

Foreign Affairs Committee

Oral evidence: [Finding a diplomatic route: European responses to irregular migration, HC 1903](#)

Tuesday 9 July 2019

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Members present: Tom Tugendhat (Chair); Stephen Gethins; Priti Patel; Andrew Rosindell, Mr Bob Seely; Royston Smith.

Questions 76-116

(Questions 41-75 were taken in private)

Witnesses

I: Shoshana Fine, Visiting Fellow, European Council on Foreign Relations, Yves Pascouau, Associate Senior Researcher, Jacques Delors Institute and the University of Nantes, and Matteo Villa, Research Fellow, Italian Institute for International Political Studies (ISPI).

Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Shoshana Fine, Yves Pascouau and Matteo Villa.

Q76 Chair: Thank you very much indeed for coming to this afternoon's session of the Foreign Affairs Committee. I apologise that we are running slightly later than intended. Could I ask you to very briefly introduce yourselves in one sentence?

Yves Pascouau: I am Yves Pascouau. I have been working for several institutions, including the European Policy Centre in Brussels, the Jacques Delors Institute in Paris, and several universities. I am now the founder and CEO of an NGO called EuropeanMigrationLaw.eu.

Matteo Villa: My name is Matteo Villa. I am from an Italian think tank, the Italian Institute for International Political Studies, and I specialise in European migration.

Shoshana Fine: I am Shoshana Fine. I am a research fellow at the European Council on Foreign Relations, a pan-European think tank, and I am also a research associate at Sciences Po Paris.

Q77 Chair: Fantastic. Thank you very much indeed. Many of these questions, you will notice, apply to one country or another. Please do not feel the need for everybody to answer every question; that is certainly not the intention. Please do only chip in if you feel you have something to add. We will try to keep our questions short, and if you could try to keep the answers short, I would be very grateful.

Mr Pascouau, what impact has irregular migration had on French domestic politics since 2015?

Yves Pascouau: The impact in France is pretty much the same as the one that has been experienced in many other countries. It has been felt as an issue, and as a consequence, for the past 20 or 30 years. The new Government have adopted a new law in order to give new rules to better organise migration and try to better address the issue of irregular migration.

Particular to France is the fact that, contrary to what is happening in other member states, we are experiencing an increase in the number of asylum seekers arriving in France due to several factors, one of which is the fact that many asylum seekers whose application has been rejected in Germany are coming to France and re-applying for asylum. That is one issue, and issues in France related to irregular migration are also mixed up in the public debate with issues related to asylum.

Q78 Chair: Fascinating. How would you say irregular migration has affected France's relationship with the United Kingdom?



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Yves Pascouau: There is a particular relationship between France and the UK, and one of the biggest issues in this field is what is happening in Calais. There are two main issues, one of which is related to the fact that France is controlling exit from the Schengen area, which is a sort of paradox because we are avoiding people leaving the Schengen area, whereas the normal policy at EU level is to prevent people entering the Schengen area. That is one of the main paradoxes, and one of the main relationships France has with the UK.

The second problem we have today is the fact that for the last couple of months a series of people have been trying to reach the UK on different boats and vessels that they steal from sailors and fishermen on the coast, and they try to cross the channel, which is one of the most dangerous sea routes in the world. We are experiencing that kind of new phenomenon. Since 2015, if I am correct, 55 people have died trying to cross the channel from France to the UK.

Q79 **Royston Smith:** What is behind more people trying to get across the channel?

Yves Pascouau: They want to reach the UK. Given that, due to the separate checks in the security premises established in Calais, they are not able to get on a boat or even on a lorry, they now try to reach the UK by sea. That is the main phenomenon that we are experiencing. We have seen some people moving from Calais to Belgium to try to cross the sea from Belgium to the UK. This situation has not been that important or significant, and now the new phenomenon is that some people are trying to reach the UK on stolen boats that they try to lead to the UK.

Q80 **Royston Smith:** We have heard in other meetings and conversations that the number of people trying to cross the channel is anything from the published figures to 60 or 70 a day. Do you have any numbers, not necessarily for those making trip but for those being turned back?

Yves Pascouau: I don't have those numbers because I have not been able to retrieve the different numbers published by the Home Office in France.

Q81 **Royston Smith:** Finally, on Brexit and UK-French co-operation, our arrangement is not dependent on our EU membership, as I understand it, but when we leave the EU will that make any difference to the way in which the UK and France co-operate on migrants trying to get across the channel?

