

**32. BSPC (27 - 29 August 2023 in Berlin)**

**Report on Migration and Integration**

**29. August 2023**

**As of 1200**

**Deutscher Bundestag, Plenary Hall**

Dear President of the BSPC (*dear Mr. Schrapf*),

Dear incoming President,

Dear colleagues,

Since many years, our working groups are important for our work and it is also a good tradition to report on our annual conferences.

Migration and integration are among the **great challenges** and tasks of our time. This applies more or less equally to all members of the BSPC.

I may say:

**In recent years up until today**, civil war, protracted conflict, terrorism, deteriorating internal security and increasing poverty in many countries have led to **massive departures of civilian populations.**

**Resulting** in a **significant rise of immigrants** into the European Union.

Moreover, today, with **Russia's military invasion of Ukraine** we are facing one of the largest humanitarian crises in Europe's recent history – with the ongoing war causing increasing numbers of casualties, destruction and displacement within and outside Ukraine's borders.

According to **Eurostat**, the EU's statistical office, in **April 2023, over 72.000 first-time asylum applicants** applied for international protection in EU countries. An **increase of 34 %** compared to April 2022. Let me remind you yesterday's contribution by the Secretary General of the PABSEC, Asaf Hajiev, who mentioned the all-time-high number of 100 Mio. Refugees in the world, expressing his opinion that the problem has to be solved through the close cooperation of all countries and

in the frame of international law, and asking us as BSPPC for cooperation.

Dear colleagues,

This all shows: With the number of **asylum applications on the rise**, refuge and asylum have once again become a central issue of politics in the European Union.

People fleeing, refugees are not only Figures and Statistics – behind each number stand human beings and fates. But: the statistics help us to find out about the help needed.

Domestic politics in our region are confronted with finding a response to housing, labour, education, healthcare and childcare.

**Common** European solutions are necessary.

However, **recent developments** show that this attempt – joint immigration and asylum policies – is a challenge itself.

In **June**, the **Council of the European Union** finally agreed on a negotiating position on reforming asylum policy, which provides that the reception of refugees will be compulsory. EU states that are unwilling to take in refugees are to pay compensation.

The compromise exemplifies a **new EU consensus**:

The majority is no longer focused, as it was in 2015, on helping people as quickly as possible as they flee from political violence or civil war. Rather, the **focus** is on **reducing the number of refugees coming to Europe**.

In my opinion, the consensus also shows that we live in times, in which we discuss migration policy even more emotionally, since there are differences in the domestic political situations in a number of EU member states; namely:

Across Western Europe, far-right parties are advancing, under the headline of migrants threatening security.

**Poland** is in favour of hardline policies; now proposing to hold a referendum asking citizens whether they support the arrival of “thousands of illegal migrants coming from the Middle East and Africa”.

The **Swedish government** is aiming to tighten the immigration requirements for family members of foreign residents residing in the country.

**Finland's** new government lately announced a “paradigm shift” with immigration crackdown.

The **Danish government** says it plans to tighten the country’s citizenship rules. Already, nearly half of candidates have their applications rejected.

Besides, in response to hybrid warfare, several countries are **tightening security**: Finland, Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia have agreed to coordinate and enhance border measures at the crossings with Russia and Belarus.

Dear colleagues,

What can we, the member states of the BSPC, do? How can we contribute to handle this European challenge?

For sure we can say that we have realized the urgency of the situation and see the importance to **work on the subject together**, regardless of any differences.

Our “**Working Group on Migration and Integration**” aimed to put emphasis on integration, to promote the exchange of knowledge amongst the members and to share best practices regarding migration and integration – with an open dialogue and exchange between Baltic Sea member states. Our final report is still worth to have a look at.

What are the **perspectives** of successful integration of migrants and refugees in our region?

**OECD and European Commission** have – just very recently in June 2023 – released an interesting **study**, called “**Indicators of Immigrant Integration: Settling In**”.

The study represents the most **comprehensive international comparison** created to date, analysing the characteristics and integration results for immigrants and their children in OECD, EU, and certain other countries.

The report highlights that **integration and inclusion investments** benefit migrants, their families, societies, and economies, while failure to integrate is costly. With shrinking workforces and labour shortages in many countries, efforts to integrate migrants and families are essential.

This leads to one conclusion, to my opinion: We just cannot stop to stress this topic under different aspects, since new and ongoing conflicts will continue to force people to flee.

Thank you very much for your attention.