

Advocacy for legal migration channels, a weapon of « smart power »

Dr Bénédicte Halba, president of IRIV (www.iriv.net), 15 September 2024

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This summer has been a killer for the exiles. Twelve people (including ten women and six minors) drowned on 3 September 2024 (and two missing), the heaviest toll since the tragedy of 24 November 2021 where 27 migrants, mostly Iraqi Kurds, had perished at sea near Calais. On August 12, 2023, a shipwreck between Sangatte and the Hemmes de Marck had caused six victims (and two people disappeared at sea) . Always the same *modus operandi* proposed by the smugglers in these deadly shipwrecks- small boats of fortune to cross the strait of Pas de Calais. According to the High Commissioner for Refugees, nearly 50 people have died on the coast since the beginning of 2024. Mortality never decreased.

The French authorities mention the 1700 police and gendarmes deployed on the coast, boast of 60% of attempted crossings failed, incriminate the «migratory pressure» and the responsibility of smugglers. They are more discreet about the low-profile role played by France, which plays the substitute of the United Kingdom, by ensuring the subcontracting of their immigration policy. This much-maligned mission was entrusted by the European Union to Turkey or Libya- to prevent the crossing of a border for remuneration. Since the 2003 Touquet agreements, French law enforcement is the guardian of the UK's rail and maritime borders, relieving our British partners from examining asylum applications at the border as required by international law. Since 2023, this French aid to the UK has been worth 543 million euros over three years to the French authorities to cover the monitoring resources, materials and French personnel involved. The French police forces act as real «bounty hunters» without proposing any legal way of migration yet demanded by many associations.

The political and geopolitical situation is delicate, with the rise of extreme right parties in Europe in general, and in our two countries in particular, which instrumentalize the migration theme. The UK's summer 2024 racist riots have been nationwide, with a stir orchestrated by extremist movements on social media. They have finally been circumscribed. British citizens, who elected a Labour government in June 2024, rallied with the firm support of their prime minister, Keir Starmer, and a royal support. Calm and a better state of mind have been restored in the country. We remember the shocking proposal of the conservative government that had suggested to subcontract migration in Rwanda, a controversial country in Africa for its authoritarian excesses, and its unpeaceful relations with its neighbors.

The diplomatic route is the only alternative to solve migration policy with humanity and intelligence. The security strategy is short-term and discredits France, and Europe, with our partners in the South (especially in Africa), with a human cost that has been increasing. It should have been avoided. The proposal for a “migration treaty between Britain and the European Union” already mentioned is once again topical. The European elections have made it possible to neutralize (for five years) the threat of the far-right in Europe. A new government in the United Kingdom has returned to power, less tense on migration. Migration

was manipulated during Brexit, with an active disinformation campaign led by conservative Boris Johnson and the far-right leader of UKIP. The same voter profile was abused during the August 2024 riots, capitalizing on resentment, anger and a sense of downgrading. The most vulnerable Britons were the first victims of Brexit.

An original form of «migration diplomacy» is at work in Italy with a Council president, yet on the far right of the political spectrum who does not hold the same discourse. Georgia Meloni links the immigration strategy to her foreign policy (a diplomatic weapon) and does not use it as an instrument like her French counterpart Marine Le Pen, who “rather, through unspoken words, evokes an anxious imaginary that refers less to real flows than to tensions and internal identity-related malaise, products of the long colonial and migratory history which has shaped contemporary French society.” This colonial past is being blamed on us by the most authoritarian and anti-democratic countries to discredit us – Turkey, Russia, Iran, China...

Georgia Meloni says immigration is an “external phenomenon”. A migrant is a “desperate victim” whose “right not to emigrate has been flouted” by a well-identified coalition of the former colonial powers (including France, which takes it up for its rank) and the “human traffickers”. On this last aspect, the President of the Council praises the Italian expertise that has done wonders in the anti-mafia fight. This strange speech, very skillful, has convinced many African states at a very opportune moment. Italy, like other European countries, is looking for alternatives to Russian gas – it has moved closer to Algeria. Italy’s demographic decline has been known for decades-the workforce from Africa is essential. In particular, the life support workers are all foreign, often from Cape Verde and other neighboring countries; the building sector recruits massively workers from Egypt or Tunisia.

The Italian motivation is not only economic, it flatters national pride. Albania agreed to host detention centers under Italian law, praising Italy’s very generous policy of reception towards its nationals in the 1990s. The success of Italian athletes at the Olympic Games, whose diversity has not escaped anyone, led to a proposal for a more generous naturalization policy.

Immigration could also become a smart strategy in Europe, a real "smart power" without cynicism, with a true humanity. An inspiring bet on the future.

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