Yves Pascouau: I think the co-operation between the UK and France will remain at the same level as it is today with respect to migration. The main problem relates to intelligence co-operation, which is wider than the issue of migration. That is perhaps one of the biggest points that the UK will have to deal with, particularly getting access to the European database on that issue. With respect to the migration phenomenon and people leaving Calais in order to reach the UK, I think that the co-operation will still be there. Will it be at the level it is today? I don't have a crystal ball, but I don't we are going to give up any form of co-operation. One example is

that at the very beginning of Brexit, French leaders said the Le Touquet agreement will be over or dismissed, but it is still running, so there is co-operation between the two countries, and this co-operation, in my opinion, will continue to be there.

- Q82 **Stephen Gethins:** We have heard in some of the evidence we have been given about the cycle of migration. Can you talk to us about the role of the French and the EU, including the UK, in projects in the Sahel to address irregular migration, and is that having any impact at the moment?

Shoshana Fine: There is a very interesting example if you take the case of Niger. This example comes up time and again. EU member states, including France but also Spain, have played a very important role in promoting ECOWAS. This goes back quite a few years. ECOWAS is a space of free movement, very much inspired by Schengen. It was considered that intra-regional migration and movement was very important for the development of the local economies. There is a consensus on this issue. But in the last few years a lot of migrants have passed through Niger to head up to Libya, so we have had efforts to push the European border outwards. We have had the promotion of the securitisation and criminalisation of migration in this region. We have got the introduction, with EU backing, of the first anti-smuggling law. Basically, we have criminalised migration. That means that a lot of people in Niger who were reliant on crossing borders for their daily living are no longer able to do so.

That is obviously creating a lot of instability. Here, we very much see that the money assigned for development interventions in Niger is very much in conflict with that assigned for security interventions, and there is not a global picture looking at that.

- Q83 **Stephen Gethins:** So these projects could actually be increasing instability.

Shoshana Fine: They are increasing instability. There is a lot of evidence for that. There is also a lot of evidence to say that they are not reducing migration. We had figures originally from the IOM saying that we are reducing migration along this particular route up to Libya by 75%, but what we have seen is that they are going around other routes—through Chad and Darfur, for instance—and those routes are very dangerous.

We do not have figures but we know that there has been an increasing number of migrant deaths on those routes. We have displaced the route. That is much like your earlier point, which is really important to remember when we think of migration. We cannot stop migration. What we see with the bolstering of border security is that people are just using different routes that are often more dangerous. That is something that we have seen in the case of UK-France and something we see in the case of Niger.

- Q84 **Stephen Gethins:** It is driving instability and also exacerbating human rights abuse.

Shoshana Fine: Absolutely.



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Matteo Villa: May I just jump in, because I have a bit of a different take? I also think that financing projects, especially in transit countries, that are mostly aimed at development end up financing the Government, which then finances the border management control for migration and not the development of the regions that are actually relying on smuggling. It does enforce instability.

We have seen that in north Niger increasingly. I will give you an example. The EU has assigned €600 million to Niger to tackle the problem. There are an estimated 100,000 smugglers making a living through smuggling in northern Niger. That is around €6,000 per smuggler. It was estimated to be a sufficient figure so that smugglers would change their business model and try to find a living out of legal ways.

The problem is that another estimate says that what made it through to the smugglers in the end was €500, so most of that went to the army and other development projects—yes, they were on the ground, but they had nothing to do with smuggling. The problem with that kind of aid is that it is hard to control and track down.

It is quite surprising that we have not seen an increase in instability in northern Niger militarily, but I would expect that either smuggling to Libya restarts at some point or this part of Niger gets destabilised again. Just remember that in 2011 there was a civil war there and it ended. It is pretty clear that they do not have many alternatives.

Q85 Stephen Gethins: What impact is that having on the situation in Libya, where you have a civil war in an effectively failed state where many of the migration routes go through?

Matteo Villa: Again, it seems from the numbers that numbers to Libya have gone down. In respect of routes, it is true that there has been some diversion, but overall numbers have gone pretty much down.

If you look at the transit regions in the southern part of Libya, you no longer see the same movement that you saw two years ago. The problem is that the migrants in Libya are increasingly trapped. You have actually seen return migration to Niger. You usually never saw that in the past few years.

