

The Budgetary Future of Migration and Development Policy in the European Union

by Aysel Küçüksu

ABSTRACT

In June 2018, the European Commission released a number of proposals addressing aspects of the European Union's upcoming Multiannual Financial Framework for the 2021–2027 period. From a migration-policy perspective, the proposals under the "Migration and Border Management" heading, engaging with the internal aspects of migration, and those under the "Neighbourhood and the World" heading, engaging with the overall external action of the Union, are the most noteworthy and controversial. This is down to their securitisation of the language of migration and their designation of development funds for the purpose of deterring migration. Although the final version of the proposals is not yet ready, examining the drafts is a worthwhile endeavour because it enables a better understanding of the rough shape of migration management in the EU for the foreseeable future. It also offers the chance to outline more coherent and balanced EU external actions through raising alternative proposals.

European Union | EU budget | Migration | Economic aid

keywords

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Introduction

In late spring 2018, the European Commission released a number of proposals addressing different aspects of the upcoming Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF), which allocates the European Union's budget across various policy dimensions for the 2021–7 period. Negotiations have been ongoing and a great deal of progress has been made, with certain numbers, percentages and other details being susceptible to change – especially in the light of criticisms voiced by the European Parliament and other civil-society interventions.¹

The Commission's proposals are still in draft form. However, the main contours laid out by the June 2018 proposals are unlikely to change – for example, the overall, and significantly elevated, importance of migration; the focus on migration control- and enforcement-related spending; and the emphasis on the root causes of migration as a means to reducing the phenomenon.

Two migration-related proposals are among the most noteworthy: those under the "Migration and Border Management" heading, dealing with the internal aspects of migration, and those under the "Neighbourhood and the World" heading, dealing with the overall external action of the Union, including certain external aspects of migration. They have also proven to be the most controversial, owing to their securitisation of the language of migration and designation of development funds for the purpose of deterring migration.

¹ European Parliament, *Interim Report on the Multiannual Financial Framework 2021-2027 – Parliament's Position with a View to an Agreement (A8-0358/2018)*, 7 November 2018, http://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/A-8-2018-0358_EN.html.

* Aysel Küçüksu is a Marie Curie Doctoral Fellow in Law and Political Philosophy at the University of Geneva and LUISS Guido Carli (Rome) within the framework of the GEM-STONES research programme.

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These trends are problematic due to contradictions inherent in the simultaneous pursuit of enhanced internal security and external development through deterring migration. While still provisional, the drafts are worth examining. Such an endeavour enables a better understanding of the rough shape of migration management in the EU in the foreseeable future, it offers cautionary observations capable of moulding more coherent and balanced EU external action, and allows the airing of some alternative proposals for the most controversial aspects.

Before proceeding, a few clarifications and reminders are in order concerning the current budget headings and their relationships with the proposals under discussion. Currently, we are covered by the 2014–20 MFF, wherein migration is addressed under two separate headings. First is the “Security and Citizenship” heading. This focuses on improving immigration and asylum policy as well as on border protection – amongst other targets like justice and home affairs, public health, consumer protection, culture, youth, information and dialogue with citizens.² Second is the “Global Europe” heading, which covers all external action by the Union – be it development assistance or humanitarian aid.

The newly proposed budget (covering the 2021–7 period) breaks continuity with the previous one (covering 2014–20) in several ways. Within the context of migration and development, it changes the names of the headings mentioned above and pursues some substantive alterations to reflect the Union’s realigned priorities. Therefore, what is currently the “Security and Citizenship” heading in the ongoing MFF is to be separated into two new ones – namely, “Migration and Border Management” and “Security and Defence”. When it comes to the question of development, the current “Global Europe” heading governing external-action spending is to be changed to “Neighbourhood and the World”. Although these could initially be taken as merely formal changes, they tell us a great deal about the kind of reshuffling and re-prioritisation of issues informing the new budgetary proposals.

As for the internal dimension, the matters of migration and border management are brought together and transformed under a heading of their own. This change shows that in the foreseeable future addressing the question of migration will be closely associated with the issue of border management, while also emphasising the priority given to this policy dimension. In this respect, it is a clarifying exercise. The current pursuit of border management alongside objectives like culture, public health and consumer protection makes the “Security and Citizenship” heading both confusing and disjointed due to the absence of a clear budgetary focus. Putting the question of migration and border management under a separate single heading is therefore a decision to be welcomed.

