If the eurozone crisis was the defining issue in the Barroso II Commission, migration has dominated Jean-Claude Juncker’s term in office.

Hundreds of thousands of refugees fleeing wars in the Middle East and North Africa, combined with primarily economic migration from sub-Saharan Africa, led to a surge in migration numbers, and difficulties for some member states, particularly those in the Mediterranean Sea.

The number of migrants reaching European soil has fallen dramatically in the last two years and eventually returned to pre-crisis levels in 2018. But the political impasse between EU member states, and public perceptions of migration and security appear to have hardened.

Attempts by EU lawmakers to overhaul the bloc’s laws have floundered, primarily over opposition by a handful of countries, led by the Visegrad group of central European countries, to mandatory relocation or resettlement of refugees.

This Special Report takes snapshots on migration and security policy from five member states ahead of European Parliament elections in May.
French debate on setting migration quotas reopened

Crisis over, crisis continues

Greek MEPs demand action on overpopulated migrant centres

Germany needs a quarter of a million migrant workers a year

Romania treads water on migration and asylum reforms

Poland seeks to protect its Ukrainian connection
The question of setting migration quotas in France has come back to the forefront through the ‘great debate’ initiated by Emmanuel Macron. EURACTIV France reports.

Within the national ‘great debate’, a two month series of public meetings initiated by the French President in the wake of the ‘yellow vest’ crisis, the question of setting migration quotas has been put back on the table.

While the matter of immigration has not been at the forefront of the issues raised by the ‘yellow vests’, the subject still appears in the questionnaire addressed to French people.

“With regard to immigration, after meeting our asylum obligations, would you like us to set annual targets laid down by the Parliament?” the website for the ‘great debate’ asks.

ANNUAL QUOTAS

While this question clearly stipulates that asylum seekers would be excluded from annual immigration quotas set by the Parliament, the start of yet another discussion on migration quotas calls to mind a plan by former President Nicolas Sarkozy, which ended up being abandoned.

“This question of quotas is not a new one and has already been settled and then settled again in France from a constitutional perspective,” said an irritated Sylvie Guillaume, a Vice-President of the European Parliament.

“And putting the issue of migration, which wasn’t part of the initial demands, in the ‘great debate’ is very loaded,” said Guillaume, who is also a member of the board of directors of the French office for the

Continued on Page 5
protection of refugees and stateless persons (OFPRA).

The idea of establishing migration quotas is regularly proposed by the French right as a solution to managing migratory flows. However, the application of such a measure has repeatedly been ruled out on the grounds of being unconstitutional and ineffective.

The French constitutional council ruled on this matter in 1993. Establishing quotas on family immigration would not only contravene the French constitution but also the European Convention on Human Rights, of which France is a signatory.

Furthermore, during the last attempt to establish immigration quotas by Sarkozy in 2009, it was decided that such a measure would be ineffective. The so-called “Committee on the constitutional framework of the new immigration policy,” chaired by Pierre Mazeaud and set up for the occasion, decided that the quotas “would be unworkable or meaningless.”

“Having a quota policy has no impact on illegal immigration,” Guillaume also pointed out. “It’s dangerous to mix the categories between immigration and asylum with this kind of initiative,” the MEP warned.

Although the question of setting immigration quotas is separate from that of the right to asylum, the two policies are very often assimilated in public debate, even if it means attempting to indirectly regulate the number of migrants in France by taking action on asylum policy.

At an event recently held by the Institut Montaigne and the think tank Terra Nova, the former head of OFPRA Pascal Brice, criticised the “logic of deterrence” implemented in France and Germany, with “the idea that if the conditions for asylum seekers are harsher, this means that fewer will come.”

Statistics indicate a tightening in the granting of refugee status in France. The number of applications for asylum made with OFRPA for the whole of 2018 increased by 22%, reaching 122,743. However, this increase was only slightly reflected by the number of applications accepted. This was up marginally in 2018, with 24,663 requests accepted compared to 23,958 in 2017.

