Migration: improving the management and security of EU borders

[02-06-2016 - 15:18]

The influx of irregular migrants continues to pose a challenge to Europe. According to Frontex 13,800 people had to be rescued in the central Mediterranean over the last week alone. The EU is working on different ways to manage migration better. On Monday 30 May Parliament's civil liberties committee approved proposals concerning migration and cooperation with other countries, paving the way for a better management of the EU's borders. Read on for an overview of what is being proposed.

Last year more than one million migrants arrived by sea, according to UN refugee agency UNHCR. This year 205,287 have already arrived by sea while 2,510 have been reported dead or missing.

European Border and Coast Guard

One of the issues the EU is looking at is how to protect its external borders. The national governments asked the European Commission to come up with proposals for a European Border and Coast Guard. The new agency would unite Frontex and the national authorities responsible for border management, which would continue to look after the day-to-day management of the external borders.

The border and coast guard would have the right to intervene meaning it is able to take action even when a member state is unable or unwilling to take the necessary measures. It would also be involved with monitoring and supervising migratory flows into and within the EU. In addition the European Return Office would be part of the agency, helping to send back migrants staying here illegally. A standard European document for return would make it easier for countries outside the EU to accept migrants coming back. Finally, the border and coast guard would work together with other organisations and EU agencies to help prevent terrorism.

Parliament's civil liberties committee approved the plans on 30 May. Latvian EPP member Artis Pabriks, responsible for steering the plans through Parliament commented: "The EU needs safer, better managed external borders and thus the European Border and Coast Guard as soon as possible. The European Border and Coast Guard is not a silver bullet that can solve the migration crisis that the EU is facing today or restore the Schengen area. Yet it is the first step."

Committee members said intervention should not be up to the European Commission, but to the member states deciding by qualified majority.

Following the committee vote, the Parliament has started talks with the Council, representing EU countries, to reach an agreement on the new legislation.

Returning migrants

The EU is also looking at ways to best return migrants who have not been granted asylum. At the moment these procedures are ineffective and can take a long time. EU countries might give substitute documents to people without the proper papers, but these are often

not recognised by countries outside the EU as there are no common standards and the documents have low security features.

The Commission is proposing to introduce a standard EU travel document for migrants who don't fulfil or no longer filfil the conditions for entry, stay or residence in the EU. Member states would then be required to use the same format and include the same personal information in order to seep dup the return process.

The civil liberties committee approved the plans on 30 May. Finnish ECR member Jussi Halla-aho, responsible for steering the proposal through Parliament, said: "One small piece in the puzzle and one step in the right direction."

The proposal will now also have to be approved by the Council before it can enter into force.

Safe countries of origin

The Commission is proposing an EU common list of safe countries of origin to fast-track applications from people that come from countries that are considered safe. At the moment these list are defined at the national level and are not coordinated with other EU countries.

The proposal has to be approved by Parliament and the Council before it can enter into force.

Better information sharing

Differentiating between refugees and economic migrants can prove challenging as well as identifying potential terrorists. This is why it is important to collect and share more information on the people entering the EU.

The European Criminal Records Information System (ECRIS) was established in 2012 to exchange information on criminal convictions of EU citizens. The Commission is proposing to extend the system to also include people from outside the EU. MEPs want Europol, the EU's law enforcement agency, and border agency Frontex to also be able to access the database on request on a case-by-case basis.

The civil liberties committee approved the plans on 30 May. "We need to restore public confidence that we are able to monitor who comes in the EU," said UK ECR member Timothy Kirkhope, who is responsible for steering the proposal through Parliament.

Coming up in plenary next week

Migration will be discussed during next week's plenary session in Strasbourg. On Tuesday 7 June MEPs will discuss a financial plan for Africa as well as an action plan for the integration of migration with Frans Timmermans, Vice-President of the European Commission, and Federica Mogherini, the EU's foreign affairs chief. Watch the debates live online after 15.00 CET on Tuesday 7 June.

Find out more

- Migration top story: http://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/en/top-stories/20150831TST91035/Migration-a-common-challenge
- Civil liberties committee: http://www.europarl.europa.eu/committees/en/libe/home.html
- Infographic on migration and asylum: http://www.europarl.europa.eu/thinktank/infographics/migration/public/index.html?page=intro

Studies

- European border and coast guard:
  http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2016/556934/IPOL_STU%282016%29556934_EN.pdf
- Cooperation with non-EU countries:
  http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2015/536469/IPOL_STU%282015%29536469_EN.pdf

Briefings

- List of safe countries : http://www.europarl.europa.eu/EPRS/EPRS-Briefing-569008-Safe-countries-of-origin-FINAL.pdf
- Readmission agreements:
  http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2015/554212/EPRS_BRI%282015%29554212_EN.pdf