There has been return migration to Niger and some displacement across the border. Then, clearly, the migrants in Libya became trapped. Remember that the EU trust fund has contributed to financing the Libyan coastguard and some of the border patrolling. Some of the people who work for the coastguard also work with militias who detain migrants in Libya. Italy has also financed support of the Libyan coastguard with about €50 million to €80 million a year. The EU trust fund has given €320 million in two years, so that is €160 million a year, while Italy has given between €40 million and €80 million each year, to the Libyan coastguard.

Q86 Mr Seely: Can I just double check some things? Did you say there were 100,000 people involved in the people smuggling in northern Niger?

Matteo Villa: Yes.

Q87 **Mr Seely:** And there still are?

Matteo Villa: It depends. These people are usually young males who do not have alternatives, so they can go back and forth into smuggling.

Q88 **Mr Seely:** So they were, but when is that figure from? You say there are now fewer people being smuggled through, so when was it 100,000? Is that from two or three years ago? Is that from last year? Is that from five years ago?

Matteo Villa: I think that was from 2015 or 2016, but the problem is that these people are vulnerable and then re-take up smuggling.

Q89 **Mr Seely:** They are doing nasty things and they are not being very nice to other human beings, but they need to earn a living and so they are caught between a rock and a hard place. You have had an entire industry funding people from specific countries—central Africa, west Africa—through Niger and up into Libya, and people making money all the way through this system. Have you had an entire economy around people-smuggling in western and central Africa, or is it too exaggerated to say that?

Matteo Villa: In northern Niger, that is certainly true; you do not have many alternatives to that. In other parts of the country, especially Libya, that is totally not true. Usually in Libya, you use smuggling as a decoy for other illicit activities. You do not make that much money from smuggling. You make a lot of money through drug trafficking, weapons trafficking and oil smuggling, and then you do—

Mr Seely: People on the side.

Matteo Villa: People smuggling on the side, because that is politically relevant, so local Governments will ask you to stop that and then maybe close an eye to—

Q90 **Chair:** So people smuggling is a cover for drugs and weapons.

Matteo Villa: Absolutely. In Libya—the western part of Libya—that is totally the case.

Q91 **Mr Seely:** But not so much in Niger? In Niger, the primary economic gain out of smuggling is people smuggling. Is that because the drug routes go through Algeria, or is it because the people of Niger do not themselves control the drug routes through their own country?

Matteo Villa: In northern Niger, there are not many other routes apart from weapons, but usually weapons stay within the area and they are smuggling to Tuareg and Tubu tribes in the Sahel. Yes, there are other trafficking things, but they do not generate that much revenue to single persons, so 100,000 people do rely on smuggling or simply fall down on unemployment, and sometimes they want to take up arms because that is the only alternative.



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Q92 **Mr Seely:** Do you think that the money that the European Union—no doubt that includes the UK at the moment—has given has had a significant positive effect on people-smuggling through Niger?

Matteo Villa: If it really trickled down to them, it would have. The problem is that it was not that significant an amount; it is enough for them to live for about a year, not much more than that, while €6,000 would have made a lot of difference. It depends on how you target aid, and given that the Government of Niger were asking for money to be managed centrally, you do not have that much control over where it goes.

Q93 **Mr Seely:** So you suspect that a lot of the money that has gone into Niger in order to prevent people-smuggling has been siphoned off by central Government.

Matteo Villa: We have some data on that.

Mr Seely: Some data?

Matteo Villa: Yes, I can only talk through data. We know that only about 10% of the money that was given to Niger reached the northern regions.

Q94 **Mr Seely:** So factually, your argument is—or the data suggests—that of the EU money that was given to Niger, presumably including DFID money or somebody's money from the UK, only 10% got to the affected people, the affected area or both. Is there an affected area that we are talking about, or people who were part of the smuggling operations?

Matteo Villa: That is an area and also people, but yes, that is the northern part of Niger. I mean, this is in official documents; we can even give them to the Committee if you want. They come from the European Court of Auditors, so you can use that.

Q95 **Mr Seely:** Do we have those documents? Could you provide those documents?

Matteo Villa: Yes, absolutely.

Shoshana Fine: It is just important to note here that if we are speaking about DFID money, we have just done a big project on this, looking at EU development aid and DFID money and whether or not it is effective in these regions. It seems to me that one of the big problems we have seen here since the so-called migration crisis of 2016 is that today, when we are speaking about human smuggling, suddenly this has entered the field of development aid. This is not really what development was about back in the day—it was supposed to be about poverty eradication—so what are we talking about when we are speaking about development aid here?

