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Cecilia Malmström: There is a need for legal migration to the EU

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Abstract:

On 21 June 2011, the EU Commissioner on Home Affairs Cecilia Malmström held a Morning Policy Briefing entitled “**Which legal migration policy for the EU?**” The briefing was organized by the European Policy Center¹ in Brussels. The briefing was attended by diplomats from Brussels-based Embassies, Missions and Permanent Representatives to the EU, business people, officials from EU institutions, UN agencies, NGOs, academics, and journalists.

In her introductory remarks, Commissioner Malmström addressed three main issues: legal migration, the Euro-Mediterranean crisis, and integration. First of all, she referred to the demographic decline of the European population and the fact that already from 2014, the number of Europeans will start to decrease and there will be a great need for a labour force in the EU. In actuality, we are experiencing higher levels of unemployment within EU Member states. At the same time, the labour force in various fields and industries is evidently missing. In this situation, it can sometimes be difficult to explain to the different people and institutions involved that there is an unquestionable **need for legal migration** to Europe. The EU Member states are each experiencing their own realities, finding themselves in varying situations and having to tackle a wide range of problems. Ergo, they also have different needs in terms of legal migration.

However, it is possible to have a common framework in this area. The issues currently being tackled at the EU level are: discussions on the Single Permit Directive, the Intercorporate

¹ The European Policy Centre (EPC) is an independent, not-for-profit think tank, committed to making European integration work. The EPC works at the "cutting edge" of European and global policy-making providing its members and the wider public with rapid, high-quality information and analysis on the EU and global policy agenda. It aims to promote a balanced dialogue between the different constituencies of its membership, spanning all aspects of economic and social life.

Directive (which only relates to a small number of people, approximately 20,000 or so experts), and the Seasonal Workers Directive (which will simplify important labour migration issues in sectors such as agriculture and tourism). The Commission is also about to prepare a Green paper on labour shortages.

The Commissioner finally emphasized the need for the EU labour market to be sufficiently welcoming and attractive to foreign workers, so that they could easily come and bring their families and live their lives here.

Regarding the **Euro-Mediterranean crisis**, the Commissioner acknowledged the significance of the developments towards democratization that are happening in the region. Regarding Lybia, many refugees are leaving the country these days, most of them going to neighbouring countries and only a very few coming to Europe.

What Cecilia Malmström now sees as crucial is the establishment of a long-term dialogue and a mobility partnership with countries in the Southern Mediterranean region. The issues on which there should be cooperation are the strengthening of refugee protection, the fight against human trafficking, and a decent return policy that also promotes labour mobility to the European Union. It is also in the EU's interest to support the economy, promote education, business and employment in its respective states, which can also lend itself to support the democratization process. As all negotiations end with compromises, the EU also needs to make compromises with the countries in the Mediterranean and not expect to enjoy only the advantages from the partnership. The Commissioner stressed that if the EU failed to establish this equal cooperation and dialogue now, it would definitely regret it in the future.

The last issue addressed was the urgent need for better **integration** of migrants in Europe and its current weak points. According to the Commissioner, there is marked widespread underemployment in migrant populations in Europe, while well-qualified and educated people do menial work. Equal treatment of migrants compared to EU nationals in various other industries is lacking, *inter alia* in employment of migrants in general or in access to medical care. The Commissioner also pointed out the difficulties migrants have to face in segregated areas in Europe.

But the EU cannot and should not integrate migrants. It is up to each member country. The EU can only help by support at the local level, as well as enable the sharing of information and experiences. Migrants contribute to the economy and society and that should not be forgotten.

Migration is a two-way process and the active participation of migrants also needs to be taken into account. The Commissioner illustrated an integration success story from her home country. She described a situation where a Swedish region was lacking around 150 qualified doctors. The authorities first went to look for qualified medical staff in Poland and other countries abroad. But then, they had the idea to examine the people who were already present

in the region. Among the multitudes in their reception centres, they discovered over 450 doctors that had the needed qualifications from Somalia or Ukraine. They were then given a one-year training to be brought up to Swedish medical education standards and they became the needed labour force, even though they were previously working as cleaners or even unemployed. This solution was much cheaper and more efficient than supporting the education of young people from the beginning or bringing in new workers from abroad.

Most of the guests present reacted very positively to the Commissioner's views and suggestions and expressed their gratitude and support for her work. For example, the business sector (i.e., Manpower and Microsoft) representatives expressed their appreciation of the Commissioner's input, offering active help to achieve the mentioned goals. Further cooperation was also suggested by the spokesman of the Australian Embassy. However, opposing voices were also heard. The ageing of the European population and the demographic decline in the EU were questioned. Further discussion led to the question of whether there was an EU preference for an Eastern or a Southern partnership. The Commissioner ensured that there was no such a preference for migration flow in the EU policies.

In the discussion, concerns were also raised about the fact that, in reality, the interests of many member states lie in border protection, the fight against irregular migration, and migration management, rather than supporting legal migration. That's why it appears to be a daunting challenge for the Commissioner to work on external mobility partnerships. The Commissioner acknowledged that the national Ministries of the Interior sometimes live in their own secluded worlds, focusing exclusively on protecting each of their countries from foreigners. She added that the commission is trying to break this one-sided perspective.

About the author:

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