When it comes to the question of the Union’s budget for external action, including development, the transformation of the current “Global Europe” heading into

² European Commission website: *EU Budget Headings and Ceilings*, https://ec.europa.eu/info/about-european-commission/eu-budget/how-it-works/long-term-planning/headings-and-ceilings_en.

“Neighbourhood and the World” is not a purely cosmetic change. Quite the contrary, the new budget proposal fundamentally changes external-action spending. Critically, the 2021–7 budget proposal aims to incorporate funding from the European Development Fund (EDF) into the EU budgetary structure. The EDF, which covers development-cooperation aid with African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) countries, amongst other overseas territories, does not fall under the 2014–20 MFF.³ The EDF has thus far been funded by direct contributions from member states (as opposed to the EU budget),⁴ with the immediate practical consequence of its falling outside the monitoring jurisdiction of the European Parliament. Therefore, the incorporation of the EDF into the EU budgetary structure is consequential for both the handling and the monitoring of external-action spending by making it more transparent and democratically accountable.

1. The Migration and Border Management budget proposal

On 2 May 2018 the Commission published the Migration and Border Management factsheet (“the May factsheet”).⁵ On 12 June, the Commission removed it from the website dedicated to the new MFF budget proposal and replaced it with two separate factsheets (“the June factsheets”): Migration: Supporting a Robust, Realistic and Fair EU Policy and Securing the EU’s External Borders – “the Migration factsheet” and “the Border Management factsheet”, respectively.⁶ Together, they list the most important figures related to the Migration and Border Management budget proposal.

1.1 The Migration factsheet

The Migration factsheet shows an increase in funding from 7.3 billion euro for the current MFF cycle to 11.3 billion euro for the 2021–7 period.⁷ The majority of this sum – namely, 10.4 billion – will be used for the establishment of an Asylum and Migration Fund,⁸ which will aim for a “stronger and more efficient” Common European Asylum System (CEAS), increased support for integration, and a quicker

³ Ibid.

⁴ European Commission website: *European Development Fund (EDF)*, https://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/funding/funding-instruments-programming/funding-instruments/european-development-fund_en.

⁵ European Commission, *EU Budget for the Future. Migration and Border Management (Factsheet)*, 2 May 2018, <https://doi.org/10.2775/621313>.

⁶ European Commission, *EU Budget for the Future. Migration: Supporting a Robust, Realistic and Fair EU Policy (Factsheet)*, 12 June 2018, https://ec.europa.eu/commission/sites/beta-political/files/budget-may2018-fair-migration-policy_en_0.pdf; and *EU Budget for the Future. Securing the EU’s External Borders (Factsheet)*, 12 June 2018, https://ec.europa.eu/commission/sites/beta-political/files/budget-may2018-securing-external-borders_en.pdf.

⁷ European Commission, *EU Budget for the Future. Migration...*, cit.

⁸ European Commission, *Proposal for a Regulation establishing the Asylum and Migration Fund (COM/2018/471)*, 12 June 2018, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:52018PC0471>.

and more effective returns system.⁹ For comparison, in the ongoing budget, 6.9 billion euro was allocated to an Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund. The Migration factsheet portrays budgetary efforts towards the internal management of migration in a positive light. Rather than a cause for anxiety and fear, what is termed “the refugee crisis of 2015 and 2016” is framed as the origin of an effort to improve the Union’s response to similar events in the future through “develop[ing] search and rescue capacities, increas[ing] reception capacity, and stepp[ing] up returns”.¹⁰

Indeed, with the agenda espoused in the Migration factsheet, the proposed budgetary increase is a welcome development. Yet the question as to the precise allocation of these funds across the various policy pillars and the balance between them remains unanswered. Additionally, although the CEAS is in desperate need of increased resources, its shortcomings cannot be completely rectified without addressing the underlying political issue of solidarity, or the lack thereof. Indeed, increased resources could benefit the functioning of the CEAS, but in the absence of any action towards solving the current political deadlock more money would bring only temporary relief. The factsheet states that 6.3 billion euro would be dedicated to supporting member states in managing migration in a manner reflective of their needs.¹¹ Here, we see the Commission filling the vacuum created by some member states’ reluctance to show solidarity to those states that carry the burden of being the external maritime borders of the Union. The Migration part of the budgetary proposal therefore represents a welcome refocusing of the Union’s attention towards the internal dimension of its migration-and-asylum policy. However, an appropriate distribution of funds towards improving asylum-reception capacities, search-and-rescue operations, and returns is needed to remedy the existing internal shortcomings.

