarian opposition in Poland and the Czech Republic. Instead, the American objection encouraged other objections and abstentions.

The division within the global north is based less on differences in interests—most European countries need immigrant workforce while the literature is unequivocal that diversity increases the creativity and innovativeness of societies—and more on staunch differences in the rhetoric and promoting different worldviews. This division, however, shows that any cooperation among European countries for now has to be ad hoc, responding to an emergency rather than leading to a common long-term approach to migration management. There is still no systemic solution to share the burden of irregular migration in Europe, although there are attempts at creating them. Some have failed (obligatory resettlement and relocation mechanism) but some are for now proving successful (solidarity mechanism).

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[3] "People of concern" is the UNHCR term for refugees, asylum seekers, IDPs, returnees, stateless persons, etc.

[4] UNHCR Statistics, "The World in Numbers," http://popstats.unhcr.org/en/overview#_ga=2.244895363.724091355. 1575044320-2132642167.1575044320.

[5] "International Migration 2019," United Nations, https://www.un.org/en/development/desa/population/migration/ publications/wallchart/docs/MigrationStock2019_Wallchart.pdf.

[6] "General Assembly Endorses … ," https://www.un.org/press/en/2018/ga12113.doc.htm.

[7] *Ibidem.*

[8] L. Cerulus, E. Schaart, "How the UN migration pact got trolled," *Politico*, 3 January 2019, https://www.politico.eu/article/ united-nations-migration-pact-how-got-trolled/.

2. Further European integration will significantly improve migration management—until then, Europe is left with ad hoc voluntary measures.

In the Lisbon Treaty, migration and asylum policies are nominally an area of shared competence but countries retain the right to decide how many migrants from outside of the EU they admit.[9] This results in such complexity in the current configuration that it makes even the modest forms of redistribution, such as relocation, resettlement, or reform of the Dublin system, unworkable. The problem will remain until the migration and asylum policies of the Member States are integrated, which would include a much larger budget for it and a common European agency on top of joint political will of EU members. The prospects for it are poor.

In the meantime, only voluntary ad hoc mechanisms of migration management stand a chance of success, such as the European solidarity mechanism proposed in July 2019 by France.[10] Its goal is to relocate migrants across the participating countries: Germany, France, Italy, and Malta. Under the mechanism, rescue vessels are allowed to dock at the closest safe port without the danger of being returned to Libya. The four countries will decide case by case how to distribute the migrants between them. The deal was agreed largely owing to a change in the government in Italy. The new Italian interior minister, Luciana Lamorgese, immediately changed the tone of Italian public discourse on migration, in stark contrast to her predecessor, Matteo Salvini.[11] The deal may reduce the problem of penalisation of search-and-rescue missions (SAR), calm the debate, or even expand to include more countries, but the larger issue of European management of migration from the south remains.

3. It is not externalisation that undermines migration management but agreements with politically fickle and unlawful countries.

The emphasis on the externalisation of migration management to North African countries has been starkly criticised,[12] although it has to be noted that the rationale for some degree of externalisation is in line with GCM principles: in the spirit of regional cooperation and management as well as human rights. All three main migration routes in the south of Europe (Morocco-Spain, Libya-Italy/Malta, Turkey-Greece) are specific: they are maritime routes and require long and dangerous travel by sea in the majority of cases. It is logical and, often, lifesaving to manage European migration before migrants begin the maritime journey, not after it. Also, deeper European cooperation with North African countries not only in migration management but also in development, can potentially strengthen and improve relations across the Mediterranean. It is not the externalisation itself that causes problems but the fact that the EU and Member States signed agreements with politically fickle, unstable, or war-torn countries, namely Turkey and Libya.

