The 2015 migrant crisis caught Europe off guard, with little funding, limited manpower and no contingency plans in place.

The number of migrants trying to reach Europe has declined significantly since then but migration is back on the EU’s radar, against the backdrop of continuing instability in the Mediterranean and the Middle East.

The Commission’s proposed new seven-year budget allocates €34.9 billion to Migration and Border Management, a significant boost from the €18 billion earmarked for ‘security and citizenship’ in the current framework.

The lion’s share will probably be used to prevent migrants from reaching Europe, and a smaller amount to help the integration of those who come here.

In this Special Report, EURACTIV’s network looks at the challenges presented by migration in six EU countries.
Tensions with Turkey increase migration across Greece’s land borders

Romania MEP: EU needs proper migration budget in case of new crisis

French law zooms in on solidarity offence

MEP: We have to prevent games with multiple identities in Asylum System

Fortress Europe lives on in Poland

MEPs hope to break deadlock on migration reform
Refugee flows through Greece’s land borders have started rising again, causing frustration among EU and Greek authorities. According to UNHCR data, in April alone 2,900 people entered Greece via land passages at the borders of Evros River, mainly families from Syria and Iraq.

Press reports say that increased migratory flows across the Evros are the result of the latest tensions in the Greek-Turkish relations.

According to the same reports, the Greek authorities suspect that Turkish border guards may have deliberately become less attentive, effectively turning a blind eye to the refugees attempting to cross into Greece, in order to pressure Athens and Brussels about the EU’s indefinite postponement of visa liberalisation for Turkish nationals.

In the meantime, the European Border and Coast Guard Agency (Frontex) is ready to boost its support at the land border between Greece and Turkey due to increased migratory flows, said Natasha Bertaud, a European Commission spokesperson.

Greek islands ask for immediate assistance

In the first four months of this year, a total of 7,300 people entered Greece, compared to 4,761 arrivals counted last year, according to the International Organisation for Migration data (IOM).

Currently, more than 13,500 refugees are hosted in temporary facilities with a capacity of only 5,500 people in the islands of Chios, Samos and Lesvos.

“Over-concentration of people creates complex situations that are hard to describe,” Christiana Kalogirou, the governor of the North Aegean Region, told a recent
For three years now, in the North Aegean islands, we’ve been experiencing all the consequences, both in our everyday life and in our wider economic activity. Consequences that day by day become structural and make the management of the situation even more difficult”, she said.

Recent tensions at the camps caused by the arrival of even more refugees in Lesvos, Lagadikia and Diavata prove that a lack of coordination between European and Greek authorities is a bigger issue than it seems.

As a result, the regions end up practically having to deal with the increased flows of refugees on their own, without adequate guidance and infrastructure. Furthermore, the fact that the regions are unable to access the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF) is making it even more difficult for them to address the immediate needs in hosting facilities, asylum procedures and integration of refugees.

“The government’s apparent inability to distinguish refugees from illegal migrants upon arrival has intensified the situation, which has got even worse due to the lack of political will and the time lost for the establishment of a flexible legal framework for asylum,” MEP Maria Spyraki (EPP) told EURACTIV.

She said it was high time to make the distinction between refugees and illegal migrants. “Those who do not receive asylum should be hosted in closed-type hosting facilities in order to return later to their countries of origin,” she said.

MEP Eliza Vozemberg (EPP) said the increased arrivals were also a cause for concern for the summer tourist season. “During tourist season, it is very likely that once again we will witness at the Greek islands scenes like the ones we experienced in the summer of 2015, with painful consequences for the tourist traffic and the local economies”.

**EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT’S POSITION**

Dimitris Papadimoulis (GUE/NGL, SYRIZA), the vice-president of the European Parliament, told EURACTIV the Parliament’s support to the Greek government on the refugee issues was strong and “demonstrated in related resolutions”, which highlighted the principles of solidarity and fair distribution of refugees among member states.