1.2 The Border Management factsheet

The second factsheet addresses border management and proposes an increase from 5.6 billion euro (for the 2014–20 period) to 21.3 billion (for the 2021–7 period).¹² Here, 9.3 billion of the new total will go to the creation of an Integrated Border Management Fund, whilst 12 billion will be provided to member states in need of support for protecting EU borders, for increasing the capacity of the EU Border and Coast Guard, and for EU-LISA (the large-scale IT system operating within the Area of Freedom, Security and Justice).

This significant (almost threefold) increase in funding for securing EU borders is remarkable in the context of the Commission’s own published estimation that “irregular refugee arrivals to the European Union have dropped by 63% in

⁹ European Commission, *EU Budget for the Future. Migration: ...*, cit.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² European Commission, *EU Budget for the Future. Securing the EU’s External Borders*, cit.

2017".¹³ Interestingly, this statement was published in the May factsheet but has been removed from the two June ones. This omission is of no consequence to the numbers, however. The quarterly reports from Eurostat, the European Commission's directorate-general, reveal a continuous downward trend in the total number of asylum applications lodged in the EU – with a dramatic decrease from 1,322,845 applications at the height of the refugee crisis in 2015 to 646,060 applications in 2018 (a reduction of 51 per cent).¹⁴

Emergency preparedness is important considering that the political, economic, security-related and environmental factors in the EU's broader neighbourhood do not preclude the appearance of future peaks in migratory inflows. Additionally, the further reinforcement of external borders can be seen as compensating for the deadlock in the CEAS (particularly when it comes to the reform of the Dublin regulations, which set basic rules for processing asylum requests in the EU) and the solidarity deficit within the Union (particularly when it comes to asylum).

As member states cannot agree on responsibility sharing or the associated issues of intra-EU secondary movements, the overburdening of frontline states or the difference in member states' structural capacities, they have shifted their attention (and funds) to the reinforcement of the Union's external borders – an issue on which they can agree. Yet, bearing the reduced numbers in mind, it is hard not to read the Migration and Border Management proposal as having been largely influenced by the anti-immigration wave that has overtaken the rhetoric and the agenda of a number of EU member states – including, but not limited to, Italy, Hungary and Austria.

Allowing the future of EU migration policy to be defined predominantly by the issue of control at a time when a significant drop has occurred in numbers of arrivals at EU borders means that a long-term EU budget is being drawn up based on the false premise of a "crisis" that no longer exists, even if emergency preparedness is to be kept in mind. Considering the fact that the internal and external dimensions of migration are closely related, allocating such a significant part of the budget to the internal governance of migration in order to prevent or contain the phenomenon creates a clash with values enshrined in the Treaty on European Union (TEU).¹⁵ This contributes to policy incoherence in overall terms, but particularly as regards the EU's foreign policy.

¹³ European Commission, *EU Budget for the Future. Migration and Border Management*, cit.

¹⁴ Eurostat, *Asylum and first time asylum applicants by citizenship, age and sex. Annual aggregated data (rounded)*, http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/product?code=migr_asyappctza&language=en&mode=view.

¹⁵ See Article 3(5) of the Treaty on European Union: "In its relations with the wider world, the Union shall uphold and promote its values and interests and contribute to the protection of its citizens. It shall contribute to peace, security, the sustainable development of the Earth, solidarity and mutual respect among peoples, free and fair trade, eradication of poverty and the protection of human rights, in particular the rights of the child, as well as to the strict observance and the development of international law, including respect for the principles of the United Nations Charter."

Even given the fact that both Commission factsheets presume that “migration and border management will remain a challenge in the future”,¹⁶ the Border Management one rhetorically establishes “the effective protection of the EU’s external borders” as a necessary precondition for “ensur[ing the] internal security” of the EU.¹⁷ This is used as a justification for a more than sixfold increase in the number of EU border guards from the current 1,500 to 10,000, swiftly exposing the underlying presumption throughout the Border Management factsheet that increased EU-bound migration and decreased security for EU citizens are directly correlated.