**DUBLIN SYSTEM**

The difficulties facing French asylum policy can also be found at European level, where the lack of reform to the Dublin system is damaging a system under pressure. Pascal Brice criticised the “complete failure of the Dublin system,” which requires countries of entry into Europe, often Greece and Italy, to handle applications for asylum.

Reform of the Dublin system, which has been at a standstill for two years, will probably be postponed indefinitely due to a lack of consensus between member states.

“The cornerstone of the common asylum system is indeed the Dublin Regulation, which by nature is flawed because it assumes that the asylum systems in Europe are equal, which is wrong!” Guillaume explained.

However, “the member states – including France – refuse to enter into the discussion at European level, whereas the Parliament has proposed a compromise on the matter for two years,” she said.

Guillaume added that she regretted that “the French state prefers to cast French people into yet another debate about quotas rather than returning to the discussion at the European level.”

Continued from Page 4
The migration crisis in Europe is over. According to the statistics, at least.

Some 634,700 applications for asylum across the European Union were lodged in 2018, 10% fewer than in 2017, and similar to the level of 2014, according to data published by the European Asylum Support Office last week. Asylum applications peaked at 1.4 million and 1.3 million in 2015 and 2016.

“We are returning to pre-crisis levels. We are on the right track,” EU migration Commissioner Dimitris Avramopoulos said following the report, although he added that current levels of migration are likely to be the norm for many years and that European countries, particularly those bearing the heaviest burden from migration, must be better prepared.

But the optimistic message isn’t shared by many European citizens. The most recent Eurobarometer survey shows that 40% of Europeans consider immigration to be one of the two most important issues facing the EU – and the highest reported of all issues.

Yet while voters across the bloc are concerned about migration policy, their political leaders remain as divided as ever over how to deal with migratory flows, and how to integrate those who have recently settled in their country.

The political impasse over the European Commission’s proposals to overhaul the EU’s immigration and asylum laws will remain until after the May European elections. In December, the Juncker Commission admitted defeat on plans to reform the Common European Asylum System.

Instead, the EU executive wants MEPs and ministers to adopt the five out of seven laws on EU asylum reform where there is agreement, before the European elections. These do not include the proposals for mandatory relocation or resettlement in the Asylum Procedure Regulation and the Dublin Regulation.

Continued on Page 7
Any settlement or relocation within the EU remains voluntary, as it has been since autumn 2017, when refugee quotas were abandoned after member states resettled a mere 28,000 refugees, far short of the initial 160,000 target set by the European Commission.

The Commission’s admission of defeat prompted MEPs from the European Parliament’s Green group to accuse the EU executive of “burying a common European asylum policy”.

The Parliament, particularly its centrist and left-wing groups, has been frustrated in its attempts to push member states to reform the Dublin Regulation, and blames member states for dragging their feet and the Commission for a lack of leadership.

“We had 1.3 million (migrants) in 2016 (at the heart of the migration crisis), but that’s still only 0.25% of the European population,” Elly Schlein, the Socialist and Democrats lead spokesperson on the files, told EURACTIV.com. Schlein also described the break-up of the files as “cherry-picking”.

“It’s not a problem of means and population but of lack of political will,” she added. “There is no leadership, and no understanding that common challenges need common solutions.”

With reform of its internal rules deadlocked, the focus of EU policy-makers appears to be more on externalising the EU’s borders. A €4 billion cash for migrants deal with Turkey originally signed in 2016 appears to have become a model for accords with north African states including Morocco and Egypt.

But here, again, there is disagreement. In 2018, several Visegrad states held up agreement on the Commission’s negotiating mandate for the successor to the Cotonou Agreement between the EU and the African, Caribbean and Pacific community for several months demanding a tougher strategy on migrant returns.