“At the same time, there is an ongoing dialogue within the Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs Committee (LIBE) and clear support for our country through the positions of the majority of MEPs.... Lastly, there is strong and intergroup support for the resolution on the children of migrants and refugees, the continuation of the relocation program and the reunification of families,” Papadimoulis added.

In the first four months of 2018, 18,939 refugees and immigrants entered Europe, while last year there were 44,558 arrivals, according to IOM data. In 2016, more than 172,000 refugees arrived in Greek islands, while a year earlier that figure was 872,519, according to the Hellenic Republic’s General Secretariat for Media and Communication.
As the debate over the future EU budget intensifies in the European Parliament, more questions are being asked about the funds allocated to border security, migration and refugee integration.

The overall reaction of the EU and national capitals to the humanitarian crisis in 2015 has been widely criticised, with many voices asking for more resources to be directed towards improving reception facilities and integration programmes.

The general circumstances, however, were not at all favourable to the reception of refugees. In a Union that already struggled with internal mobility, particularly from east to west, the refugee situation only managed to exacerbate an already tense situation.

With Brexit getting closer and migration clearly among the EU’s new priorities, the European Parliament is asking for the future EU budget to include enough funding to cope with any crises that might arise, Romanian MEP Siegfried Muresan told EURACTIV Romania in an interview.

“The European Parliament has not asked for an exact amount allocated to migration issues because it is difficult to estimate in 2018 what could the 2027 needs be,” said Muresan (EPP), who is vice-chair of the Budget Committee in the European Parliament.

He said in the current 2014-2020 budget framework, there were smaller amounts allocated for migration and security “because these issues were not a challenge in 2013, when the multiannual financial framework (MFF) was adopted”.

“What we have asked, however, is an adequate allocation for migration problems, so that we are not surprised

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again if a new crisis emerges,” the MEP said.

Muresan said the future MFF needs more flexibility to allow the funding of new priorities that might arise during execution, through additional allotments, “and not endangering the EU priorities set at the beginning of the implementation period.”

Many MEPs were unhappy with the budget proposal of the European Commission. The Parliament voted in favour of raising member state contributions to 1.3% of the Gross National Income, but the budget drawn up by Commissioner Günther Oettinger is equivalent to 1.1% of EU’s GNI.

However, even if the UK’s exit from the EU leaves a gap of more than €12 billion annually in the bloc’s budget, the total budget is comparable with the current MFF.

As a result, some of the net contributor states criticised the Commission’s proposal, saying “a smaller Union needs to have a smaller budget”.

But the Commission has to balance the financing for both its traditional policies – though it announced single-digit cuts to the cohesion funds and the Common Agricultural Policy – and the new priorities, such as defence, border security and migration.

**DETERRENCE OR DEVELOPMENT?**

Three years after the peak of the refugee crisis, the EU has to make a fundamental choice between measures that deter migratory processes and initiatives that encourage migration and integration. UNHCR representative in Romania Eduardo Yrezabal believes that, so far, some of the member states have opted for the former.

In an interview published by EURACTIV.com, Yrezabal argued that “the authorities in Europe have put a lot of effort to implement deterrent measures more than to establish procedures to host people in a more systematic and organised way than what we saw back in 2015”.

Of course, the situation is not the same in every country. For example, in response to the Libyan crisis, “countries like Norway, the Netherlands, France, Germany are seriously establishing programmes to provide resettlement spaces for refugees,” Yrezabal explained.

**WHERE WILL THE BUDGET GO?**

In this context, the future EU budget will have a dramatic impact on the programmes that will be implemented. Up until now, the major financial source for governments has been the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund, with a total value of €3.137 billion for the 2014-2020 period.

The Commission proposed the expansion of the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund to €10.4 billion, said MEP Muresan, noting that this important increase “clearly shows that this instrument became a major priority for the EU.”

“If we add the allocations for the new instrument for the border management of €9.3 billion in the 2021-2027 period and the increase in the Frontex number of border guards from 1,500 to 10,000 – we get a better picture of the EU’s efforts in this area,” Muresan said.