The focus on border management is to the detriment of a more comprehensive migration and asylum policy. It leads to a disjointedness between the Border Management and the Migration factsheets by creating the impression that they are best described as belonging to two separate budget proposals, when in reality they belong together. On the other hand, such an increase in EU border-guard staff could also be seen as a “Europeanisation” of the management of EU external borders if it were to be matched with real reform that rendered the asylum system also truly European. Such reform could consist of broadening the legal pathways to seeking asylum in Europe, enhanced the authority of the EU (i.e. for its European Asylum Support Office in this case) in processing asylum applications, and handing the EU the political mandate for jointly managing the Union’s external borders.

If both the external borders and asylum governance were to become genuinely Europeanised, then it would make sense to channel all those funds towards common border and asylum management, rather than irregular-migration termination. That would potentially lead to a truly European management of asylum, which is not exclusively set on reinforcing some sort of “Fortress Europe”.

2. The Neighbourhood and the World budget proposal

On 14 June 2018, the European Commission released its long-term EU external-budget proposal entitled “Neighbourhood and the World”,¹⁸ which covers EU foreign-policy spending. It is more migration- than development-oriented and has an additional part devoted to the external handling of migration. Its basic premise is the fact that “in an increasingly complex and connected world, [p]rosperity and peace in the EU’s neighbourhood has a positive impact on the EU’s own prosperity”.¹⁹

¹⁶ European Commission, *EU Budget for the Future. Migration: ...*, cit.

¹⁷ European Commission, *EU Budget for the Future. Securing the EU’s External Borders*, cit.

¹⁸ European Commission, *EU Budget: Making the EU Fit For Its Role As a Strong Global Actor*, 14 June 2018, http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_IP-18-4086_en.htm.

¹⁹ European Commission, *EU Budget for the Future. The Neighbourhood and the World (Factsheet)*, 2 May 2018, https://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/eu-budget-future-neighbourhood-and-world_en. See

A close reading of the Commission's summary leaflet shows that two aspects stand out.

Firstly, the leaflet announces a 30 per cent increase in the EU's external-action budget, from 94.5 billion to 123 billion euro, and promises a more accessible, flexible and effective structure for taking on the global challenges of the day. The press release accompanying the budget describes the proposal as "the EU's main tool to support its partner countries in their political and economic transformations towards sustainable development, stability, consolidation of democracy, socio-economic development and the eradication of poverty", adding that "[i]t will also allow the EU to continue to provide humanitarian assistance all over the world".²⁰ Bearing these guiding values in mind, the increase in the budget is a welcome move from a global developmental perspective.

Secondly, the budget envisages the creation of five distinct instruments to improve the coherence and effectiveness of EU external action. These are:

- the Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument (NDICI), with 89.2 billion euro at its disposal, which will merge most of the existing external funding instruments and integrate the EDF into its architecture and, therefore, into the EU budget;
- the Humanitarian Aid Instrument,²¹ which will make 11 billion euro available for helping populations affected by natural disasters and man-made crises;
- the Common Foreign and Security budget of 3 billion euro, envisaged for "build[ing] the capacity of partner countries and protect[ing] the EU and its citizens";²²
- the Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance,²³ which will make available 14.5 billion euro to support EU candidate countries on their path towards accession; and
- the European Instrument for Nuclear Safety, which is to have 300 million euro for complementing the undertakings of the amended Euratom Treaty.

The differentiation of these instruments is a welcome move in terms of clarity – especially the establishment of a separate regulation on humanitarian aid, which currently continues to fall under the Global Europe heading alongside all other foreign-action spending. Although all instruments are important, the NDICI is – as we will see, below – the most relevant to the question of migration and development.

also the factsheets dated 14 June 2018: <https://europa.eu/lyB68vq>.

²⁰ European Commission, *EU Budget: Making the EU Fit For Its Role As a Strong Global Actor*, cit.

²¹ European Commission, *EU Budget for the Future. EU Humanitarian Aid* (Factsheet), 14 June 2018, https://ec.europa.eu/commission/sites/beta-political/files/budget-may2018-humanitarian-aid_en.pdf.

²² European Commission, *EU Budget: Making the EU Fit For Its Role As a Strong Global Actor*, cit.