Secondly, what we have seen is that security and development communities don't talk to each other. We have really seen that with the question of migration. It is a big problem, because it means that we are getting these counterproductive interventions. Coming back to the point I mentioned before, these counter-smuggling interventions are detrimental to development aid. We have got money coming from DFID and the EU that is not in a cohesive framework.



- Q96 **Mr Seely:** That is a really good point. If the Chair will allow, I will ask a question on that. I have seen that issue in Afghanistan. You have soldiers saying, "Don't eradicate the poppies," and you have got DFID money saying, "Eradicate the poppies." If you eradicate the poppies, you get 10 more IEDs being blown up in and around the village the following week. You say that people are not talking to each other in the case of northern Niger. Can you give me some examples where you have the development community saying one thing and the security community saying another and things not being very joined up?

Shoshana Fine: Absolutely. If we look at EUCAP Sahel, the aims and objectives are security ones, such as counter-smuggling. If we look at development aid pre-2015, it was promoting ECOWAS and concrete interventions, although I do not have specific examples here. Spain was a key country here, as was the EU. They were saying, "For job creation and to promote local economies, we need these people to be able to cross borders." Since 2015, this criminalisation of crossing the border was coming in, so people were no longer able to move.

- Q97 **Mr Seely:** Why were they moving? Is it because they had sheep herds or because they were traders between villagers? What were people's livelihoods that meant they needed to move across the border?

Shoshana Fine: I don't have details on that, but I can come back to you.

Chair: Feel free, by the way, if you have information that you do not have with you now, to say that you will write to us with it later. You cannot have everything at your fingertips.

- Q98 **Royston Smith:** Can we talk about Italy's domestic politics? What sort of impact is irregular migration having internally in Italy?

Matteo Villa: Clearly it has had an impact on the political narrative and discourse. We have had much higher numbers of arrivals since 2013 and 2014, which is different from the EU, where the crisis went up and came down quite quickly. It went up in August 2015 and almost ended in March 2016. We see the ripples throughout the continent, but the main effect has dissipated, at least practically, if not politically.

In Italy, we have had pretty high numbers of arrivals for a few years. Even the centre-left Government before the current Government had tried to bring down arrivals. In the end, that was effective in mid-2017. Right before the current Government came into power in June 2018, there was a significant decrease in arrivals, and the politicians were still talking about high arrivals as if that was a reality.

There was a survey at the end of 2017, after six months of huge decreases in arrivals—there were at least 75% less than before—and the majority of people in Italy believed that arrivals were the same or higher than the previous year. That catered clearly to a narrative that was one almost of invasion. It brought about a change of Government and an attempt to follow up on some of their promises. They were elected on the promise of repatriating half a million people who are irregulars currently in



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Italy. They have been elected on a promise of further bringing down arrivals by sea. That has happened, in a sense, as arrivals by sea have shrunk even more. The number of irregulars resettling in Italy has gone up. In a sense, you can say that the Government have acted on some promises.

The third promise was reducing protection for those who were perceived to be cheating by accessing the asylum seeker system when they were just economic migrants. Those three things have been followed through. We have had a decree taking away one of the three protections that we have in Italy. We had asylum, subsidiary protection—as in the EU—and humanitarian protection, which was the third layer and was taken out. Arrivals have gone down, but we had more than 150,000 waiting in line as pending asylum seekers and we took away one protection, so we increased the number of irregular migrants staying in Italy irregularly. Right now, there are an estimated 600,000 irregular migrants in Italy, which is more than when the Government came about, when the estimate was 530,000. We have this kind of problem to face.

Q99 Royston Smith: Does irregular migration put any strain on Italy's relationships with France and the UK, for example?

Matteo Villa: Absolutely. I will go back to 2011, before the current crisis. We had a spike in Tunisians coming to Italy after the Arab spring in Tunisia. We had 40,000 people coming to Italy, and the previous centre-right Government gave very short-term humanitarian permits to those people in order to let them go to France. This clearly strained relations. It caused the first crisis at the border, which we all remember because it came back with all the different Governments. Whether there has been a centre-right or centre-left Government in France, and whether there has been a centre-left or centre-right Government in Italy, there has always been this kind of tension. Italy has attempted for years to cheat the system and let people go—most of them do not want to stay in Italy—and France has tried, with some force and strength, to regulate the borders, sometimes going a bit beyond what the law foresees for minors and sometimes not.

