



For a real policy of reception for exiles in France and Europe

Dr Bénédicte Halba, president of IRIV (www.iriv.net), Newsletter January 2022

Bénédicte Halba heads a research institute (iriv) that coordinated with the Catholic Relief a European project Erasmus + - Diverpass (2019-2021) aimed at supporting professionals (volunteers and employees) who work with a migrant public. In this context, she has associated Sébastien Nadot , president of the Parliamentary Commission of Inquiry who has reminded the public authorities of the need to propose a policy for the reception of exiles, humane and decent, respectful of fundamental rights. She met on the ground Claire Millot, a volunteer at the Salam association, as well as many volunteers involved with exiles in Calais, Dunkirk and Grande-Synthe. Claire Millot has kindly agreed to testify about the essential work done by these associations in the final publication of the Diverpass project, accessible on the project website - <https://www.diverpass.eu/blog/france/presentation>

The year 2022 begins with a procession of depressing news with the ongoing health crisis, an election campaign that creates a deleterious climate and a general tension in international relations with boot noises in Asia (Hong Kong , Taiwan , North Korea , Burma or Kazakhstan), in Africa (in the Sahel countries but also in the Horn of Africa) but also in Europe (Ukraine, Georgia). The general idea is to withdraw identity and general exasperation, even within countries (in the United States but also in France).

The most sensitive subject is migration. A Belgian Think Tank “For solidarity” published a report in 2017 that sums up the three strategies it calls system: a first security “sees immigration as a threat to security and social identity: immigration is seen as an invasion that threatens jobs and social cohesion”. The theory of «great replacement» advocated by Renaud Camus, leader of the extreme right in France is an extreme illustration of this approach. A second “utilitarian” system considers “immigration as an economic resource and advocates the introduction of a quota system”.. The term “utilitarian” could be interpreted critically, yet it allowed Germany to take in more than one million refugees fleeing the civil war in Syria in 2015. A third system, “humanist asylum”, considers “the memory of great historical exoduses and challenges ideas of invasion” by emphasizing freedom and the defense of migrants' rights. This last approach is advocated by associations that are committed on the ground to help all exiles, single or family, who have often been denied asylum and have no choice but to try their luck in other countries, for example the United Kingdom, which is not much more welcoming.

Europe is seen as a fortress under siege that keeps foreigners away from its external borders. Greece and Italy were the first countries concerned with the sad tale of human dramas, thousands of migrants trying to cross the Mediterranean on makeshift boats and cowardly abandoned at sea by smugglers only interested in the money they extorted from them. Mafia networks have developed. Human distress has always been exploited by unscrupulous individuals who present themselves as friends. Other countries were in the front line in 2021, Poland and Lithuania with the instrumentalization of the migration issue by Belarus which multiplied visas for candidates leaving for the Middle East (Iraq, Syria,...). Yet things are not

so Manichean, according to migration experts, Marie Cosnay and Raphaël Krafft , if there are crooked smugglers who profit from people's misery, they are also professionals who work in a dangerous but indispensable profession and often serve governments to get rid of their criminal policies.”

The same argument is put forward in another forum published by 200 academics whose title is unequivocally «Migrants' drama: it is indeed the states that kill at the European borders».¹ These specialists in migration issues are asking the European states to recognize their responsibilities. Smugglers only exist because borders have become difficult, if not impossible, to cross legally. These researchers refer to the “ever-increasing criminalization of solidarity”. They add that “the increase in police controls and resources only increases the price of services offered for crossing assistance”. Smugglers fill out a “service” , risky and highly sought after, and would act as rational economic agents. The statement may seem cynical but they add that the policy of “no-welcome” consisting in harassing exiles, by violating their fundamental rights and to hinder the work of associations that support them , especially on the coast of northern France (Calais, Dunkirk, Grande-Scynthe) makes the crossing to England even more necessary and the role of the smuggler essential.

On the same day, a second forum published by the leaders of the five main French associations working with exiles (Amnesty International, Caritas France, Cimade, Médecins du Monde and Médecins without frontiers) called all actors, public and civil society, to enforce the State's international human rights commitments². They denounce “a wall of indifference to the suffering encountered and lived by exiles”, “a wall of refusal to listen and to engage in real dialogue,” “a wall of bad faith” when public authorities accuse associations of “collusion with smuggling networks or criminalize citizen solidarity actions”. They call for a break with this dialogue of the deaf and to make all actors work together: migrants, states, local authorities, parliamentarians, economic actors, trade unions, associations, researchers, civil society... In this spirit, they took the initiative in 2019 to request the creation of a parliamentary commission of inquiry that was created in spring 2021, chaired by MP Sébastien Nadot, with a report submitted in November 2021. The main virtue of this committee of inquiry is to have allowed, “out of any caricature or electoral calculation, to debate and build concrete answers and proposals for the fundamental rights of exiles to be respected”.

According to a report published on the 16th of December 2021 by seven European NGOs, violence at the EU's external and internal borders has become systemic and widespread³. The practice of illegal refoulement has become standard. It has become a “border management tool”. These associations based in Italy, Hungary, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia, Greece, North Macedonia and Belgium, united within the Protecting Rights at Borders initiative, collected testimonies of 12,000 incidents. The largest number of victims are Afghans. The Secretary-General of the Danish Refugee Council (DRC) thinks that the media coverage of certain events (which are certainly much more numerous) has reduced extreme violence as states work to make these repeated human rights violations less visible, in particular to prevent migrants from applying for asylum under the 1951 Geneva Convention on Refugees.

¹ Tribune publiée le 2 décembre 2021 dans Le Monde.

² Cecile Coudriou (Amnesty International France), Véronique Devise (Secours catholique), Henry Masson (Cimade), Carine Rolland (Médecins du Monde) et Mégo Terzian (Médecins sans frontières)

³ Jakub Iwaniuk « Le refoulement des migrants, pratique illégale mais normalisée », Le Monde, 17 décembre 2021

Paradoxically, this report also opens some avenues of hope with the year 2022 that opens with the French presidency of the Council of the European Union. A November 2021 note by the Economic Analysis Committee, which is dependent on the Prime Minister's services, stressed that "benefits of skilled and diversified labour immigration in innovation, entrepreneurship, integration into the global economy through trade, capital flows and the flow of productive knowledge, and ultimately productivity growth." A parliamentary report also stressed in September 2021 the need to move forward on the new Pact on Asylum and Migration at a European level, especially to address problems encountered at the EU's external borders.⁴ France remains the country of human rights, symbolically, it could not give the image of a closed country on itself, become xenophobic and reactionary.

In migration, as in any sensitive and strategic public policy, the image is as important as the message. That France, through its European presidency, is up to the task of living up to its past inherited from the Enlightenment: here is the wish for 2022 that all convinced democrats and Europhile can formulate.

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⁴ André REICHARDT et Jean-Yves LECONTE , « **RAPPORT D'INFORMATION** au nom de la commission des affaires européennes (1) sur le **nouveau Pacte sur la migration et l'asile**, » Sénat , le 29 septembre 2021