Earlier this month it was reported that Hungary and Poland had blocked mention of the UN’s Migration Pact in the joint statement by the Arab League and EU that will follow a summit between the two on 24-25 February.

That suggests that even with a new Commission and a new composition of the European Parliament, the roadblock on EU migration rules will remain unchanged.
Overpopulation of migrant reception centres on the island of Samos has reached the point of no return, with the local community and local authorities left overwhelmed and demanding assistance from the Greek government. EURACTIV Greece reports.

Last week, centre-right MEP Elissavet Vozemberg-Vrionidi submitted an urgent question to the European Commission, requiring immediate action to support the needs of the refugees and local society on Samos.

According to Vozemberg, the local community has been brought to its knees, “as the situation has reached the limits of a humanitarian crisis, with a total shortage of health care for migrants, an alarming increase in crime and frequent conflicts between foreigners”, she told EURACTIV.gr.

“Local actors call for the immediate decongestion of the island, the staffing of the asylum service and the provision of health care, otherwise they call for the immediate closure of the hospitality centre. It is worth mentioning that 60 to 70 people arrive on the island daily, with few returning to their homelands”, read the written question addressed to the EU executive.

Earlier this month, refugees marched in protest across the island, demanding better treatment and living conditions. At the same time, the mayor of Samos, Michalis Aggelopoulos, sent an official letter to the Greek Minister on Migration Policy, Dimitris Vitsas, asking for immediate answers and financial support for the island.

Continued on Page 9
STRATEGY ON EFFICIENT MANAGEMENT STILL MISSING

In December, more than 3,100 people arrived at the Greek islands, according to data from the Greek Coast Guard, raising the total number of migrants and refugees on the Aegean islands to around 15,000 people.

In January, another 2,075 new migrants and refugees arrived at the Greek islands in the Eastern Aegean Sea, a higher number than in the corresponding month of 2018.

The Moria centre on Lesbos has twice as many refugees as its original capacity, while the Samos centre currently houses over 3,700 refugees, while its original capacity is only 648.

"We need honest strategies to deal with the dramatic flows to Europe. So-called “painkillers” do not solve a problem of that size, when a serious strategy is missing. As it seems, the sensitivity of this formerly leftist government obviously does not reach as far as Samos," Socialist MEP Eva Kaili told EURACTIV.gr.

LAST TIME OR NOT?

This is not the first time the issue of over-congestion of the migrant centres has been brought to the attention of the EU executive. One month ago, another Greek Socialist MEP, Nikos Androulakis, voiced similar concerns about the living conditions in refugee reception centres on the Eastern Aegean islands in another formal question.

"Unfortunately, the situation in the East Aegean islands and especially in Samos is getting worse, instead of getting better each day. Since the beginning of the refugee crisis, I have highlighted the inhumane conditions prevailing in migrant centres, creating suffocating conditions for both the people who are housed there and the local residents who see their islands transformed into a storehouse of souls," Androulakis wrote.

He also added that the Syriza government has linked the maintenance of low VAT rates on Samos and the rest of the islands, with the presence of a growing number of refugees and immigrants in the official reception structures.

"Let’s not forget that the European Union has allocated more than €1.6 billion to address the refugee crisis. However, the current conditions remain unacceptable and the European Union has ordered their control. This cannot continue," Androulakis said.
Germany needs a quarter of a million migrant workers a year

By Sarantis Michalopoulos | EURACTIV.com

Germany is dependent on migrant workers but a decreasing number of them will be EU citizens in the future. In the long term, about 146,000 immigrants from outside of the EU will have to be integrated into the German labour market every year, according to a recent study. EURACTIV Germany reports.

Nevertheless, a study by three researchers, from the German Research Institute of the Federal Employment Agency (IAB) and Coburg University, has done exactly this, predicting different scenarios for how the German labour market will develop.