Q100 Mr Seely: How can you regulate an open border?

Matteo Villa: You close it.

Q101 Mr Seely: Which borders have been shut?

Matteo Villa: Ventimiglia, for instance, which is a land border next to the coast, and then other Alps borders. Migrants have frequently come there and attempted to cross. That is quite risky—clearly, if you try to cross the Alps with no great knowledge of the region, you can die easily—but thousands of them each year have attempted to cross. Some of them have been apprehended and brought back. We have an agreement with France, which states that if you apprehend people within some kilometres of the border, you can send them back without passing through the Dublin rules, so you do not have to take them and ask them whether they want to apply for asylum or whether they applied for asylum in Italy and then ask Italy

formally to take them back. That is what has been going on, and that has strained some relations. We do apply that part of the agreement, but clearly the Italian Government are not happy that people are being sent back.

Q102 Royston Smith: What about the UK? Are there strained relations between the Italian Government and the UK Government?

Matteo Villa: No, not at all. I would say, on the contrary, that the UK has helped with EU NAVFOR Med. They have given naval assets—four ships, I think, at different points in time—to Italy. With the UK there has been co-operation in search and rescue, and in tackling smuggling and trafficking—destroying boats. Then there has been not co-operation but toleration in Libya and other parts of Africa. I do not think Italy is seen in the UK as a strained partner; actually, I see Italy as being quite a good partner on migration control with the UK.

Q103 Stephen Gethins: I have a couple of quick questions. The first is on Sudan, given everything that has been going on there recently. To what extent are projects by the EU, the UK or others having an effect on the situation in Sudan? Are we overlooking human rights abuses there in implementing those?

Matteo Villa: To me?

Stephen Gethins: To anybody.

Matteo Villa: I am speaking too much. I will go back to the trust fund, because we have a lot of data on that. The trust fund, in its first years of operation—which will be its last if it is not refurbished—used about €200 million in Sudan. Some of that money has gone to the rapid defence forces. These are Government-affiliated forces that were used to control the border, especially the northern part of the border, and then the eastern part with Eritrea and Ethiopia.

We know that some of these people being reintegrated within the rapid defence forces were previous Janjaweed militias, if you were referring to that. We know for a fact that some of them might have had connections, or even have fought in Darfur. That is a problem that we have to face. If we finance border management control projects and go to an army or paramilitary operation in Sudan, that might well be the case. Now there is a transition in Sudan, so we have to see what kind of Government will come out of that, and whether the rapid defence forces will still be in a position of power in a few months' time.

Q104 Stephen Gethins: Do you think that this should be a higher priority for European Union member states, if they are going to look at continuing these programmes?

Matteo Villa: It is something that has to be looked at. In terms of migration, you could say that what came from the money in the EU trust fund even decreased migration from Sudan, which was surprising to me at least. The instability in Sudan to this day has not provoked a spike in



people in Khartoum, the capital, towards Libya, which is surprising to me—but yes, we have to look into what happens in Sudan.

Q105 Stephen Gethins: I have just a couple of final questions. Have Italy and the EU done enough to ensure that the deals in Libya do not drive instability and human rights abuses? Some of you have already hinted at that.

Matteo Villa: This is tricky. You could say that there was a plan that has not been followed through. For instance, Italy provides logistical assistance, and even human rights training. Even the EU trust fund provides human rights training, but to Libyan coastguard troops, who are formally affiliated with the Ministry of the Interior and the Ministry of Defence in Libya. However, they have a lot of ties with smugglers and traffickers, especially on the western part of the coast.

When you finance that kind of operation, you have to know what these people will do. Sometimes they will not even infringe on human rights because they do not work that much. There have been a lot of problems with Italy telling the Libyan coastguard that they should act on a search and rescue and then the Libyan coastguard waiting one day before deploying a ship. The problem is that you cannot talk about human rights without thinking that these kinds of rescues will be interceptions, so people will go back to detention centres. The second part would have been pressuring Libya into doing away with the system of indefinite detention in detention centres—even just legal ones. That has not come through.

Shoshana Fine: An important point is that we do not know what happens to them when they get taken back. The EU has operationally been very much invested in supporting the Libyan coastguard with Italy through various means. Once they arrive back in Libya, we do not know what happens to them. They get taken back to these detention centres, but we do not know what happens in between. In these detention centres we know that there is systematic, arbitrary detention. We heard about slavery a couple of years ago. It is still going on—torture and what not. We know that all this is going on.