Under the Commission’s proposal, the new budget chapter of Migration and border management will get €34.9 billion. In the current MFF, the security and citizenship appropriation got less than €18 billion.

**INTEGRATION?**

The figures for 2017 show a significant decrease of asylum requests in the EU, compared to 2016. Last year, around 700,000 people applied for asylum, down from 1.2 million in 2016. Nonetheless, there are states that have seen an increase of asylum requests.

Such is the case of Romania, where the General Inspectorate for Immigration processed 4,800 asylum requests last year, a 150% increase of the caseload from the average of the past 12 years of 1,500 applications per year. This was, in the words of the Deputy Director of the Asylum and Integration Directorate, Eleodor Pîrvu, “an absolute record” for the country.

In Brussels, border security gets more attention, Muresan underlined. He noted that, of the total €34.9 billion allocated for migration and borders in the Commission’s proposal for the 2021-2027 MFF, €21.3 billion is earmarked for the improvement of EU border management.

“Creating a standing corps of 10,000 border guards within Frontex is a concrete measure proposed by the EU to increase the security of its borders,” the MEP said.

But questions remain about the capacity – and willingness – of the member states that are away from the front line in Southern Europe to receive more people if there is a new international crisis. There is also the issue of whether Europe needs new and better integration programmes that can assist people who are already here.

In Romania, authorities have already started work on a new proposal for legislative changes that will aim to improve the integration programme, but the situation varies drastically across the EU.
Helping illegal migrants can come at a cost in France, where the notion of solidarity offence is currently under revision. At the European level, debates on the issue have only just started.

In the French commune of Briançon, locals are currently concerned about legal risks as they have been helping an ever-growing number of migrants cross the Alps from Italy.

“Some people have been detained and pressure has been put on other people who are known for having helped migrants,” said Bruno, a ski station employee who lives in Névache, a small village not far from the border with Italy.

A solidarity movement has emerged in Névache to help migrants who have risked their lives to cross the Alps. The village has witnessed an increasing number of migrants crossing the Col de l’Echelle to arrive in France from Italy. “In winter, I have no qualms. No law will stop me from helping an endangered person in the mountain,” said Bruno.

However, there is a fine line between helping an endangered person and helping someone cross illegally into French territory. During the winter, volunteers in Briançon searched the mountains to help those who might need help.

Though this helped save lives, some citizens who volunteered to help migrants have also come into contact with smuggling networks. The volunteers are quickly identified by those networks in Italy, who then sell the volunteers’ phone numbers to migrants.

It’s a balancing act in which the lines are blurred between humanitarian aid and collaboration with smuggling rings and can lead to legal risks.

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The chain of solidarity is therefore sometimes exploited by smugglers whose numbers are rising on the route over the Alps. “Sometimes exiles who have arrived in the refuge in Briançon believe that their overnight stay is part of the package they paid smugglers for to arrive in France,” said one of the volunteers who helps at the refuge.

Under the current French law, people can be prosecuted for facilitating unauthorised entry, transit and residence of illegal migrants. An exception is made if help was provided to preserve the person’s dignity and is not remunerated in any way.

However, it cannot involve helping to enter French territory or travel further but only the stay (accommodation, food, medical help etc.).

The provision from the code of entry and residence of foreign persons and the right to asylum, which carries a prison sentence of up to 5 years and a €30,000 fine, is used to prosecute smugglers.

However, this provision has also been used against citizens who helped migrants such as Cédric Herrou, a farmer in the Roya Valley. Herrou was arrested several times in 2016 and 2017 for having helped over 200 migrants cross into France from Italy.

Martine Landry, an Amnesty International activist, has also been arrested for helping two 15-year-old Guinean migrants cross into France from Italy and her trial will start end May.

