EU HEADLINES

NATIONAL PERSPECTIVES OF EUROPEAN DEBATES

Build that wall

After the difficult and controversial approval of the Migration and Asylum Pact in the European Parliament on Wednesday, we take a look at the background of the legislation and some reactions to its passage.

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Dublin down

The European Pact on Migration and Asylum has entered its final phase after years of intense negotiations, *Le Monde* reports. The subject has deeply divided Member States since the 2015 refugee crisis, with the new migration pact aiming to provide for tighter control of migrant arrivals into the European Union, and the introduction of a solidarity mechanism between EU Member States concerning the distribution of refugees. In 2015, the massive influx of migrants (1.8 million arrivals in one year) greatly destabilised cooperation between Member States and illustrated Europe's failure in the field of asylum and immigration. Today, Europe is faced with a new rise in asylum applications. The migration pact aims to reform the controversial Dublin Regulation, which has been the focus of much tension, as the 2015 crisis highlighted the inefficiency of this process, amongst others. The new pact is a set of ten instruments designed to strike a balance between border control and solidarity in receiving refugees on European soil. The final vote comes just in time for the European elections, to the relief of European Commission President von der Leyen, who has made this reform a key feature of her term in office.

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The cost of doing business

"We made history," Roberta Metsola, President of the European Parliament, said after MEPs adopted the Migration and Asylum Pact on Wednesday. Despite opposition from much of the far right, but also by the Greens, the Left and some socialists, the three main European political families – the EPP, S&D and Renew Europe – got their way, Romanian newspaper *Digi24* reports. Someone not cheering as loudly? 161 human rights organisations, including Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International and the International Rescue Committee stating that the pact will kill and expressing concern about the "detention of families with children" and the "criminalisation" of migrants. The reform introduces a mandatory "verification" of migrants arriving at EU borders, consisting of their registration in the common EURODAC database. Polish Prime Minister Donald Tusk gave assurances on Wednesday that Poland will refuse to apply the mandatory mechanism for the relocation of migrants, despite the adoption by the European Parliament.

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Hold the champagne

“This is not my pact, I think it is almost no one's pact. It is the possible pact," said S&D MEP Isabel Santos as she described a “bitter aftertaste” and “defeat” following the passage of the Migration and Asylum Pact, which sums up the disappointment described by many in the European Parliament, according to *Expresso*. Renew’s Sophia In 'T Veld conceded the agreement as one with “no better alternative,” with the left and right flanks opposing it as well. The far right, for its part, considers it too generous, preferring a stronger hand and for individual Member States to set their policies – with the exception of the Brothers of Italy from the ECR group. The Greens/EFA, the Left, and myriad NGOs lambasted the agreement for enabling countless potential abuses and human rights violations that will surely have rippling repercussions even outside of Europe, going against fundamental EU values. "Building a fortress in Europe, erecting fences, paying warlords and normalising inhumane practices will not stop migration," said Greens president Philippe Lamberts. Meanwhile, Commission President von der Leyen, Parliament President Metsola and Belgian Prime Minister de Croo celebrated the compromise as a victory.

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“Whoever wins, we lose”

Holding back no criticism of the “problematic, toxic and convoluted” Migration and Asylum Pact, *El Mundo* attributes the seemingly impossible passage of the legislation to urgency and nerves ahead of the upcoming elections in June – not only so that candidates could focus on campaigning and count it as an accomplishment, but also because according to projections, the next parliament may be more radical and might have gone another way on migration. And now leaders are able (or forced) to celebrate, or at least defend, a deal that appeases long-term aspirations of the right more than anything. Last year's Spanish Presidency of the Council of the EU characterised this legislation as a show of EU solidarity, but with its legion of detractors, it seems that few are convinced, according to the article – with many critical voices even within the parties that supported it. *El Mundo* also notes that hundreds of protestors gathered outside the European Parliament during the vote, but by abstaining from the inescapable disruption and chaos that other special interest groups have brought to Brussels in recent months, they appeared to have little effect on what became an “agreement, but no solution.”

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

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