²³ European Commission, *EU Budget for the Future. The New Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance* (Factsheet), 14 June 2018, https://ec.europa.eu/commission/sites/beta-political/files/budget-may2018-pre-accession-assistance_en.pdf.

2.1 The game-changing nature of the NDICI

The consolidation of the Union's foreign spending, including development assistance, into one major instrument, the Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument, is indeed the most notable aspect of the Neighbourhood and the World budget proposal. The NDICI has been allocated the largest share of external-action funds, with the sum of 89.2 billion euro (out of the 123 billion available in the budget) to be distributed across a geographic, a thematic and a rapid response pillar. Most importantly, according to the draft regulation proposal, the NDICI will streamline all of the Global Europe external-action financing instruments (except for macro-financial assistance grants and some aspects of the Instrument for Nuclear Safety Cooperation) and the EDF as soon as they all expire in December 2020.²⁴

Currently, the Union's development work is a complicated web of so many instruments²⁵ that keeping track of them is next to impossible. In fact, not only is foreign spending a convoluted and opaque mesh of different funding streams but it is also largely undertaken through the EDF, which is outside the EU budget and thereby also outside the European Parliament's scrutiny. Since 2014, when the application of the current MFF started, four EU Trust Funds (EUTFs) have been established outside the EU budget under the EDF.²⁶ Their alleged flexibility and rapidness has come at the cost of democratic, legal and financial accountability, which is why the consolidation of the Union's foreign spending is a welcome step in addressing those shortcomings. The NDICI improves the transparency and accountability of the Union's foreign spending.

The pillar structure used to distribute funds arguably clarifies different funding aims, although the distribution of funds amongst the pillars certainly creates a hierarchy. For example, the geographic pillar is to be allocated 68 billion euro of funds for the purposes of fostering dialogue and cooperation with third countries and regions beyond the EU – the Union's immediate neighbourhood and sub-Saharan Africa being the notable priorities. In contrast, the thematic pillar is to be allocated the comparatively modest sum of 7 billion euro, whilst the rapid-response

²⁴ European Commission, *Proposal for a Regulation establishing the Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument* (COM/2018/460), 14 June 2018, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:52018PC0460>.

²⁵ European Commission website: *External Action Financing Instruments*, https://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/funding/about-funding-and-procedures/where-does-money-come/external-action-financing-instruments_en. See also ECDPM website: *The Multiannual Financial Framework*, <http://www.ecdpm.org/mff>.

²⁶ The EU Trust Fund for Colombia, the EU Emergency Trust Fund for stability and addressing the root causes of irregular migration, and displaced persons in Africa (EU Trust Fund for Africa), the EU Trust Fund in Response to the Syrian Crisis (the Madad Trust Fund), and the EU Trust Fund for the Central African Republic (the Békou Trust Fund). For more information, see Sergio Carrera et al., *Oversight and Management of the EU Trust Funds. Democratic Accountability Challenges and Promising Practices*, Brussels, European Parliament, April 2018, [http://www.europarl.europa.eu/thinktank/en/document.html?reference=IPOL_STU\(2018\)603821](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/thinktank/en/document.html?reference=IPOL_STU(2018)603821).

pillar is to benefit from 4 billion.²⁷ Outside the pillar structure, a so-called “flexibility cushion” worth 10.2 billion euro (and therefore more than either the thematic or the rapid-response pillar) will enable the EU to deal with any new challenges. Whilst having room for flexibility is an asset, the amount allocated for the purpose (when compared with the 7 billion euro for the clearly outlined objectives of the thematic pillar) reflects the Union’s willingness to prioritise flexibility over predictability, accountability and having clearly set long-term goals.

2.2 The NDICI on poverty eradication and the Sustainable Development Goals

Despite the increased transparency and accountability injected into EU external finance through the NDICI, the migration focus of the Neighbourhood and the World instrument comes at the apparent price of both the downgrading of its development commitments and the securitisation of its development aims. This is evidenced throughout the NDICI regulation proposal. To begin with, Article 3 of the proposal,²⁸ which presents the objectives of the instrument, fails to list poverty eradication amongst its goals despite finding the space to include “migration and mobility”,²⁹ an issue that is already being addressed elsewhere in the overall budget proposal,³⁰ as one of its main concerns.