The French National Assembly is currently examining a draft law on asylum and migration where the solidarity offence is also under review. Some deputies have adopted an amendment to change the solidarity offence to include an exemption for facilitating travel. In practice, most people prosecuted for breaching the solidarity provision have been arrested for helping migrants travel within the French territory.

Discussions on changes in the solidarity offence at the National Assembly have been made possible because of the support of President Emmanuel Macron and deputies from his LREM party. However, in the Senate, where there is a right-wing majority, there is no guarantee that the solidarity offence will pass when examined at the start of June.

**EUROPEAN CITIZENS’ INITIATIVE**

At the European level, the debate on the solidarity offence is slowly emerging. Current European laws are more flexible than French laws. A European directive adopted in 2002 on the facilitation of unauthorised entry, transit and residence lays the minimum rules for penalties in the case of aid for-profit.

Under French law, the notion of remuneration concerned is not necessarily the monetary nature. This broader notion has made it possible to prosecute citizens who have helped migrants without receiving any monetary rewards.

The Directive also states that member states have the right to a total exemption in cases of humanitarian aid, a provision which is currently not used by France.

“At the European level, there is a lack of discussion on the issue of solidarity offence,” said Sylvie Guillaume, French socialist MEP and vice-president of the European Parliament. “Now, there needs to be a French and European dynamic on the issue.”

“We need a European Parliament resolution on the subject to have a more framed European approach, today the laws applied in Europe are very diverse. And I am well aware of the risk this could entail,” Guillaume said.

Opposing views between left and right, as well as recurring tensions on the migrant issue between countries in Eastern and Western Europe, will most likely lead to difficult discussions. “By opening this debate, we risk ending up with a more punitive definition of the solidarity offence. But a debate on the matter is necessary.

The debate has barely started in Brussels but a boost could come from a European Citizens’ Initiative (ECI). Launched in February, the initiative calls for the end of the solidarity offence and is currently trying to collect a million signatures from European citizens.

If the initiative is successful, the Commission is expected to provide a legislative response.
Since 2016, the EU has been working on the reform of the Common European Asylum System (CEAS). Particularly tricky is the creation of a new Dublin IV agreement, clarifying which country is responsible for a person’s asylum application.

At the end of April, the European Parliament’s Committee on Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs (LIBE) approved the latest reform of the regulation. It is meant to create a uniform application procedure in the member states, guarantee applicants individual legal assistance and accelerate the decision-making process.

Hungarian MEP Péter Niedermüller (S&D) is the shadow rapporteur for the reform, which he discussed with EURACTIV Germany in an interview.

Mr Niedermüller, what are the current problems in refugee registration that cause the need for an update of the regulation?

People arriving in the EU first of all lack information. They do not know what the next steps will be. Many want to go to Europe, for example to Germany or Sweden, without knowing to what extent this is possible. Most of them do not speak the language. Many are also traumatised and need psychological support.

Compulsory legal advice should therefore show these people their potential options. Also in cases where the first application was rejected due to missing information. They then can provide the missing information in a second procedure. However, the regulation should also accelerate deportation decisions.

To what extent can this decision prevent “asylum shopping”, the application for asylum in different countries?

Through a uniform registration and the consolidation of databases in the member states, we can quickly

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Understand whether an asylum seeker is already registered elsewhere. A general registration requirement is very important in order to prevent that games are being played with multiple identities.

To what extent identity fraud is a phenomenon that should worry us, we currently do not know. The LIBE Committee has consulted with Europol and they have not been able to tell us if these are isolated cases, or if they are a real problem. Of course, there will always be a way to betray any system. But we try to create a framework that meets the real requirements.

Incidentally, I do not believe that refugees have much to do with terrorism. But of course, we need to know who is in the EU and who is allowed in.

**In the next EU budget, the Commission wants to almost triple the funds for border management and migration policy. Frontex is to be built up to 10,000 jobs. Is this to be accompanied by a strong common asylum system?**

Yes, the protection of the EU's external borders is very important, as the representatives of the political groups in Parliament have repeatedly made clear. We do everything possible to strengthen our borders – but that does not mean that one starts to build up walls everywhere. That is not the right way. It is therefore even more important to comply with the strict rules of registration, the very strong control of refugees.

