

UNITED NATIONS



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**Keynote Remarks by Louise Arbour  
Special Representative of the Secretary-General for  
International Migration**

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**“United for a different migration” - Foundation for  
European Progressive Studies (FEPS)**

**Friday, 21 September 2018**

**Distinguished guests,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,**

**Firstly, I would like to thank you on behalf of the Secretary-General for this invitation to share some thoughts on migration as the central theme of this conference. I am also pleased to be here with you in my capacity as the Special Representative for International Migration.**

**As we gather here against the backdrop of the 73rd Session of the UN General Assembly, I believe it is highly opportune to reflect on the historic journey and eventual milestone reached on 13th of July by 191 Member States. I am of course referring to the agreement on the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration. To put this achievement into context, I would like to quote the Secretary-General's report Making Migration Work for All – “Managing migration is one of the most urgent and profound tests of international cooperation in our time.”**

**The benefits of migration as an engine of economic growth, innovation and sustainable development are not in question. It allows millions of people to seek new opportunities each year, creating and strengthening bonds between countries and societies. Yet, as you know, it is also a source of divisions within and between States and societies, often leaving migrants vulnerable to abuse and exploitation. In recent years, large movements of desperate people, including both migrants and refugees, have cast a shadow over the broader benefits of migration. The catalytic events in the Mediterranean three years ago best illustrated this.**

**It is also against this reality and climate that many Member States entered consultations and negotiations going back some 18 months ago.**

**I would like to say a few things about the engagement by Member States in these processes.**

**It was truly remarkable to witness the high levels of engagement from Member States and their capitals. The conversations throughout these processes were serious, sober, informed and informative, notwithstanding the expected pressures influenced by domestic circumstances.**

**The discussions were respectful of sovereignty and cognizant of issues attendant to respective Member States. The process was as inclusive as any in a UN context, involving stakeholders in civil society and the private sector.**

**By their nature, intergovernmental negotiations are complex and can be a difficult exercise of consensus-building. Many of you would have already gone over the text of the global compact and appreciated the extent of back and forth among and between Member States during the six rounds of negotiations and in their margins, dictated simply by the challenges that are inherent to the subject of migration.**

**I would also like to mention that the consultations and negotiations processes were masterfully shepherded by the Co-facilitators – Ambassador Juan Jose Gomez-Camacho of Mexico and Ambassador Jurg Lauber of Switzerland. The resulting text is a tribute to their skills in demonstrating that pragmatism doesn't require a surrender of principle.**

**Allow me to say a few words about the global compact itself beyond its historical significance.**

**The Global Compact for Migration is significant for a number of reasons:**

- o It has garnered the support of the overwhelming majority of Member States: it represents a significant achievement of multilateralism;**
- o It is, by its title, global in outlook: it privileges no region but acknowledges that migration is a universal phenomenon;**
- o Its aim is neither to stop nor to encourage migration. Rather it is to facilitate safe, orderly and regular mobility;**
- o The Member States commit to reviewing progress on a regular basis – the first time in the UN’s history that migration, in its entirety, is on the agenda.**

**The compact is a reflection of a global need to better harness the undoubted benefits of migration and mitigate its challenges.**

**It recognizes that each country is differently impacted by migration. Although not explicitly, it also reflects the reality that most countries are all at once countries of origin, transit, destination and return, to varying degrees, and at different times in their history.**

**It is non-legally binding – though has clear political and moral weight – recognizing the sovereign right of states to determine the conditions of entry and stay of non-nationals in their territory, in accordance with international law. But it also reflects the reality of state interdependence when it comes to managing the movement of people across borders.**

**The core of the compact comprises 23 objectives covering the entire narrative arc of migration -- from the factors that compel people to move, to the need for better data to support evidence-based policies, to enhancing availability of legal pathways, promoting ethical recruitment and labour standards, combatting trafficking and clamping down on smuggling, to saving lives and better managing borders, harnessing the contributions migrants make to development, to strengthening consular services and international cooperation for facilitating safe and dignified returns.**

**Throughout, the Compact is people-centered and human rights-based, as it re-affirms that human rights belong to all, regardless of migration status, and re-commits to combatting all forms of discrimination.**

**On climate change, the Compact reflects the growing reality of climate- induced migration and promotes the implementation of the Paris agreement and Sendai framework for Disaster Risk Reduction. It also encourages Member States to actively engage in voluntary -state-led initiatives in this field.**