This omission is in contrast not only with the Union’s stated foreign-policy priorities³¹ and its commitment to ensure policy coherence for development, as required by Article 208 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU), but also with reassurances offered by several high-level EU institutional actors in the press release announcing the new budget proposal. High Representative/Vice-President Federica Mogherini underlined the importance of the increased budget for the Union’s credibility as a “reliable, predictable, cooperative global player”, whilst Commissioner for International Cooperation and Development Neven Mimica noted the Union’s role as “a key promoter of the UN 2030 Agenda and its Sustainable Development Goals”, adding that the budget reflects the Union’s wish to help eradicate poverty.³²

²⁷ European Commission, *EU Budget for the Future. The Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument (NDICI)* (Factsheet), 14 June 2018, https://ec.europa.eu/commission/sites/beta-political/files/budget-may2018-neighbourhood-development-cooperation_en.pdf.

²⁸ European Commission, *Proposal for a Regulation establishing the Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument*, cit.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, Article 3(2)(b).

³⁰ See the Migration and Border Management heading.

³¹ See Article 208 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union, wherein the reduction of poverty in the short term and its eradication in the long term are listed as primary objectives of the EU’s development-cooperation policy. See also Article 21(2)(d) of the Treaty on European Union, in which poverty eradication is listed amongst the objectives of the Union’s external action.

³² European Commission, *EU Budget: Making the EU Fit For Its Role As a Strong Global Actor*, cit.

This absence of poverty eradication from the stated goals of the provision, made all the more obvious by the presence of goals already pursued elsewhere in the budget, led to criticisms. A development-oriented non-governmental organisation (NGO) argued that the proposed regulation is evidence of development being “subsumed” under the political interests of the EU as commissioners talk “about poverty eradication but put something else in writing”.³³ In response to the outcry, Mimica rushed to state that “Poverty eradication is now, and will be in the future, the core priority, the core focus of the European development actions and development engagements abroad.”³⁴ Yet, the silence of the proposal on the issue of poverty eradication when setting its own agenda speaks louder than the commissioner’s assurances.

It is important to note that although poverty eradication is absent from the NDICI’s objectives, the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) do get a mention – in Article 4(5),³⁵ which states that the programmes under the thematic pillar should support the objective of meeting the SDGs. However, as mentioned above, the thematic pillar has a much smaller budget share (and a much lower priority) than the geographic pillar, in which there is no mention of them. In a similar vein, Article 5 states that the implementation of the regulation should ensure policy coherence for development. Unfortunately, these fleeting references to meeting the SDGs are unable to compensate for their absence from the objectives of the regulation. The mentions that they do merit are simply insufficient.

The NDICI proposal demonstrates the downgrading of the SDGs in the Union’s budgetary landscape for the foreseeable future, despite the EU’s explicit commitment to “promot[ing] multilateral solutions to common problems, in particular in the framework of the United Nations”³⁶ and to “eradicating poverty”.³⁷ Therefore, CONCORD, the European Confederation of Development NGOs, has raised its concerns that the NDICI “would increase the risk of development cooperation becoming secondary to self-interested foreign policy and divert aid from its main objectives – poverty eradication and long-term sustainable development”. It further noted, “This trend is also reflected in the Commission’s will to put flexibility over predictability and accountability.”³⁸ Additionally, 10 per cent of the NDICI’s funds will go towards the ambitious yet vague aim of “addressing

³³ Jonathan Beger, director of EU advocacy at World Vision, quoted in Vince Chadwick, “Alarm Bells Sounded Over New EU Aid Instrument Proposals”, in *Devex*, 15 June 2018, <https://www.devex.com/news/alarm-bells-sounded-over-new-eu-aid-instrument-proposals-92936>.

³⁴ Neven Mimica as quoted in Lili Bayer, “Brussels Defends Development Aid Link to Migration”, in *Politico*, 24 July 2018, <https://www.politico.eu/article/neven-mimica-migration-budget-commissioner-defends-development-aid-link>.

³⁵ See Article 4(5) of the European Commission, *Proposal for a Regulation establishing the Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument*, cit.

³⁶ See Article 21 of the Treaty on European Union.

³⁷ See Articles 3(5) and 21(2)(d) of the Treaty on European Union.