The safety of EU citizens has the highest priority. But you always have to think about what safety means and how it can be guaranteed. Safety cannot mean that we simply deport people because they come from a different culture or religion. We need a system that is compatible with our European values.

**Is a unified asylum procedure in the interest of all states? What does your home country Hungary think about this?**

As you know, the Visegrád states want the asylum procedures to remain a matter for the member states alone. In any case, the EU can only create a legislative framework, and decisions on granting asylum ultimately lie with the member states.

The issue of quotas is a huge problem that still causes political debate. At the moment, I have the impression that some countries are open to compromise in this regard. But Hungary's government is still fundamentally against such an allocation formula. Only a few days ago, Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán declared that he was not ready to negotiate. He is determined not to let illegal migrants, as he calls them, into the country and to preserve the Christian culture of Hungary. Unfortunately, I do not see any movement on the part of the Hungarian government.

**What about the argument of solidarity within the European Union?**

This discussion is pointless. The Hungarian government will say that they have shown a lot of solidarity – because in the end one defends the EU's external border. Hungary has invested a lot of money in the border fence. So that does not lead anywhere. The EU is a joint project and those who are unwilling to participate need to consider whether they can envision a future outside the union. You have to talk about this openly.

Of course, we do not want Hungary to leave the EU and I do not think that Hungary wants that. But to be honest, I do not quite understand what goals Orbán’s government is thinking to achieve when seeking the conflict with the EU.

**Should countries be compelled to cooperate then? What do you think of German Chancellor Angela Merkel’s idea of using EU funds as sanctions or incentives for the member states to accept more refugees?**

I can indeed imagine something like that. The EU must be able to exert pressure, otherwise, the common system will not work. I think that in the Parliament there could perhaps be a majority for this idea, in the Council, of course, it would fail over the veto of a few countries. Therefore, we are working to create the political conditions for this. For example, a two-thirds majority in the Council could be enough, as Poland and Hungary would certainly vote against such a system.

The EU has moved away from a strict allocation formula. Instead, in the reformed Dublin IV system as proposed by the LIBE Committee, it is first to be seen whether there is a social link with a member state. Will the Council adopt such a proposal?

No, I am afraid that will not happen. There are still heavy negotiations to come for us. For example, the Danish Social Democrats have recently stated that they are strictly against any family reunification. Very different positions have to be negotiated, not just between left and right, or conservatives and social democrats.

In addition, 2019 is an election year. I believe that once the problem of distribution is resolved this year, it must first be put on hold. I cannot imagine that a member state will be ready to negotiate this difficult issue in the middle of the 2019 elections. Therefore, we quickly need an agreement.
Since 2015, Poland has strongly opposed receiving refugees from Italy and Greece. Until now, not a single person has been accepted under the quota system set by the European Commission. And the majority of Poles actually side with their government on the issue.

Surveys leave no doubt: Poles do not want to receive refugees.

According to a survey conducted by the Polish Centre for Public Opinion Research (CBOS) published last December, 63% of respondents do not want people who fled war in their countries to enter Poland. Just 33% are in favour of receiving refugees.

Only two years earlier, in mid-2015, the situation was different. 21% of respondents opposed receiving refugees while 72% were in favour.

What has changed in the meantime is what we understand by the term “refugee”. Because of the wars in the Middle East and the ‘Arab Spring’, for many Poles, the words “asylum” or “refugee” came to be associated exclusively with people from Muslim countries.

The respondents cite cultural and religious differences as well as fears of radical Islam. However, while as many as 75% of Poles would oppose receiving people from the Middle East or Africa, only 32% would not want to accept refugees from Eastern Ukraine.

RATIONALITY OR MANAGEMENT OF FEAR?