While initially commendable, Turkish refugee and migration policy is becoming a tool for the Turkish leadership to blackmail Europe, exposing yet another challenge with irregular migration—its politicisation. It begs the question of whether prior to the agreement with Turkey it was not due to specific Turkish behaviour to deliberately facilitate irregular migration that a large number of refugees and migrants were able to cross to Greece. Libya, on the other hand, is considered by the UN to be an unsafe country, one to which neither asylum seekers nor migrants should be returned. The agreement between Italy and Libya, signed in 2017, to block migrants leaving Libya is controversial. Yet, in the logic of ensuring their security, the EU should not let migrants enter Libya via the Libyan southern border in the first place, which is impossible and absurd to expect. The agreement could be improved, however, and that is what Lamorgese planned since assuming office. On 4 November, the Italian-Libyan agreement was prolonged and slightly changed—Art. 3 was added, which stipulates the establishment of a bilateral commission to oversee the conditions in detention centres with a view to improving them. In the spirit of the GCM, Italy has successfully cooperated with the International

[9] J. Hampshire, "European Migration Governance since the Lisbon Treaty: Introduction to the Special Issue," *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, vol. 42, no. 4, 15 March 2016, pp. 537–553, https://doi.org/10.1080/1369183X.2015.1103033.

[10] J. Szymańska, "Prospects for Differentiated Integration in EU Asylum Policy," *PISM Bulletin*, no. 126 (1874), 3 September 2019.

[11] A different tone had already been adopted by the Five Star Movement while in the government coalition with Salvini, although its political strength was by then limited.

[12] G. Costanza, P. Jassogne, and M. Vandemeulebroucke, "Externalisation of European Policies Regarding Migration," CIRE, May 2019.

Organization for Migration (IOM) and the UNHCR in assisted voluntary repatriations—25,000 migrants have been repatriated.[13]

4. When irregular migration lessens so does the incentive to manage the issue.

The adoption of GCM resulted in immediate international complacency, as if the text was the end of the journey rather than its beginning. This was particularly visible in European migration policy, which, instead of speeding up reforms, broke down once more in the aftermath of the divisions over the GCM. The complacency could be explained by fewer and fewer migrants reaching EU borders. In the first 10 months of 2019, 107,900 irregular migrants and refugees entered Europe, which was a 16% decrease in the same period from 2018, and deaths at sea halved as well.[14] Fewer deaths should be seen as a success also of the SAR operations in the Mediterranean.

Despite the complacency, it is too early to assess the GCM's overall impact—the next years will show if the document influenced global management of migration—although several positive outcomes can already be seen. Countries of origin and transit, such as Tunisia and Morocco, are reforming their asylum policies. IOM is deepening cooperation with countries (i.e., Italy) and NGOs: at the beginning of November in Istanbul, together with the International Council of Voluntary Agencies, it convened the first Regional IOM-NGO Humanitarian Consultation for the Middle East and North Africa Region.[15] Politically, however, the EU—consumed by Brexit, national elections, transatlantic and NATO rifts— has lost the migration urgency from its horizon.

5. Migration is no longer the primary, politically defining issue in Europe.

While the spring round of Eurobarometer shows that immigration remains the main concern of Europeans when asked about the EU level (34%), it decreased by 6 points in six months and at the national level is only cited by 17% of respondents (down 19 points since autumn 2015).[16] Another poll in spring 2019 (YouGov/ECFR) shows that a majority of people in 14 European countries polled do not perceive migration as one of the top two national problems—the European median is around a dozen percent. The two exceptions are Hungary and the Czech Republic, with more than 20%. And even when migration is cited as a threat, respondents mean different things—not only immigration but also emigration: the problem of their compatriots leaving for other countries.[17] These findings are corroborated by the YouGov and Open Society Foundation poll, which found that two-thirds of Romanians (67%), Bulgarians (65%), and Hungarians (62%) are concerned about people leaving their countries to live abroad.[18]

This data combined with the success of Green parties in European and national elections in 2019, as well as the absence or markdown of migration-related topics in election campaigns (except in Hungary), lead to the conclusion that the issue has for now lost its political tenacity. Undoubtedly, it can quickly change with another crisis caused by irregular and mixed movement of people.

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[13] "'We're Not Facing a Migrant Invasion': Italy's New Interior Minister," *Agence France Presse*, 11 January 2019, https://www.thelocal.it/20191101/no-migrant-invasion-says-italys-new-interior-minister.

