

## **EU affairs parliamentary committee - discussion on migration**

**1385 words (10-11 minutes)**

### **1. Intro**

It's a pleasure to be in Ireland, a pleasure to be in Dublin, and a pleasure to be with you here today.

I'm looking forward to hear your ideas and answer your questions.

I want to update you on the negotiations on the Pact on Migration and Asylum. Which I presented in September 2020. As a European answer to manage migration.

Each day of delay on an agreement undermines the trust of our citizens. Trust between Member States

Each day of delay, we pay the price. As we jump from improvised solution to improved solution. In crises like Afghanistan and Belarus.

And those who pay the highest price are the people who come to Europe on dangerous journeys.

200,000 people last year – an increase compared to previous years.

More than 2000 people reportedly died at sea last year.

### **2. Ireland's solidarity**

I applaud Ireland's solidarity, with these desperate people. For holding European values high.

Just last week, you offered to regularise 17,000 undocumented people. You said: "migrants are not them, you are part of "us".

When people suffered in unbearable conditions in overcrowded Greek camps, you gave them new homes – 50 refugees and 36 children last year.

When people were in distress at sea, you took them in. 28 people last year and I heard 21 are planned for this week, from Malta and Italy

Ireland has been for many years a consistent supporter of EU resettlement schemes. Providing safe journeys to a welcome home for people in need of protection.

And the Irish system of community sponsorship of refugees is a model of engaging people to build welcoming societies.

Neighbours, friends, local businesses and sports clubs get together to help refugees.

By the middle of last year, 13 communities in Ireland had welcomed 50 families.

Your example inspired us to include community sponsorship in the Pact. Because People never integrate into a continent or a country, but always into a community.

### **3. Migration is normal**

The idea at the core of the Pact. Is that migration is something normal. Something of all time. It's always been there. It always will be.

I don't think I need to explain that in Ireland. Where migration is such a big part of your history.

The goal of the Pact is to uphold the right to apply for asylum and manage migration in an orderly way.

All the more important now. When there are voices who want to limit access to the asylum process. Who want to build walls and fences to keep people out.

I don't think I need to explain in Ireland what the problem is with walls and fences at our borders.

#### **4. The step by step approach**

We have made progress on the Pact, the past few years.

Like the new European Blue Card. A residence permit to attract skilled professionals to Europe. To help us in in the global competition for talent.

Or the new mandate for the European Union Agency for Asylum, so it can better support Member States.

Files that were stuck for many years in negotiations between Council and Parliament. But last year we reached agreements on both.

Or the new migration preparedness and crisis blueprint. A crisis management mechanism that has already proved its value. In handling crises like Afghanistan and Belarus.

We are working on improving cooperation on search and rescue.

And Member States agreed to resettle and provide protection to 60,000 refugees – twice as many as expected.

Proving that Europe can unite on migration. And can do so, in line with EU values.

None of this was easy. But now we need Europe to agree on the core of the Pact. And that's even less easy.

Last week, President Macron gave an inspiring speech. Showing strong leadership on Schengen and on Migration.

I very much welcome his proposal for a Schengen Council. We need to strengthen the political governance of the Schengen area. That's totally in line with the Schengen strategy I put forward last year.

And I also welcome his proposal to move forward on the Pact. Which gives a real perspective of progress.

To move forward pragmatically, gradually, step by step. To put parts of the Pact already in practice. With a coalition of the willing. To build trust. And show that the Pact works.

In three key areas.

First, the external dimension of migration management. Second, screening at the border. Third, solidarity.

## **5. The External Dimension**

So first, the external dimension.

As I told Member States at the borders conference in Vilnius: border controls alone won't manage migration. We can only manage migration if we work with external partners.

Work with countries of origin and transit. To fight smugglers, to improve legal migration. And improve returns and readmissions. Returns carried out with respect, dignity and humanity.

We know that it works. Our recent experience in stopping Lukashenko proves it. When Lukashenko lured people to Europe. Tricked and trapped them at the EU border. Trying to fabricate a crisis.

The EU responded united. We reached out to third countries and travel companies. The flights to Minsk stopped. Irregular arrivals fell. People returned home. The situation has de-escalated. For now.

For the last two years I've been working to build migration partnerships. Visiting countries in North Africa and the Western Balkans.

We've now prepared eight action plans to deal with key countries. (Tunisia, Morocco, Libya, Nigeria, Niger, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Afghanistan and Iraq).

And we will also engage with other partners. Soon, I will visit Senegal.

Member States have a key role to play. Last week I asked Home affairs ministers to present concrete proposals and actions. The Commission can provide support, including funding.

## **6. Screening**

No matter how good our cooperation with neighbours, there will always be desperate people trying to come to Europe in irregular ways.

This is why we introduced a pre-entry screening in the Pact.

The French Presidency suggests willing Member States could start to put this in place step by step, already now.

The pre-entry screening at the border is designed to identify people who come to the EU in an irregular manner. With identity and security checks. By taking fingerprints. But also with health checks. And identifying vulnerable people in need of aid.

This screening is a very important first step towards any follow up procedure. Guaranteeing due process, and access to the right procedure.

In a second stage we will discuss the asylum and return procedure at the border. But first things, first.

The French will also explore how to carry out these steps without detention. Developing alternatives to detention, but making sure people don't abscond. Since this is also a problem. And we will support them in this endeavour too.

## **7. Solidarity**

Finally, any European approach to migration management depends on solidarity. Solidarity with people in need, and Member States under pressure.

Member States faced with sudden large numbers of irregular arrivals. Need to know they can count on solidarity. On support from other Members of our Union.

As a Union together, we can manage these arrivals.

Relocations will remain the most important way of showing solidarity, notably when we speak about people in need of international protection.

But I want Member States also to be able to show solidarity in different ways.

For example, by offering support: operationally, materially or financially.

Or by helping a Member State under pressure, to carry out returns.

Here too, the French Presidency suggests we can already start implementing our proposals, step by step, with Member States ready to engage. And I hope many will.

## **8. Conclusion**

The French Presidency has presented creative, and pragmatic proposals to move the Pact forward.

I like this approach. It's "negotiating by doing".

I discussed these proposals with ministers last week.

They are just what we need to kick start negotiations. To move on to the next phase.

Turning the Pact into reality will help to build trust. Will help to prove that the Pact works. As our action on Belarus already has proved diplomacy works, to manage migration.

It's clear that the Commission will coordinate.

I want to make sure, that these practical steps forward go hand in hand with the legislative process.

That what we learn in practice, becomes part of our rules. That we retain the careful balance, we have now in the Pact.

And that our asylum migration management remains truly European.

United, and upholding our values.