These fears are understood by Dr Piotr Sebastian Ślusarczyk, a political scientist and president of the Foundation of the Institute of European Affairs in Warsaw. He is one of the authors who criticised migration from Africa and the Middle East to Europe on the website Euroislam.pl.

“When comparing the Polish research with similar research results in many other European countries – for example in France, Germany, Italy or Spain – it turns out that citizens of these countries think similarly. The
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differences are small. Therefore, Poles do not stand out particularly in this matter,” says Ślusarczyk.

He said people in Western Europe are often reluctant to admit views that are condemned by the elite and media.

But Maria Złonkiewicz from the “Polish Hospitality” Foundation argues that the reason is entirely different – politicians. Their statements had a key impact on the opinions of Poles, she said.

The foundation runs two initiatives aimed at changing the tone of the refugee debate in Poland: The project “With bread and salt” (CHLEBEM I SOLA) helps refugees adapt to life in Poland, while the website Uchodźcy.info collects information on asylum seekers and tries to convince Poles to engage with them.

The website’s authors have put together thousands of statements by Polish politicians about refugees and migration since 2015 and compared them with the results of regular sociological research.

“The dependence was extremely visible. As soon as politicians, especially from the current ruling party, spoke strongly and negatively about refugees and migrants, support for their admission dropped – much more than, for example, after the terrorist attacks in Western Europe,” explained Złonkiewicz.

She said the change became visible during the presidential and parliamentary campaigns in Poland in 2015.

“Migration issues have become one of the most important topics of those campaigns. We therefore have to deal with the so-called fear management,” she explained.

She recalled a speech by the Law and Justice (PiS) chairman Jarosław Kaczyński, who told an electoral rally in October 2015 that refugees could bring “dangerous diseases, parasites or protozoa” to Europe.

Meanwhile, in April 2017, in a special epidemiological centre in Biała Podlaska, where people seeking asylum in Poland are examined, there was no single case of a serious infectious or parasitic disease.

WHERE TO LOOK FOR SOLUTIONS?

Both Złonkiewicz and Ślusarczyk agree that the EU must introduce new system-related solutions about migration and asylum policies.

According to Ślusarczyk, today’s EU asylum system is not able to effectively distinguish economic migrants from refugees, which can lead to “bizarre situations”.

“If you look at it from the point of view of the Geneva Convention, people who came to the EU, for example from Turkey, do not have to be recognised as refugees. They have already been in a country recognised as safe by the international community. We therefore have a legal vacuum here. Old solutions do not work anymore, and there are no new ones,” he said.

He added the influx of people to Europe might not end with the end of the war in the Middle East:

“Africa is also a problem. According to current UN forecasts, in 2015-2030 the population of Africa will increase by 450-570 million people. In total, there will be more than one and a half billion people in Africa in 2030, four times more than in the EU. And if only 10% of Africans would want to come to Europe, it adds up to 3 million immigrants annually. The 2015 scenario may be repeated each year in that case.”

He recommended drawing on Australian experiences, which means reaching agreements with the governments of African countries and supporting policies to combat overpopulation.

“We must also support the economies of these countries so that the situation there improves. If Europe does not share its wealth with Africa, Africa will share its poverty with Europe. Three things should be done: introducing a smart policy aimed at combating the causes and effects of overpopulation, tightening borders also through the fight against, as well as economically help those countries that want to cooperate with Europe on fair terms, ” Ślusarczyk explained.

Złonkiewicz, however, argued that this approach is only part of the solution.

“People will still be moving to other places in search of a better life. Some flee from war, others from poverty or climate change. This is the cost of a globalised world. You cannot close your eyes to this issue.”

“Locking ourselves up will not work. We are not North Korea after all. That is why we also need activities that will help integrate people who came to Europe. And integration is never a one-sided process. Everybody has to engage.”

She admitted that integration was not easy, but it was not going to go away either.