[14] "Migratory situation in October—arrivals in Eastern Mediterranean down from September," Frontex, 12 November 2019, https://frontex.europa.eu/media-centre/news-release/migratory-situation-in-october-arrivals-in-eastern-mediterranean-down-from-september-zKJwug, and "Mediterranean Migrant Arrivals Reach 87,315 in 2019; Deaths Reach 1.087," International Organization for Migration, 1 November 2019, https://www.iom.int/news/mediterranean-migrant-arrivals-reach-87315-2019-deaths-reach-1087.

[15] "IOM Partners with NGOs to Broaden Humanitarian Access in Middle East and North Africa," International Organization for Migration, 1 November 2019, https://www.iom.int/news/iom-partners-ngos-broaden-humanitarian-access-middle-east-and-north-africa.

[16] "Spring 2019 Standard Eurobarometer: Europeans upbeat about the state of the European Union—best results in 5 years," European Commission, 5 August 2019, https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP_19_4969.

[17] I. Krastev, S. Dennison, and M. Leonard, "What Europeans Really Want: Five Myths Debunked," ECFR, April 2019, https://www.ecfr.eu/article/what_europeans_really_want_five_myths_debunked.

[18] "States of Change: Attitudes in Central and Eastern Europe 30 Years after the Fall of the Berlin Wall," Open Society Foundations, November 2019, https://www.opensocietyfoundations.org/publications/states-of-change-attitudes-in-central-and-eastern-europe-30-years-after-the-fall-of-the-berlin-wall.

6. New actors begin to shape the rhetoric about migration.

Given the complexity and heterogeneity of the phenomenon, migration should be spoken about in a different tone than the security context in which it is usually brought up.[19] While the topic is still polarising, most European politicians make greater efforts to use language carefully. It is a long learning process, which the new President of the Commission Ursula von der Leyen experienced the hard way when she was forced to change the awkward name of the EC migration portfolio "Protecting our European Way of Life" (now "Promoting…"). On the other hand, Josep Borell, the new High Representative of the EU for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, sees migration as the most potent phenomenon and tool to prevent the decline of Europe.[20]

Apart from the strictly political actors, there are large societal groups that are playing an increasingly important role in shaping the narrative about migration. First, driven by growing demand for workforce, employers are pushing governments to change restrictive migration policies. Second, there are two social groups particularly interested in social issues such as migration: the youngest Europeans, and particularly young women. Statistics show that they are not fearful of migration and take the heat out of the debate about it. A recent poll, for example, showed that 38% of Generation Z women in Central and Eastern Europe (born after 1997) think refugees are not protected enough while 40% of them think the same about ethnic minorities, which lead the pollsters to conclude that the youngest is the most inclusive European age group.[21] A new, calm tone on migration has the potential of deflating the pressure from the issue in the public debate.

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[19] P. Sasnal, "Domesticating the Giant: The Global Governance of Migration," Council on Foreign Relations, June 2018, https://www.cfr.org/report/domesticating-giant-global-governance-migration; S. Fine, "All at Sea: Europe's Crisis of Solidarity on Migration," ECFR, 2019, https://www.ecfr.eu/publications/summary/all_at_sea_europes_crisis_of_solidarity _on_migration.

[20] J. Borrell: "Seule la migration empêchera le déclin de l'Europe," *Radio Télévision Suisse*, 14 November 2019, https://www.rts.ch/info/monde/10867600-josep-borrell-seule-la-migration-empechera-le-declin-de-l-europe- .html?utm_source=ECDPM+Newsletters+List&utm_campaign=759bf4963c- EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_2019_09_05_08_48_COPY_01&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_f93a3dae14-759bf4963c- 388616949.

[21] The speed with which Carola Rackete, a German ship captain saving lives in the Mediterranean, became a media hero, attests to this shift. For elaboration on the Generation Z attitude to migration, see: "States of Change … ," *op. cit.*