



INTERFACE

TOWARDS A EUROPEAN RESPONSE TO THE REFUGEE CRISIS

A STRUCTURAL CRISIS

With the arrival of summer, the number of migrants arriving at European ports has regrettably risen once again. The Italian authorities are sounding the alarm – over 85,000 migrants arrived at their ports from January to June 2017, with almost 20,000 reaching Greece. Although a far cry from the 885,000 migrants arriving in Greece in 2015, we cannot escape the facts: the influx of migrants in Europe is not about to end. Most of these new arrivals are arriving from West Africa, and even South Asia, no longer simply from Syria, Afghanistan, Iraq and Eritrea.

Europe is having to cope with “mixed flows”, making the distinction between (political) refugees and (economic) migrants even more difficult. Candidates for exile are fleeing not only countries in which authoritarian governments are violating the rights of political opponents and of ethnic and religious minorities, but also regions destroyed by extreme poverty and even desertification, called “climate refugees”. The former meet right-of-asylum criteria, and have a strong chance of obtaining refugee status in one of the Member States, while applicants with essentially economic motives are required to return to their countries of origin.

So far, the EU has chosen to respond to this migratory influx by externalising the crisis at Europe's borders, signing agreements with countries of origin and with transit countries (EU-Turkey deal), and creating “hotspots” in first-entry countries (Greece and Italy).

The European Union has so far preferred repression over taking in and integrating migrants. But it is now time that we mount a joint European response to overcome what has become a structural migration challenge.

Clotilde WARIN

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