“No walls and fences will stop migration to Europe. Let us rather consider how this progressive mixing of cultures can be used,” Złonkiewicz said.

WHAT SHOULD THE EU DO?

The current Polish government refused to take part in the programme for relocating refugees from Italy and Greece created by the European Commission. Although many EU member states have not yet met the quotas, Poland and Hungary are the only ones that have not accepted a single person.

Kosma Złotowski, MEP of Law and Justice, which belongs to the parliamentary group of the European Conservatives and Reformists, says

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this is the right decision.

“Neither Poland nor the European Union are places where everyone can come just because they want to. Especially because we have the experience from Western Europe. There, parallel communities are formed, living according to the laws and customs imported from their countries. This is a very dangerous phenomenon – by no means enriching culturally or in any other way,” Złotowski said.

But to Róża Thun, an MEP of the Civic Platform (EPP), countries like Poland and Hungary are wrong not to join in the EU’s efforts to help refugees.

“PiS politicians prefer to scare Poles, prefer to present false statistical data or use manipulations on public television. For example, it is wrong to say that refugees are responsible for terrorist attacks. The vast majority behind these attacks are people who were born in the EU. They are often even the grandchildren migrants from the Middle East or North Africa. It is wrong to say that the only solution is lockdown.”

“What is important, however, is the development of a common European migration and asylum policy that will treat these phenomena in a multi-aspect manner. The world is changing. And it is only up to us whether we face these changes together as 500 million EU citizens, or whether everyone will solve these problems alone,” said Thun.

For Bogusław Liberadzki, MEP of the Democratic Left Alliance (SLD) and vice-President of the European Parliament on behalf of S&D, the issue of migration is in fact the issue of what Europe will look like around the year 2050.

“On the one hand, in many countries of the EU, especially in the West, there is a shortage of hands to work. On the other, people from non-European countries are much more demographically active than ageing Europe. Simply put – they have more children.”

“That is why the EU must ask questions not only about finding solutions to current challenges but also about the model of society and the demographic structure in 20-30 years. We must think about integration measures because mistakes committed 30-40 years ago mean that today we are dealing with the radicalisation of people who come from immigrant families but were born in the EU.”

Despite all the fuss, very few refugees actually come to Poland and most of those who arrive here want to go on to the countries in Western Europe, so migration in Poland is a marginal issue.

At the same time, there are more than 2.5 million Polish citizens permanently residing in the other EU member states, according to the Central Statistical Office’s data presented in February.
Reaching a common EU response to the long-running migration crisis has been painfully slow. Ministers remain deadlocked on plans to reform the so-called Dublin Regulation that sets out the EU’s common migration and asylum rules.

Italian MEP Elly Schlein, the negotiator on Dublin for the centre-left Socialist and Democrat group, described this impasse as “shameful”.

“They have had the proposal from the European Commission for over two years. Instead, they are focused only on externalising borders,” by cutting deals with the likes of Libya and Turkey, she told EURACTIV.

“There is no leadership... no understanding that common challenges need common solutions,” she added.

While ministers remain divided, MEPs backed an overhaul of the Dublin Regulation last November with a large cross-party majority, and are now waiting for governments to join them at the negotiating table.

Schlein described the Parliament vote as “a historical mark”, and says that she “wasn’t expecting to get to get such an ambitious approach in the EP on such a divisive matter.”

“It was the first time that the European Parliament found a compromise on first country entry on automatic burden sharing,” and amounted to a “truly European” approach on migration, she says.

Schlein, Swedish rapporteur Cecilia Wikström, and the Parliament’s other negotiators will hold a press conference in the coming days to urge member states to reach a common position and agree to the initiation of negotiations.

Migration Commissioner Dimitris Avramopoulos will spearhead another attempt to get EU leaders to agree a

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common position on the overhaul of the bloc’s Dublin regulation at a summit in Brussels on 28-29 June.

**NO OBLIGATION**

But Schlein conceded that MEPs can do little if governments continue to delay. Talks have been stuck since October.

