

## EU should take the lead in refugee crisis

Written by Demetris Papadakis on 8 October 2015 in Opinion  
Opinion

As a Cypriot, Demetris Papadakis says he understands all too well the need for the EU to take concrete action is tackling the refugee crisis.



For a long time, the EU has turned a blind eye to the tense situation in the Middle East and ongoing instability in north and sub-Saharan Africa.

But now, the problem is on the EU's doorstep, with an unprecedented migrant influx along our southern borders, pressure in the western Balkans and the rising death toll of people undertaking perilous journeys.

It is imperative that the EU institutions and member states take action.

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So far, around 340,000 people - many of whom are children - fleeing war, oppression and conflict, have reached Europe's external borders. It is our duty to provide them with more safe and legal channels into the EU. For example, we could deliver more humanitarian visas and ease existing restrictions on family reunification.

The recent images of Hungarian riot police firing tear gas and water cannons at crowds of desperate refugees trying to cross the border from Serbia were shocking to say the least. Neither walls nor deterrence, national selfishness nor national measures, will solve this global challenge.

Instead, what we need is a strong commitment from all the member states to implement deep-seated change in the European approach to the migrant and refugee crisis, which is first and foremost a humanitarian crisis.

We need a holistic EU approach to migration, through broader and intensified cooperation with third countries of origin and transit and bilateral agreements, in order to clamp down on smuggling and trafficking networks. We must implement frameworks for regular migration and mobility, as well as a humane and effective return policy for irregular migrants.

The EU's response focuses largely on the results of the migration crisis, rather than its causes. We should start by asking ourselves why these people are prepared to risk their lives - and in many cases, die - setting out on dangerous journeys.

In her poem, 'Home', Somali writer Warsan Shire says, "no one leaves home unless the water is safer than the land".

According to the UNHCR, 60 per cent of people who crossed the sea during the first five months of 2015 came from Syria, Somalia and Afghanistan. These are countries that have been torn apart by war and generalised violence. Some came from Eritrea, which has one of Africa's most repressive governments. Others were fleeing violence and insecurity in Libya.

Therefore, I believe the EU should use its resources and political weight in a more coordinated way, in order to address the root causes of migration - poverty, instability, war, persecution, human rights violations, lawlessness and climate change.

We must reflect on the role the EU could play in Middle Eastern countries, Syria and Libya. It is clear we should be taking the lead in this regard, through common foreign and security policy initiatives, without being under the US's thumb.

We could do this by transferring our democratic know-how, providing support to international efforts towards poverty reduction, peace-building and the promotion of human rights, as well as political and economic stability, security and prosperity.

The EU should also deepen its collaboration with regional partners, such as the African Union and the League of Arab States.

We are currently at a crucial juncture; we cannot afford to repeatedly fail to respond effectively to the crisis. I am Cypriot and I know very well what it means to be a refugee. Therefore, I feel that now is the chance for Europe to prove that it is capable of solving major problems and challenges, through a common and solidarity-based approach. This would help heal the deep wound in our citizens' consciousness at so the EU's raison d'être.

### **About the author**

Demetris Papadakis (S&D, CY) is Parliament's foreign affairs committee opinion rapporteur on the situation in the Mediterranean and need for a holistic EU approach to migration

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