³⁸ CONCORD Europe, *EU Budget: Development Aid Blended with Foreign Policy Objectives*, 14 June 2018, <https://wp.me/p76mJt-2GG>.

the root causes of irregular migration and forced displacement and to supporting migration management and governance including the protection of refugees and migrants' rights".³⁹ In addition, there is the "flexibility cushion", a large share of which might be allocated to migration-security-related issues considering the political prioritisation of these issues as well as the continuing "crisis" modality informing the European approach to them.

Migration is one of the few policy areas that have been allocated a dedicated share of the budget's external-action funding, highlighting both its prioritisation within the MFF and the Union's committed adherence to the idea that sees development as a means of reducing the incentives for migration. The explicit encroachment of migration-halting pursuits into the NDICI, which is primarily a development instrument, makes the absence of an unambiguous setting of poverty eradication amongst its goals a bitter pill to swallow – even more so when this allocation is foreseen despite the already nearly tripled proposed spending on the issue (from 13 billion euro for the 2014–20 period to 34.9 billion for the 2021–7 period) envisaged under the separate Migration and Border Management budget proposal of the MFF.

This near-threefold increase will cover the EU's internal handling of migration issues (namely border control, return, relocation, asylum, integration, etc.) and thus does not have a development-driven agenda. The urge to curb migration is so overwhelming that parts of the external-action budget, which is supposed to be mainly development-oriented, have been held hostage to the goal of preventing migration before the movement has even taken place.

2.3 The increasingly problematic linkage of development and migration

It is difficult to neglect the fact that both the Neighbourhood and the World and the Migration and Border Management budget proposals suffer from the interplay between the securitisation of the migration debate on the one hand and the misrepresentation of the migration phenomenon on the other. "Securitisation of migration" refers to the shift of the discourse over migration towards an emphasis on security. This results in an imaginary circle whereby migration is primarily seen as a security problem, which is to be dealt with through controlling borders and ensuring development – which are in turn expected to contribute to curbing migration. Indeed, one could argue that the securitisation of the migration debate is the driver behind the establishment of the nexus between migration and development, as that nexus is subsequently used to justify the designation of development money for curbing migration.

Two points are worth stressing in this respect.

³⁹ See Preamble, paragraph 30 of the European Commission, *Proposal for a Regulation establishing the Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument*, cit.

First, using development money to curb migration is counterproductive from a development point of view as migration is actually beneficial for development through processes like remittance absorption. The World Bank has long observed the relationship between remittances and development. A 2008 report emphasises the fact that remittances lead to economic development through reducing poverty and economic inequality whilst increasing aggregate investment and growth in the recipient countries.⁴⁰ Still, the World Bank warns that phenomena like “brain drains” might cause the net economic developmental effects of remittance absorption to be more modest, in order to caution against conceiving of remittances as an “alternative to sound economic policies”. Nonetheless, the report’s conclusion is that “remittances should [...] be welcomed, encouraged and facilitated” and that “policy makers may take actions to enhance the development impact of remittances”.⁴¹ Important reports like this one underline the fact that the use of development money to curb migration is a contradiction in terms. Such a use is not only counterproductive and self-defeating but also undermines the whole project of pursuing coherence in the EU’s overall policy through the introduction of a consolidating instrument like the NDICI.

Second, the reconfiguration of the migration-development nexus reproduces the largely unfounded narrative that improving development prospects would help in stopping the phenomenon of migration. In fact, not only does migration lead to economic development (as the study of the effects of remittances proves) but, conversely, development leads to migration – often amongst the upper echelons of society – because it generates enough resources for people to sustain the costs of emigrating.⁴² The European Commission itself has published a very well-drafted factsheet explaining the now well-known inverted U-curve mobility transition argument, which contends that migration initially increases with more development and tends to lessen only when countries reach upper-middle income level.⁴³ In a curious twist of fate, the designation of development money for migration curbing is doubly counterproductive in that it is not even effective from the perspective of primarily aiming to stem migration, at least in the short to medium term.

A refusal to readily connect migration and security would allow human mobility to reclaim the spotlight in the debate, and prevent resources that could be used towards improving practices surrounding such mobility from being invested into those that enhance “Fortress Europe”. That would additionally permit the

⁴⁰ Pablo Fajnzylber and J. Humberto López, “The Development Impact of Remittances in Latin America”, in Pablo Fajnzylber and J. Humberto López (eds), *Remittances and Development. Lessons from Latin America*, Washington, World Bank, 2008, p. 3, <http://hdl.handle.net/10986/6911>.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 2-3.

