



Speech on Management of migration flows (Session I)
President of the Senate of the Kingdom of the Netherlands,
Ms Ankie Broekers-Knol
Conference of Speakers of EU Parliaments
Luxembourg, 23 May 2016

Dear colleagues, ladies and gentlemen,

Europe is being confronted with the largest influx of refugees since the Second World War. We are overwhelmed by this, and yet we were warned this was going to happen. For years experts have alerted us to the dangers of the instable situation in the Middle East, the insufficient protection of our external borders and the inadequacy of the European Asylum System.

We were **warned**. But for too long the member states, governments and institutions of the European Union failed to recognize the urgency of these problems and the need for Union-level agreements.

First and foremost, we are facing a human tragedy of people adrift for various reasons: in search of safety and protection, or looking for a better life. Our European humanitarian values require that we respond to this human tragedy like a good **Samaritan**; by reaching out to those in need. But at the same

time we know there are no easy solutions and that our response to this crisis has to be **sustainable** in the long run.

The impact of the crisis is felt acutely by our citizens. EU member states are struggling to cope, especially since the summer of 2015. And because of the disproportionate burden faced by some countries, tensions in the EU have been rising.

We must also be aware that last year, according to a report by Europol and Interpol, migrant smuggling networks earned at least a staggering 4.4 Billion euro. All this by profiting from human despair and taking advantage of gaps in European border control.

In an effort to reduce irregular migration and encourage a more ordered approach, the European Union has struck a revolutionary deal with **Turkey**. A deal that was born from a harsh political and humanitarian truth. For now, it appears the first elements of the deal are working and that the influx of refugees has become more manageable. However, a structural cooperation can only work if both parties stick to what was agreed and stand firmly in upholding the **Rule of Law** and respecting human rights.

In any case, the migrant crisis has made one thing more apparent than ever: no country can manage it alone. European

member states have to **work together** to achieve goals that go beyond the interests of the individual sovereign state.

That means that we have to create an approach to asylum that is based on **solidarity**. We all need to carry the burden. Of course, there are limits to what a country can contribute. I sympathise with countries in Eastern Europe that are still relatively young democracies and trying to set up a stable, well-functioning, economically viable state. And that are bearing a great burden in protecting our external borders. We have to find a fair and proportional way of sharing our responsibilities. But failing to adhere to the norms resulting from the shared decision-making process undermines the legal order of the EU.

Tackling this crisis requires a **considerable investment** by all member states. Working together is the only way the EU can maintain its position as a solid block, as the world's largest economy and as a unique political partnership. No member state would succeed in maintaining their position alone. This is, may I add, even true for the United Kingdom, I believe.

Tackling the crisis also requires that we combat abuse of the **asylum procedure** and that we improve the prospects of those who have a legitimate claim for asylum.

The EU needs to create a **clear, standardised approach** to asylum seekers, with agreements about return and readmission with safe countries outside the EU. Although the motives of economic refugees are understandable and undeniably sombre: choices have to be made. As President Juncker said at the debate in the European Parliament in April 2015: the continent of Europe cannot be the one and only refuge for fighting poverty and hunger in the world.

Creating a common asylum and migration policy also requires substantial investments in reception centres. Authorities must be able to tell asylum seekers as soon as possible if they have a legitimate claim. Scandinavian countries do this efficiently.

The management of the **external borders** plays an extremely important role in creating a standardised approach.

Strengthening our external borders is urgently needed. For instance by providing more coast guard vessels with crews, a measure at reasonably low costs. Let us find the political will to devote money and manpower to this. It is the only way in which we can prevent the permanent closure of the internal Schengen borders. Permanent closure would not only cause severe economic and social damage, it would obstruct the quintessence of our Union: internal free movement.

However, the migration issue cannot be reduced to an issue of border management and asylum policy. The answer must be embedded in a coherent foreign policy. If we want to find a

structural solution we have to help tackle the **root causes**: war and instability in the Middle East and Africa. The EU has to strengthen its defence cooperation and boost its development aid. Let us not forget that the migration and refugee crisis is putting an extremely heavy toll on Syria's neighbours - particularly Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey - who are hosting a staggering number of refugees. The expectation that these countries will continue to receive endless amounts of refugees, is wholly unrealistic.

If the EU does not contribute to tackling the root causes of migration, we are bound to be overwhelmed by it time and time again. It has become clear that the unstable and volatile situation in the Middle East will continue to provide a migration flow. In that flow, the number of people arriving from African countries has skyrocketed and is not expected to decrease. In addition, experts are warning us of increased environmentally-motivated migration.

Ladies and gentlemen,

We were warned, and we are warned. For the current crisis the EU was insufficiently prepared. Let us not repeat that mistake and step up our efforts in confronting the continuing migration flows and the new migration flows which will certainly arise. National parliaments and the European Parliament have an **important role** to play in this. We can urge our governments

to do everything in their power to devise forms of **prevention and management** in humanitarian crisis situations. Not only those resulting from wars, but also those caused by the economic, demographic and climatological conditions that may arise in the coming decades.

Together, we are uniquely placed to offer a platform for debate and determine whether initiatives for a solution can count on broad public support.

Parliamentarians can help make sure that in the future the EU recognizes the urgency of migration problems and the immense need for Union level agreements sooner. An ounce of prevention is better than a pound of cure.