



Jean-Claude Juncker

On immigration, I feel like a Maltese. For 63% of citizens of Malta, their number one concern is immigration, far ahead of any other issue

During my campaign across Europe to become the next President of the European Commission, I have often said: In future, Europe needs to be big on big issues and small on small issues. For me, coping with the challenge of immigration is a big issue for Europe and will be high on my agenda as Commission President.

First of all, as a Christian Democrat, I will never accept that people drown in the sea trying to reach Europe's shores. Europe is very fortunate to have overcome, on our continent, the atrocities of war, dictatorship and ideological persecution and the danger of starving or dying of thirst. We managed to do this because Europe got help and solidarity from other parts of the world. Today, we need to be a continent that is open to human beings in emergency situations. Granting asylum and helping refugees is not only Europe living up to the fundamental right guaranteed in national constitutions and in the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union. It is also Europe living up to our historic responsibility.

I commend Malta for the bravery and humanity of its rescue missions, notably in the wake of the Arab Spring. I know that it has not been easy. And it has not always been fair. In a European Union of 28 member states, it cannot be that a small island in the Mediterranean has to bear the full weight of immigration towards our continent. We all know that human beings in deep distress arrive in Malta not because they want to live in Malta but because it happened to be the first European land on their way to mainland Europe. Europe therefore has a responsibility towards Malta, as it has a responsibility towards Italy, Greece, Cyprus and Spain.

We cannot have common borders if only some have to bear the cost – it is a question of solidarity. And I am convinced that we need more European solidarity in immigration policy.

Our common European values and our historic responsibility are my starting point when I think about the future of Europe's immigration policy. During my mandate as Commission President, I will build Europe's immigration policy on five pillars:

Europe needs more solidarity to cope with the challenge of immigration

1. Firstly, we need to implement the Common European Asylum System, adopted in June last year, without delay. No rules are perfect, and the new rules are naturally the result of compromise. However, they have the advantage of being able to put a definitive stop to 'asylum tourism'. Currently, one and the same applicant for asylum can have a 70-75% chance of being granted asylum in one country of the European Union and less than 1%, with the same reasons, in another country. It is clear where asylum seekers will go first, but this is certainly not a sustainable criterion for the sharing of responsibility between EU member states. We therefore need the new EU rules in place swiftly to ensure an asylum seeker will have the same chances of being granted asylum in any of the member states.
2. Secondly, we need to step up the practical assistance provided by the European Asylum Support Office, whose task it is to support member states under "particular pressure". It is no coincidence that this new EU agency and its staff of 70 are based in Valetta. What we need now is more thorough risk assessments to spot problem areas before they become overloaded. We also need tailored training for asylum officers in every member state guarding an external border. And we need all member states to work very closely together with the European Asylum Support Office, which can only execute its tasks if national authorities team up with it.
3. Thirdly, we need to step up cooperation with third countries, particularly North African countries. To cope with the challenge of immigration, it would be naïve if Europe were only open and hospitable. Even Europe, as the richest continent in the world, will not be able to accommodate the distress and pain of the whole globe. We must not only deal with the symptoms but go to the root of the problem and help bring about change in the countries of origin. Nobody wants to leave their home country – unless the political or economic situation there forces them to go elsewhere. This is why European partnerships with North African countries to strengthen democracy and pluralism, the rule of law, religious freedoms and support the building up of stable economies are the best investment we can make to cope with the challenge of immigration. It is good that Egypt, Jordan, Morocco and Tunisia are now countries our European Bank for Reconstruction and Development is operating in – a resource initially built up to support the political and economic changes in Central and Eastern Europe. Building up successful projects in these countries should get all our
4. Fourth, Europe needs more political determination when it comes to legal migration. I know well that this is not popular and often controversial. But we will only be able to cope with immigration if Europe adopts a sound policy that allows migrants to come to Europe legally and in a controlled manner, instead of by stealth, or by crossing the Mediterranean in unstable boats organised by shady human traffickers. Organising legal migration is also in Europe's own long-term interest. Demographic projections show that by 2060 the EU's active population will decline by over 10%, or 50 million people, whereas the numbers of retired people will increase from 17.1% to 30%, and from 84.6 million to 151.5 million. This trend poses a real danger to the economic productivity of the EU, especially because soon there will be two over-65s for every member of the working population. From 2015 onwards, demographic shrinking in the EU will mean two things: a) We will need to replace pensioners in the job market, and b) We will need to fill new jobs created to serve an ever-growing number of old people, particularly in the care sector. We therefore need to develop a common legal migration policy to meet the increasing demand for skills and talents. The EU-wide 'Blue Card' work permit, introduced by the EU in 2012, is a first step, as it allows highly-skilled non-EU citizens to work and live in any EU country except Denmark, Ireland and the United Kingdom. However, not all member states have fully implemented the 'Blue Card' Directive, and its practical implementation continues to be impeded by red tape at national level. Only 10,000 Blue Cards were issued in the first two years of the scheme. We will have to look at this again with a fresh pair of eyes to identify ways and means of substantially broadening this initiative. I want Europe to become at least as attractive as the favourite migration destinations such as Australia, Canada and the USA.
5. Last but not least, we need to secure Europe's borders. Our common Asylum and Legal Migration policies will only work if we can also prevent an uncontrolled influx of illegal migrants. We therefore need to step up the operational capacities of the European border agency Frontex. A budget of just €90 million a year is a good start, but does not yet equal the task of protecting Europe's common borders. We need to pool more resources amongst member states to reinforce the work of Frontex and put into action European Border Guard Teams for quick deployment in Frontex joint operations and rapid border interventions. We also need to apply and vigorously enforce our new common European rules to

penalise human traffickers. Those criminals who exploit the pain and needs of people in distress or suffering from persecution need to know: Europe is on guard and will bring them to justice at every turn.

I know that many Maltese citizens want immediate action from Europe on immigration. I intend to address this issue with full force once the European Parliament elects me as Commission President.

When I come to Malta today, my message is that Europe must be a Union of solidarity. I have deliberately chosen solidarity as a central theme of my campaign to become European Commission

President. Because my experience tells me that Europe will need more solidarity to prepare for the future. A future of a prosperous, competitive continent that will always be open for those in need; but that will also deal with the challenge of immigration together, and not leave Malta to cope with it alone. You are not alone, Europe stands with you. I stand with you. *Evropa ta' solidarjeta.*

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Juncker is in Malta on a two-day visit