Germany has an ageing population, meaning that fewer and fewer young workers are paying into a welfare state that is growing ever more expensive. In order to meet the shortage of workers in the longer term, about 260,000 people would have to migrate to Germany and enter the labour market, the researchers concluded.

The researchers worked on the assumption that the number of migrant workers from within the EU will fall, as EU economies continue to converge and fewer people leave their countries to look for work.

Although around a quarter of a million EU citizens still come to Germany every year, the experts

Continued on Page 11
estimate that this figure will be only 114,000 in the long term. In order to alleviate the effects of reduced EU immigration, the researchers said there would have to be more immigrants from outside of the EU, which would amount to 146,000 a year.

In 2017, the total migration balance was of slightly more than half a million immigrants, the so-called ‘migration monitor’ of the German Federal Office for Migration and Refugees (BAMF) indicated.

However, demographic change in Germany is increasingly being felt, with about 300,000 more people leaving the labour market every year than those joining it.

Dr Stefan Hardege, head of labour market and immigration at the Association of German Chambers of Commerce and Industry (DIHK), thinks the figure calculated by the Bertelsmann Stiftung’s migration report of 260,000 people needed a year was realistic.

He added that demographic change was already being felt in the economy. “Among the companies we consulted, 60% currently view the shortage of skilled works as a danger to the development of their businesses. In 2010, only 16% said so,” Hardege stated.

Even in a best-case scenario, where women and men in Germany were in employment at the same level and with retirement at the age of 70, this would only result in an additional four million workers on the market by 2060, the Bertelsmann study calculated.

NEW IMMIGRATION LAW TO ATTRACT WORKERS WITH FEWER QUALIFICATIONS

The biggest problem with the current trend in Germany is the lack of people with medium and lower levels of qualifications. The lack of graduates will be less significant, as an increasing number of people are going to university, while thousands of training positions remain unoccupied, the researchers believed.

The researchers therefore welcomed the planned new ‘specialised workers immigration law,’ which is also intended to attract people with fewer qualifications into the country. Immigrants with fewer qualifications currently find it difficult to obtain permission to stay if they are not EU citizens.

In contrast, highly qualified immigrants can obtain an ‘EU Blue Card’ and stay in Germany. The BAMF issued more than 21,000 of these last year. In this respect, Germany is a frontrunner, as this figure represented 84% of all Blue Cards in the EU.

The ‘immigration law’ adopted by the German cabinet in December means that access to the German labour market should also be given to people with professional qualifications. Immigrants with the means to live are then allowed to stay in the country for six months to look for work.

But for the law to take full effect, there was “still work to be done,” the migration study stated. For instance, it said that there had to be greater recognition of foreign professional qualifications in the German dual system of vocational training.

However, an immigration law on its own would not be enough to tie workers to Germany in the long-term, believes Jörg Dräger, member of the Bertelsmann Stiftung executive board.

“Migration and integration are a task for society as a whole,” Dräger said. He added that without offering a continuing “welcoming culture” and attractive integration initiatives, it would not be possible to offset the shortage of specialised workers in Germany.

Hardege from the DIHK also shared this opinion, saying “we should first make sure that we reduce the number of people moving away, particularly of those who have been educated and trained in Germany.”

“They are well-suited to staying in this country,” he added.
In 2015, Romania voted against relocation quotas for refugees within the EU, though it later supported the UN’s Global Compact on Refugees. Recently, it was asked by the UNHCR to use its six-month EU presidency to mobilise member states to be more active in managing the flows of refugees. EURACTIV Romania reports.

“The Global Compact on Refugees and, respectively, on Regular Migration will generate a common approach on migration and displaced persons at the global level,” President Klaus Iohannis said in a speech at the United Nations General Assembly last September. Romania signed the memorandum of supporting the Global pact in the form agreed through negotiations.

Gonzalo Vargas Llosa, the regional representative of UNHCR for European affairs, asked Romania to encourage the member states to make more preparations to administrate the flows of refugees, to consolidate the relevant institutions and the asylum procedures.

