A coast-guard officer’s perspective: reinforcing migration through legal channels

Konstantinos Karagatsos

Given that we cannot always rescue refugees or economic migrants in danger at the EU’s maritime borders, efforts are needed to reinforce legal channels for migration to Europe and to prevent refugees and migrants being exploited by organised criminal networks.

As far back as 1994 when I was inducted as an Ensign of the Hellenic Coast Guard, we were dealing with both refugees and economic migrants on Lesbos Island, which lies only ten nautical miles from the Turkish coast. At that time the vast majority of the mixed migratory flows were of economic migrants but there were also refugees in fewer numbers. More recently there has been a sharp increase in the number of refugees coming to Europe, so that refugees have become the majority of the mixed migratory flows.

The real problem for Europe nowadays is not migration – which has been happening for many years and cannot be expected to end – but migration done in an illegal way, illegal migration. The Schengen Area of Europe constitutes an area of freedom of movement, security and justice for European citizens and other nationals who enter it legally. But other third-country nationals are being helped by organised criminal networks to enter the Schengen area illegally, networks which are not based in Europe but in the migrants’ countries of origin. While we cannot make illegal migration legal, we could reinforce migration through legal channels, turning it into regulated migration.

A legal solution

I have worked as a practitioner on the issue of migration and sea borders for 22 years, and have dealt with refugees and economic migrants on the ‘front line’; I have been Director at the Sea Borders Protection Directorate of the Greek Ministry of Shipping and Maritime Affairs; I have worked as an operational analyst in Frontex; and I have witnessed the problems associated with migration in Europe for decades. I have one proposal for this problem: that is, to isolate refugees and economic migrants from the organised criminal networks by setting up procedures for asylum status (for refugees).
The extra-territorial processing of asylum claims

Sarah Léonard and Christian Kaunert

Calls for the creation of asylum-processing centres outside the EU are being renewed – but significant objections and obstacles remain.

In November 2014, German Interior Minister Thomas de Maizière floated the idea of establishing ‘welcome and departure centres’ in major transit countries in North Africa, where applications for asylum would be processed. By removing the obligation to be on European soil in order to apply for asylum, the external processing of asylum claims would remove the necessity for asylum seekers to embark on perilous and costly journeys across the Mediterranean to Europe.

The extra-territorial processing of asylum claims is not a new idea. As long ago as 1986, Denmark tabled a draft resolution in the United Nations (UN) General Assembly to create UN centres where asylum claims would be processed and the resettlement of refugees would be coordinated among all states. A few years later, the idea of establishing European processing centres was considered at the Intergovernmental Consultations on Migration, Asylum and Refugees following...