**Finally, in addressing the drivers of migration more broadly, the Compact is fully anchored in 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, another non-legally binding but powerful blueprint for collective action.**

**I would like to now turn to Migration in the context of the European Union.**

**It is fair to say that the events on Europe’s borders in 2015 precipitated the urgent calls for global action on migration. The stress caused by large-scale movements of people was further compounded by the fact that while many came seeking asylum as refugees, many others were simply fleeing crushing poverty and seeking a better life. The uneven distribution of the so-called “burden” of hosting these new arrivals among EU Member States contributed to a difficult political climate and a polarization of views.**

**You are of course well-versed on these realities.**

**Today, Europe is primarily considered a continent of destination, and more importantly, as a region of internal migration, but it was not too long ago that many of its countries were primarily countries of origin or of transit. It is important to maintain this historical perspective especially as the current narrative of migration – contrary to a well-documented reality – still focuses disproportionately on the negative.**

**Discourse in many quarters remain stridently hostile to migrants despite a noticeable decrease in the arrivals of irregular migrants since its peak in 2015, and the unfolding of a slow but seemingly successful process of integration of newcomers in the societies that had decided to welcome them.**

**Looking back however, the mixed flows of refugees and migrants have constituted humanitarian emergencies for which our collective response was grossly inadequate. And the avoidable deaths of so many migrants in transit constitute a both human tragedy and a call for better action.**



**Saving lives must remain a priority, and preventative initiatives designed to reduce recourse to dangerous, chaotic migratory routes must also be undertaken. Along these lines, the principle of rescue-at-sea must be upheld and respected through explicit policies and practices that do not deter or punish private vessels from undertaking this life-saving activity, and allowing prompt disembarkation of those rescued for needed assistance.**

**The EU's State of the Union Summit earlier this month carried with it a number of proposals that are meant to strengthen its policies on migration issues. I particularly welcome the call for an increase in legal pathways in response to the well-documented labor market needs in many European countries, and as a means to further combat irregular migration.**

**Needless to say, migrants in pursuit of economic opportunities will prefer the safety of legal channels of entry; conversely, countries in need of human resources, at all skills levels, have every interest in ensuring that these market needs are met in the formal economy, rather than in the unregulated black market.**

**While the opening of different varieties of legal pathways will obviously not necessarily eliminate all forms of irregular migration, equally there is no evidence that it will encourage its further expansion. When first expressed in the Secretary General’s report “Making Migration work for All” last January, this proposal was met with considerable resistance in many European quarters. The fact that it has gained traction is an encouraging indication that sound policies can be developed even in the most challenging environments.**

**But there also appears to be growing convergence on the idea of setting up so-called ‘regional disembarkation platforms’ outside the European Union, the details of which appear to be still being worked out. Whatever emerges from these discussions, the outcome needs to contain stringent legal safeguards to ensure that no additional barrier is erected in the path of those entitled to international protection. As an entity anchored in the Rule of Law, the EU should ensure that the quality of its members’ adjudicative processes for status determination is not eroded .**

**The Foundation for European Progressive Studies has an important role in advocating for fundamentally sound migration policies and it is critical that we lend our collective voices to that end.**

**This leads me to say something on what lies ahead for the Compact.**

**As you may know, there will be an intergovernmental conference for the formal adoption of the global compact on 10 and 11 December in Marrakesh, Morocco.**

**The adoption of the global compact signals the starting point for governments to work towards their commitments to the GCM. Marrakesh will also serve as a platform for Member States to champion issues of particular relevance to them, turning already to implementation initiatives through partnerships, innovations and pledges.**

**We must keep in mind that the Compact seeks, above all, to put in place a framework for the future.**

**I would like to close with what most of you already know - As the world changes, as our respective populations grow, shrink or stagnate, and as the impacts of climate change develop, we will enter new phases in the history of human mobility. Our collective knowledge, ingenuity and competence are unsurpassed in history.**

**So is our consequent responsibility. We can prepare now for a better future for all. And that includes for the many among us of who will seek their future somewhere other than the place the accident of their birth has allocated to them on this planet.**

**The Global Compact for safe, orderly and regular migration provides a cooperative way forward. A path well worth taking.**

**Thank you for your kind attention.**