“There is no obligation on their side,” she admitted.

“We will continue to put pressure on governments and tell citizens that the European Parliament has done its part. We are ready to sit and negotiate.”

While the Parliament is keen to start negotiations, with less than a year remaining until the mandate is brought to an end by the May 2019 European elections, Schlein insisted that governments will not be allowed to ‘cherry-pick’ parts of the regulation.

“We are still insisting on the package approach…you cannot have discussions on EURODAC and the agency (which member states are interested in) if you don’t start negotiating on Dublin. You can’t cherry pick,” she says.

Schlein says the EU “must have” a permanent means of redistributing asylum seekers, a provision that forms part of the Parliament’s mandate.

The Central European Visegrad Group, led by Hungary and Poland, who have consistently refused to be party to EU refugee resettlement quotas, are widely seen as the main obstacles but Schlein said they are not the only countries responsible for the deadlock.

“It’s very easy to blame the Visegrad group because they have been the most vocal on refusing burden sharing. But a number of countries also don’t want to change things.”

Her ire is also focused on Germany, while French President Emmanuel Macron needs to back up his pro-European rhetoric in the European Council, she said.

“Several years ago, Germany wanted an ambitious reform of Dublin, but I think Germany forgot that ambition when they got the Turkey deal.”

“It was good to have to have Macron in the Parliament, but I want to see pro-Europeanism in Council., and France has not taken a strong position in Council.”

**UNSATISFIED**

The latest proposal tabled by the Bulgarian presidency is essentially voluntary, allowing reluctant countries to handpick refugees or pay another country €30,000 for each person that they refuse to take, as a compromise.

Schlein said this proposal, which would only apply in emergency situations is "not workable".

“What I think is that the Council wants to keep the last word by sideling the Parliament and Commission in these matters.”

Nor has the Bulgarian proposal satisfied the group of five Mediterranean countries – Italy, Spain, Greece, Cyprus and Malta – who are the principle ‘point of entry’ for migrants from North Africa and the Middle East. They complain that the new proposal still places an overly heavy burden on recipient countries.

“It is obvious that the Southern Mediterranean countries should not be left alone,” said Schlein.

For its part, the Parliament’s position is far tougher. It contains automatic burden sharing of refugees and would allow the Commission to withhold structural funds to countries refusing to take their share of refugees.

In the meantime, Schlein downplayed the prospect of a new Italian government dominated by Five Star and anti-immigration Lega Nord heralding a change in Italy’s approach on Dublin reform.

Five Star and Lega MEPs opposed the Parliament’s position in November, but Schlein hinted that this is changing.

“I could see a shift that they would support the position in Council,” she told EURACTIV.

However, the recent sharp fall in the number of would-be migrants arriving on European shores could also strengthen the resolve of governments to delay negotiations.

The International Organisation for Migration data (IOM) has reported that almost 19,000 people arrived in Europe in the first four months of this year compared to around 44,600 in 2017.

“It’s undeniable that the flows have reduced, but they have been falling for the wrong reasons,” said Schlein

“The situation in Italy is still critical. The reception system in Italy and Greece has been put under huge pressure in recent years,” she added.

Schlein was also sceptical about the €3 billion EU-Turkey deal – “I don’t think this is a durable solution,” she said.

The EU was forced to abandon refugee quotas last autumn after member states resettled a mere 28,000 refugees, far short of the initial 160,000 target set by the European Commission.

Above all, Schlein dismissed the idea that this level of refugee resettlement cannot be reached.

“We had 1.3 million arrivals in 2016 (at the height of the migration crisis), but that’s still only 0.25% of the European population,” she pointed out.

“It’s not a problem of means and population but of lack of political will. Canada has been able to resettle 44,000, more than the entire EU.”

But despite the impasse, Schlein said it is not too late to find an agreement.

“I’m still hopeful,” she insisted.

“At a certain point, I hope they (governments) realise that the citizens want us to deliver.”