

## Europe and the Huddled Masses

By Jakob von Weizsäcker

BRUSSELS—First the good news: The European Union is getting more serious about a common immigration policy. At a ministerial meeting this week in Cannes, the French EU presidency pushed an agenda that went beyond just building a “fortress Europe.” Ministers also discussed ideas to attract foreign talent and to manage the inflow each year of hundreds of thousands of people seeking a better future in Europe.

The bad news is that this immigration pact, set to be adopted in October, doesn't go far enough.

As the EU has torn down its internal borders, driving from Lisbon to Warsaw these days is like driving from Chicago to Los Angeles. A “drive-through” U.S. is one reason why Illinois and California can't have independent immigration policies. For the same reason, Portugal and Poland need to coordinate their immigration rules much more. But for EU member states to give up autonomy in such sensitive areas isn't easy. This is why progress to coordinate immigration policies has been painfully slow despite two massive challenges.

The first challenge: With around six million illegal migrants already living in the EU and perhaps as many as 500,000 arriving each year, the problem of illegal immigration has reached the same order of magnitude in Europe as in the U.S. And the potential for illegal immigration to the EU is arguably bigger than to the U.S. Bordering both North Africa and the former Soviet states, Europe has the equivalent of several Mexicos on its doorstep.

Second, the EU is falling behind in the global competition for talent. The share of

the foreign-born population with a university education is around 40% in Canada and Australia and 25% in the U.S., whereas in France and Germany it is closer to 15%.

The immigration pact is strong on controls: It suggests better border inspections, biometric visas and the forced repatriation of illegal migrants. By contrast, it is weak on how to be smarter at welcoming immigrants: those sought-after high-skilled immigrants whom we need, those refugees who need us, and the large number of illegals who will continue arriving in significant numbers despite reinforced controls.

The lack of European coordination in these areas is the result of different approaches across the union. France, for instance, favors tight controls of most sorts of immigration while the Spanish government has a more open attitude. So rather than agreeing on a European policy, the ministers in Cannes limited decision making to accommodating immigrants at the national level. But such an uncoordinated approach is problematic for three reasons.

First, the flurry of national programs for high-skilled migrants that member states have introduced in recent years is not working. Global talent is largely avoiding Europe. This is especially true for the non-English-speaking member states.

It isn't hard to understand why these fragmented national immigration schemes for high-skilled workers don't work so well. Just imagine if every American state had its own high-skilled worker visa scheme, giving people the right to move across interstate borders only after five

years. Why would a young software engineer from, say, India, want to move to Cheyenne, Wyoming, if he were stuck there for half a decade? By contrast, with a guarantee that he could soon move on to other parts of the U.S., giving Cheyenne a try suddenly wouldn't sound so risky.

Unfortunately, the five-year limit for crossing borders is the current EU policy.

That's why the European Commission proposed a “Blue Card” for high-skilled migrants, designed to give them access to the entire EU labor market.

But the Blue Card risks failure if member states continue clutching the right to accept or reject even high-skilled migrants. There is no

discernible movement in the immigration pact on that important point.

Second, the EU needs to find a pragmatic way to accommodate the irregular migration that inevitably will continue despite reinforced border controls. Illegal immigrants need to be dealt with in ways that are compatible with both human rights and the need to better integrate foreigners into society. The EU needs to agree on more stringent standards. Given the open internal borders, some member states might otherwise be tempted to drive illegal migrants toward neighboring EU countries by treating them poorly. Such a race to the bottom would be in nobody's interest.

A realistic alternative to the sporadic “mass regularizations” that have taken place in countries such as Spain and Italy could be “earned regularization.” It would offer fast-track visas for those illegal migrants who rapidly acquire language skills

and display other characteristics that are conducive to integration, such as an employment track record. By contrast, irregular migrants who do not conform to this set of criteria would only be regularized after a much longer period, during which they would continue to be exposed to the risk of forced repatriation.

Third, the EU ought to assure that it provides shelter to refugees who need protection. The EU has scotched the problem of “asylum shopping,” successfully bringing down the number of asylum seekers. The next challenge is to offer more help to people who need it. Sweden's performance in this respect is exemplary. The Scandinavian country last year absorbed over 10% of all asylum seekers in the industrialized world. Almost half of the Iraqi asylum applicants in the EU found refuge in Sweden.

But it's not fair that Swedish taxpayers should foot such a disproportionate share of the bill, which is why we need increasing European funding for asylum seekers. What we need is a more proactive EU asylum policy.

In 1922, Norwegian polar explorer and Nobel Peace Prize winner Fridtjof Nansen designed special travel documents for refugees of the Russian Revolution. This “Nansen passport” helped hundreds of thousands of people to flee persecution. How about a new Nansen passport? To start, Europe should commit itself to offering refuge to an additional 25,000 people per year, using European funds to support member states that accommodate them.

The Soviet Union may now be long gone, but there are still too many refugees who need Europe's help.

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A borderless  
union needs a  
coordinated  
immigration  
policy.