⁴² For example, Florian Oel, a spokesperson for Oxfam, has previously noted that “development leads to more migration, not less – and economic growth often relies on migration”. See Lili Bayer, “Brussels Defends Development Aid Link to Migration”, *cit.*

⁴³ European Commission, *Development and Migration (Factsheet)*, March 2017, https://ec.europa.eu/jrc/sites/jrcsh/files/developmentandmigration_3.pdf.

focusing of financial resources towards more sustainable initiatives around long-term integration and social cohesion, opening legal migration pathways, building solidarity mechanisms and enabling capacity building amongst member states. It would prevent long-term development commitments, enshrined in the EU treaties, from being hijacked by short-term pressures, whether manifested in the dubbing of unexpected phenomena as “crises” or as the promotion – particularly by some European governments – of an agenda whose unreasonableness is shrouded by its loudness.

Conclusions

The European Commission’s Migration and Border Management budget proposal is guided by positive commitments and envisages a number of progressive initiatives for budgetary spending. Importantly, the Migration part of the budgetary proposal refocuses the Union’s attention towards the internal dimension of its migration-and-asylum policy. However, as per this policy brief’s suggestion for improvement, a balanced distribution of the funds between asylum-reception capacity, search-and-rescue operations and returns remains much needed in order to remedy existing internal shortcomings.

As for the Border Management part, it seems that the future of EU migration policy will be predominantly defined by control at a time when we have witnessed a significant drop in numbers of unauthorised arrivals to the EU. This reduction in arrivals does not imply that emergency preparedness is no longer relevant, but the orientation of narratives, policies and financial resources needs to take into account the fact that if there is currently any “crisis”, it derives not so much from the size of migration flows as from the politics of migration. Therefore, the significant emphasis on border management and the sixfold increase in European Border and Coast Guard staff could have a more positive impact if they were to be matched with real reform that makes the asylum system also truly European. That would potentially lead to a genuine European management of migration and asylum, rather than merely boosting the operational arm of the EU to eventually predominantly serve the purpose of curbing irregular migration flows.

Within the Neighbourhood and the World budget proposal, the NDICI improves the transparency and accountability of the Union’s foreign spending. Under the current regime, EU development funding continues to be shrouded in the “mystery” created by the many funding instruments established under the EDF, all of which fall outside the Union’s budget and are therefore beyond the reach of EU parliamentary observation and scrutiny. Positively, with the creation of the NDICI, all future development-funding instruments will be incorporated into the official EU budgetary framework. This would streamline the monitoring process and inject the Union’s external-funding procedure with some much-needed democratic accountability. It would also testify in favour of the Union’s desire to pursue better-coordinated policies, which cohere both with each other and with

the overall EU agenda.

These budget proposals reveal the fact that we are witnessing not a “numbers” crisis but a political one. The policy landscape is dominated by a discourse that argues for prioritising short-term measures aiming primarily, if not exclusively, at reducing the number of arrivals – implying a focus on border control and stemming migration. According to this increasingly prominent approach, long-term policy objectives that are not primarily migration-focused – such as creating jobs, reducing income gaps and investing in development – could be part of the agenda only once the numbers are reduced. Despite shaping EU policy for the next seven years, these budget proposals seem to be largely informed by a short-term crisis mode. This fundamental contradiction in basing multi-annual plans on temporary trepidation needs to be highlighted so that it can be addressed.

Finally, a more realistic and nuanced portrayal of the phenomenon should replace simplistic representations largely based on prejudice. This is important because narratives influence policies. An understanding of migration as a complex phenomenon would reveal the fact that the use of development funds for curbing migration makes no sense logically and imperils the achievement of developmental objectives, as well as the fact that well-managed migration, albeit not automatically, is more likely to contribute to development than not. Funds and policies, therefore, need to be directed towards creating the conditions for migration to be beneficial for development in contexts of origin – whether these conditions are related to labour-migration coordination, facilitation of remittance transfers or diaspora engagement – and for narratives of migration to follow suit. Such renewed rhetoric and policy orientation would reinforce the Union’s currently obscured and downgraded commitment to the UN-led development agenda in general, and to attaining the Sustainable Development Goals in particular.

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Via Angelo Brunetti, 9 - I-00186 Rome, Italy

T +39 06 3224360

F + 39 06 3224363

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