We keep speaking today about irregular migrants. We are not once speaking about asylum or refugees. I think it would be more correct to speak about illegalised migration, because we are not leaving any space for refugees. We were speaking about the number of irregular migrants in Italy earlier, and we have heard about the processes that illegalise these people, such as through taking away temporary protections. Libya has not signed the Geneva convention and obviously has no asylum structure.

The UNHCR does not have access to all nationalities in detention. It sometimes has access to certain nationalities, only in certain centres. We are pushing back potential asylum seekers, which is obviously incredibly problematic. It is problematic to push back migrants to live in these conditions, but also refugees. We have tiny quotas for resettlement, so there are very few legal pathways. If we really want to combat people-

smugglers we need to provide legal pathways. That can be humanitarian visas or resettlement.

They need to be real figures. Italy has been taking over a few asylum seekers with the support of the UNHCR. I think it is the only country that has flown some over directly from Libya. We have quotas across Europe for 100 or 30 here and there, I think mostly from migrants who were sent from Libya to Niger and Chad, but the centres that are right there—the UNHCR has taken a certain amount—are full, so right now they are completely blocked. We just have migrants and refugees who have no prospect of moving onwards. We cannot forget the question of asylum here¹.

Yves Pascouau: I just want to add high-level movement on that part with respect to France as well. With respect to the EU, I think that there should also be something to take into account the fact that the EU is financing and helping Libyan coastguards. That also has to be dealt with, or seen with respect to article 21 of the treaty, whereby the EU has to act outside its boundaries with due respect to human rights. So I think that here there might be a violation or breach of the treaty.

The second point is that France has also declared that the Minister of Defence will send over to Libya six vessels, in order to help border guards to better patrol their coast. And here as well I think that we are purely in the field of irony, because we all know that if we are able to equip Libyan coastguards, that is not only to save people; it is to intercept people before they reach the international waters and to send them back to hell.

Here I think that EU member states, as well as EU institutions, should take that issue in a very serious manner. This is not only a question of asylum seekers and refugees, who are under the umbrella of the Geneva convention; this is purely a question of implementing the European convention on human rights, and the fact that it is not possible to be sent back to Libya, due to article 3. These are the bases of our common system at European level and within the member states. We are clearly, and in the face of the world, disregarding those rights and values, which is the point we have to make on this issue and with respect to Libya.

Shoshana Fine: We are at a point now where there is this report in the International Criminal Court. I was at the European Commission a couple of weeks ago, and people were worried that Europe is being prosecuted for migrant deaths in the Mediterranean. People are concerned, because basically we have seen this kind of through-process of delegation—shifting responsibility and accountability—but, really importantly, we strongly need a paradigm shift here.

Yves Pascouau: I was just going to add one final element, which is part of the big picture. If we look at what has been put in place since 2015, there is also one worrying movement taking place at EU level. For the

¹ Note from witness, added after publication: Neither asylum rights nor basic human rights of migrants are respected in Libya.



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sake of efficiency, we are no longer relying on binding law or binding agreements. The EU-Turkey statement is a political statement. We are more and more using non-binding legal tools, on the one hand to be more efficient, and on the other hand to escape our legal responsibilities with respect to human rights. This movement has taken place since 2015 and is affecting Turkey, Libya, Afghanistan and other third countries.

Q106 Mr Seely: We are doing that for political reasons? I think I am asking a rhetorical question, which I would like you either to agree or disagree with, or most likely improve. We are doing that because such is the movement of people that we cannot cope—such is the overwhelming number of people coming from Syria, from central and west Africa, from these countries that are dysfunctional for whatever reasons. Rather than try to process these vast numbers, we are trying to get other people to do things, to avoid our moral responsibility. Is that a fair criticism? When I say “we”, I mean all the states of the European Union.

Yves Pascouau: I am not sure I got your point.

Q107 Mr Seely: Okay. You are saying that we are basically getting other people to do things in order to avoid our having to obey the laws that we have set ourselves on how we treat refugees. I am saying that we are doing that because of the sheer numbers of people that have become something that Europe can’t or doesn’t want to cope with.

Shoshana Fine: That is not true. The proportion is so small. If we look at the number of Syrian refugees in Turkey, we have got over 4 million. We had less than this in the whole of the European Union. And look at the European Union economy compared to that of Turkey.