“Romania is determined to strengthen the European Union-United Nations partnership. And when I speak about engagement, I don’t just mean politicians and diplomats. We have to reach out to our younger people, representatives of the civil society, journalists, businesspeople. We need them all for the cause of multilateralism and global leadership,” Iohannis said in his speech.

But this engagement has yet to produce concrete results, with almost two months of Romania’s EU presidency already gone.

MEPs are increasingly frustrated

Continued on Page 13
Continued from Page 12

with the lack of solutions for both the migration agenda and the reform of the asylum system, and blame the member states for stalling negotiations. At an informal meeting of justice and home affairs ministers in Bucharest earlier this month, the Romanian presidency did not seem too eager to hurry things up.

“We do not need now antagonistic solutions that fuel populism, extremism and disrupt political cohesion within the EU. But of course, we need to be constructive in order to find a common solution based on consensus,” said Carmen Dan, Romania’s minister of internal affairs.

The presidency said it will continue its efforts to identify consensual solutions in the field of migration.

As part of efforts to reduce illegal migration flows into the EU, the external dimension of migration and cooperation with third countries is a priority, according to the Romanian Presidency.

But, as Romanian Victor Bostinaru, a Socialist group MEP, noted: “The war in Syria isn’t over.”

“The war will end only when we find a way towards a genuine political transition, with full accountability and credible transitional justice; and when we can ensure that the six million refugees and the four million internally displaced Syrians will have a home to return to and will be protected by their state. Only then, can reconstruction start,” Bostinaru said during a debate on the situation in Syria.

When adopted in May 2015, the European Migration Agenda proposed countering the refugee crisis with solutions to all aspects of migration, and a key element was the reform of the common asylum rules. But a consensus has not been reached.

Noticing the stalemate in the Council over the reform of the Dublin Regulation, MEPs have turned their attention to the borders. After the success of the deal with Turkey, which receives EU money to ensure that migrants do not leave its territory for the EU, the European Parliament voted to allocate more EU funds for migration and asylum policies and for border reinforcement.

The Parliament’s Civil Liberties Committee endorsed the renewed Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF), and gave it €9.2 billion out of the 2021-2027 budget (51% more than in the previous financial framework). It also backed the creation of a new Integrated Border Management Fund (IBMF) and agreed to allocate €7.1 billion to it.

However, it seems that the new asylum rules will not be adopted during the Romanian presidency, and it is difficult to estimate what will be the view of the next European Parliament on the matter.
Poland seeks to protect its Ukrainian connection

By Michał Strzałkowski | EURACTIV.pl | translated by Łukasz Gadzała

Ukrainian migrants are vital to the Polish economy, but no one really knows how many of them live in the country. EURACTIV Poland reports.

They clean apartments and build new ones. They work as Uber or Taxify drivers and work in supermarkets or local groceries. They even set up stalls with folk art in tourist destinations. They are also lawyers, managers, nurses, or businessmen. For a few years now, economic migrants from Ukraine have been present in many different segments of the labour market.

According to data gathered by the Office for Foreigners (UDsC), there are 180,000 Ukrainian citizens living in Poland, an increase from 155,000 last year. The UDsC statistics include only those who have the right of permanent residence, but not every migrant that takes up a job seeks a long-term residence permit.

Meanwhile, in 2018, 26 times more Ukrainian citizens applied for retirement or pension scheme than in 2008 and four times more than in 2015, according to the Social Insurance Institution (ZUS) data.

In 2008, there were only 16,200 such people but a decade later the number was 425,700. Ten years ago, Ukrainians constituted 25% of all foreign policyholders. Today, the number is 74.8%.

And yet these numbers do not cover all Ukrainians who work in Poland. ZUS counts only those who are taxed, meaning those who work on a full-time contract or voluntarily tax their civil law contracts. In Poland, many people have contracts for specific tasks, which are not always subject

Continued on Page 15
Continued from Page 14

to insurance taxes. The real number of Ukrainians working in Poland is probably much higher.

