EU HEADLINES

NATIONAL PERSPECTIVES OF EUROPEAN DEBATES

The clock is ticking

As more migrants and asylum seekers arrive on Lampedusa, the pressure to conclude the ongoing negotiations of the new European Migration and Asylum Pact grows. Italy, Germany, and Poland contemplate new measures to control migration.

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No très passing

The agenda of the September 28 Justice and Home Affairs Council meeting echoes the heated tone of the European discussion on migration, notes *Digi24*, highlighting recent German and Italian measures to reinforce their borders. As the growing number of migrants and asylum seekers arrive on the Italian island of Lampedusa, German Interior Minister Nancy Faeser, concerned about illegal immigration and resolved to "protect people who often cross borders clandestinely, without water and almost without air," announced additional mobile checkpoints and controls on the Polish and Czech borders less than two weeks before the major regional elections. The government didn't go as far as introducing the fixed border control despite the opposition' demands but called upon the countries on the EU's periphery to "defend the borders better." Likewise, Italy, where reportedly 133,000 asylum seekers have landed since the beginning of the year, adopted new measures to curb the entry of migrants into the country, such as opening new detention centres in remote areas and extending the period a person can be detained for up to 18 months. Meanwhile, tensions are spilling over into the ongoing negotiations of the new European Asylum and Migration Pact and raise questions among Romanian officials about their own Schengen prospects.

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Germany says Ja

Back in June of this year, EU Member States seemed to have agreed on an asylum and migration package; however, part of the legislative deal which had been left on the side is now causing a stir. The so-called "crisis regulation" details what should happen if a Member State suddenly experiences a new wave of refugees. Considering this exact situation happened in the island of Lampedusa a few weeks ago, Italy is leading the charge to ask for a fairer distribution of migrants across the EU Member States. Some countries, including Austria, strongly oppose it. *Kurier* explains the country's line of argumentation: Austria emphasises the already high number of refugees that it has taken in in recent years and stresses that the crisis regulation and its measures would undermine the entire asylum package. Alongside Poland and Hungary, Austria had then voted no on the crisis measure in June, while Germany abstained. In a surprising turn of events, German Chancellor Olaf Scholz spoke out on Wednesday to say he would no longer stand in the way of the crisis regulation. Time is running out to adopt the package, as the three EU institutions need to come to an agreement before February 2024, warns the article as a conclusion.

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Pointing fingers

With more eyes on the topic of migration and elections coming up in Germany and Poland, both governments are talking tougher on the issue and ramping up security checks within the Schengen area, to quell, as they say, "smuggling" and illegal migration, according to *Balkan Insight*. Poland announced Tuesday through a spokesperson that the government is considering introducing controls on its border with Germany – on one hand, citing concerns about migrants coming through Italy, and on another, migrants passing through Poland toward Germany via Belarus and Slovakia. The following day, Germany announced increased controls at its borders with Poland and the Czech Republic for largely the same reasons. Both countries are conducting more checks and random searches on vehicles crossing these borders. Poland's ruling Law and Justice (PiS) party, which has spearheaded these initiatives, is also facing some backlash amid a scandal in which their members have fraudulently granted visas to thousands of migrants from Asia and Africa. Both Poland and Germany's concerns are likely overblown in light of the upcoming elections, according to Mikolaj Pawlak, a sociologist specialising in migration at Warsaw University. "The numbers are not so dramatic that this could not be dealt with by cooperation among border guards of the various countries," Pawlak said. "[W]hat we are dealing with today is a will to make dramatic statements rather than to solve the issues pragmatically."

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Taking a hard line

The Italian government continues to crack down on migration, with the most recent tide of legislation introducing expulsions of individuals on the grounds of posing "serious threats to public order or state security" and new rules related to unaccompanied minors. It is the third decree on immigration approved by Giorgia Meloni's right-wing government following the measures to tighten the penalties for people who try to arrive in Italy irregularly by sea adopted earlier in the month, reports *Il Post*. New regulations authorise the Ministry of Interior or, in particularly serious cases, the local prefects to expel and deny re-entry to anyone who is deemed to be a danger to public security. Moreover, the authorities get the warrant to subject migrants suspected of lying about their minor status to "anthropometric measurements" and medical procedures to ascertain their age, including X-ray tests, after having requested authorisation from a juvenile court. This contravenes the provisions of the transposed European directive dictating the age verification procedures to be using the "least invasive possible" methods and carried out in a suitable environment by professionals. To avoid overcrowding of the reception facilities, the Italian government issued a permit to use the structures of the port authorities and the coast guard and derogate from the maximum capacity of the detention centres in case of urgency. The unused police and armed forces funds will cover "the increase in the extraordinary commitments of the agents linked to the increase of migrations."

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The European Movement International
Place du Luxembourg 2, 1050 Brussels, Belgium

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