Q108 Mr Seely: So why are the states of the European Union doing this in your opinion—both of you?

Yves Pascouau: There is one real reason why. In August 2015, we saw those pictures on a daily basis of columns of people walking from Greece through the western Balkans, then to Germany, and this has been a shock at EU level. It has also been, I think, something like a shock for German people. The need was to react to the situation in the most efficient and rapid manner. This is why Angela Merkel went to Ankara and clinched the deal with Turkey, so it is for an emergency reason that this deal has been set up. If it had been a purely EU agreement, it would have taken months, not to say years, to be signed up and formalised. That is where the issue is.

Q109 Mr Seely: Are you saying that European state politicians were reacting to fears among the populace because they saw significant numbers of people who could potentially come to Europe?

Yves Pascouau: I think that was clearly a reaction with respect to a situation that has not been prepared for. Sorry for repeating things that have already been said, but if we had a looked at different UNHCR reports, the World Food Programme and the Frontex agency since 2013, we would have seen everything written down on paper—the story was going to happen. The fact is that our decision makers have been blind to that



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situation and have not been willing—this is my point—to prevent the crisis at that level.

Q110 **Mr Seely:** Shoshana, do you want to add anything to that?

Shoshana Fine: Yes. For me, it is less of a reaction. I think that we really have to look at the way we have been speaking, or politicians and the media have been speaking, about migration—since the '70s, really, but it has got a lot worse in the past 10 years, particularly since 2016. Basically, migration: is seen as problem or threat. This obviously shapes public opinion, and if you speak incessantly about this looming threat, obviously people start to feel uncomfortable.

To me, it was less about the number of boats coming in. We were being bombarded with these images—there is obviously a racialised dimension to this as well—of boats full of black people coming in, arriving on our shores. We have this image of disorder like we can't control it, when we absolutely have the means to be able to receive these people in normal ways. If you take the case of France, we have asylum seekers and migrants to this day, actually, sleeping in camps on the streets of Paris. Now they are in the suburbs, because they have been pushed out. In French law, all asylum seekers are supposed to have housing, but right now we find them on the streets. This is problematic, and for me, this scares people.

Q111 **Mr Seely:** But turning to Matteo and using Italy as an example, Italy has had the reality of large-scale irregular—I don't know if we're calling it irregular or illegal—migration from Libya, so the fears that Angela Merkel was reacting to were visible on the streets of Italy, especially southern Italy, as well. You have had 600,000 illegal migrants coming through or coming and staying in Italy?

Matteo Villa: Yes, absolutely. I would like to make a more nuanced statement on this. It is true that as soon as irregular migrants come to Europe, they become a cost, because our social system provides for it. In Italy, to receive one person, you pay €13,000. If you go to Germany, a person who has to be received by the system is a cost of €25,000 per year, so clearly one person is a cost. The second thing is that when humanitarian migrants come, they are much less easy to integrate into the labour market, so it becomes also—

Q112 **Mr Seely:** Why?

Matteo Villa: It depends—there is a host of reasons. Usually, they self-select for different jobs. They are more low skilled, they know less the language of the country that they get to, and also they are usually discriminated against by employers because they can see the permit that they have and that is for asylum-seeking. We have a host of reasons, but the truth is that there is a stark difference. If you get a legal migrant into Europe, eight times out of 10 in the first five years, he or she will be working. For a refugee, in five years, just one in four will be working in Europe. That is a problem, and we know that.



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The problem is that first, politicians did not react to the problem; they reacted to fear. We should acknowledge that. Secondly, if we do not have legal ways to get into Europe, this path will repeat itself. For instance, economic migrants taking irregular routes become increasingly like humanitarian migrants because it takes them years to get to Europe and then they do not get education. They come here; they are traumatised. A perfectly integratable person instantly becomes a much less easy person to integrate. Clearly, there is a cultural gap that I am not addressing here, but that has to be taken into account. For Italy, if you look at sheer numbers, even just 600,000 is less than 1% of the population.

Q113 Mr Seely: But your system could not cope with it—or did it not want to cope?

Matteo Villa: At first, it couldn't, absolutely. We didn't have space or room for reception. We had to use hotels. After some years, our management of the system was to let people go. Our solution to the problem of not receiving people but letting people go came to an end when other countries understandably started to close down Schengen and suspend Schengen borders.

We were left with our own problem with no other solution in place. The numbers are incredibly low. If you look at how many persons have been protected in Italy in the past six years, it is 0.3% of the population, so 99.7% of the population are not refugees or asylum seekers.