The ministry of labour, family and social affairs (MRPiPS) has information about work permits handed to Ukrainians. But, according to Polish law, a foreigner from outside of the EU may be legally employed through a so-called simplified procedure, that is through a statement of intention to hire him.

In this way, a foreigner can be employed for between six and 12 months. Many Ukrainians work in accordance with this model – six months in Poland, six months in Ukraine, and so on.

WORKERS, NOT REFUGEES

When the Polish government explained in Brussels its reluctance to participate in the relocation of Syrian and Iraqi refugees from Greece and Italy, it pointed out that many refugees from Ukraine were already on Poland’s territory. This rhetoric was used by both former Prime Minister Beata Szydlo and the incumbent Mateusz Morawiecki.

Szydlo, for instance, told the European Parliament that Poland had taken in “a million Ukrainian refugees”.

In fact, in 2017-2018, the number of Ukrainian citizens applying for refugee status could be counted only in hundreds. The rest of the Ukrainians simply took up jobs and settled in Poland. They tend not to benefit from Polish social allowances. For example, only 4,500 benefit from the government’s Family 500+ programme for Ukrainian families. Therefore, experts do not want to call them refugees.

Andrzej Kubisiak of the Polish Economic Institute suggests that it was not a harsh economic situation in Ukraine but the efforts of Polish employers to hire new workers that have driven Ukrainian migration.

“The mass inflow of Ukrainian workers to Poland started in 2014. Beforehand, Ukrainian migration was predominantly constituted by agricultural employees. But in 2014, unemployment in Poland began to fall. Simultaneously, from 2013 on, the labour supply – the number of people that can work in an economy – has been systematically dropping,” he said.

“In the end, Polish companies faced a lack of workers, for the first time since the economic transformation. Thus, the inflow of Ukrainian workers saw the perfect spot here. Companies themselves also started to search for Ukrainian workers,” Kubisiak explained.

The main motives for employing Ukrainians were labour shortages and the fact that they received lower wages than Poles.

“The Polish job market has changed a lot in recent years. New jobs have been created because of good economic conditions. Their number was rising more quickly than the number of employees available. So today it is not about economic optimisation but striving to fill in vacancies,” Kubisiak says.

WILL UKRAINIANS LEAVE FOR GERMANY?

According to the Central Statistical Office data, there are only 175,000 job vacancies in Poland. If all workers from Ukraine disappeared from the Polish market, the number of vacancies would skyrocket to more than 600,000. And the number of vacancies already grows at 12-13% per quarter.

“It all shows that our labour market is in serious trouble. If not for Ukrainians, the level of vacancies in Poland might have been a serious impediment for our economic growth. The workers from Ukraine mitigated tensions on the Polish labour market, which are created by population ageing and mass economic migration of Poles to the other EU countries”, explained Kubisiak.

It might seem that the situation is very favourable for Poland. However, changes concerning foreign workers that Germany wants to introduce by early 2020 are seen in Warsaw as a threat. Because of these changes, Ukrainians will have easier access to the German labour market, where there are higher wages and more job vacancies. Kubisiak, however, does not expect a huge outflow of Ukrainian workers from Poland.

“It is true that the German labour market is very receptive and Polish employers will have a hard time competing with German ones, but wages are not the only factor taken into account in economic migration. In Germany, a language barrier will be much higher, as in Ukraine, German – unlike Polish – is not popular. Poland is also closer to them in terms of culture, which makes a big difference”, says Kubisiak.

Many Ukrainians work in Poland only periodically and divide their time between the two countries. However, most Ukrainians – except for Warsaw and Mazowieckie Voivodeship – work in Wroclaw or Poznan, in western Poland. From there, Germany is close. But whether they decide to cross the Oder, will only be known in 2020.