Yves Pascouau: I would add something to that. What I referred to before was that we had not been able to get prepared for the situation. The situation came out in a highly disorderly manner in 2015. Now I think we have to keep in mind and not disregard the fears that clearly exist in European societies. The images we were bombarded with in 2015 have increased that fear.

It was also the duty of our decision makers to restore order and to regain the confidence of the people. The means we have used in order to achieve the results we are achieving today are there—numbers that are lower than before the crisis.

I think we have also to consider that, if we look to the numbers on paper, it is pretty clear that, with regard to the 500 million inhabitants of the EU, we are on paper able to cope with the situation. That is on paper. There is one element that is clearly lacking at European level if we want to address it as a European issue: solidarity. It is pretty clear that what is fundamentally lacking here is solidarity and trust. There is no trust between the EU states. There was some sort of trust in normal times.

Q114 Mr Seely: In terms of solidarity between states? I don't want to get political here, but to have solidarity it is useful to have a single electorate. The problem is that if you have a Hungarian leader talking to a Hungarian electorate, a Serbian leader talking to a Serbian electorate and an Italian leader talking to an Italian electorate, that is why you do not have your solidarity, which I think is a slightly overused word in the



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European Union.

Yves Pascouau: On this issue, the French President has clearly put the discussion on the table, saying, “What we have today—not for the UK—is the Schengen area. We are sharing the same space, where we can walk from the southern part of Spain to Sweden without facing any form of border control.” That is our common good and one of the major achievements we have at EU level.

Q115 **Chair:** Can I move on from the conversation about the EU and focus back on the area we are looking at? I understand why the EU répartition matters to you but it is not the focus inquiry we are looking at. May I bring you back to focus on the impact of ending the search and rescue operations in the Mediterranean? Would anybody like to make a few brief comments about that?

Matteo Villa: Just to give you a picture, we have had large-scale arrivals to Italy and then we have had a huge drop in arrivals to Italy. Overall, search and rescue operations have been there. Just to set clear the first thing, we usually say that search and rescue operations have had a pull effect on migrants departing from Libya, although there is not much evidence on search and rescues overall. It is incredible that there is not even the slightest bit of evidence of NGOs going very near the coast of Libya—it would be so easy for smugglers and traffickers to bring migrants in and organise these departures as soon as the NGOs come there. It is quite astounding that in these few years there has been no correlation between departures and the NGOs’ operations. Just to give you one example, in the first part of July 2017 we had 10,000 arrivals to Italy. In the second part of the month, it was 2,000—a drop of 80%. Overall, we had 10 NGO operations carrying out search and rescue throughout the month. We clearly have to attribute this incredible decrease of departures from Libya to different sources. For now, we do not have credible evidence that search and rescue operations are being carried out by NGOs. EUNAVFOR MED Sophia has been blamed for being a pull factor, so it has been discontinued, at least in its naval part. It contributed to an increase in departures from Libya and arrivals to Europe.

Q116 **Chair:** How do you expect refugee flows from Libya to change in the coming years? Maybe I can link that. We have a new Commission. What are we expecting from them? Clearly, the two are connected.

Matteo Villa: It is hard to predict the flows. It is true that, for now, the number of people in Libya has increased. We have constant monitoring of the situation of migrants in Libya. There are about 660,000. About 30,000 of them are refugees within the UNHCR system, although the UNHCR can only reduce the number of people but cannot protect them effectively in Libya. We do not know exactly how many of these people will want to depart, but it does not seem to be increasing as much as before.

The second point is on stability in the country. It is not true that increasing instability in the country has contributed to more migrants being sent. Actually, more instability has meant that militias that send migrants have had to watch their backs. Usually they go and fight, so they do not send



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migrants. It is a bit of a mixed picture. It is true that Libya remains the best platform, as long as there is no political solution for the country. This will probably be the challenge—not for the EU Commission, but for EU member states. Hopefully, they will come together with a solution that is not EU-pushed but founded within Libya. We have to be realistic. We must know that we have to talk with militias, if they are powerful enough. We have to be realistic and expect that external powers will continue to destabilise the situation. It is different from Syria—we do not have a strongman who can really control territory. We have seen that with Haftar, who tried to get to Tripoli. It has been two months, and nothing is happening in terms of control.

Chair: I thank all three of you for your contribution. I am extremely grateful.