

OPEN LETTER

Addressed to:

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Mrs. Mariya Gabriel
European Commissioner for Innovation, Research, Culture, Education and Youth
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Mrs. Ylva Johansson
European Commissioner for Home Affairs
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Mr. Janez Lenarčič
Commissioner for Crisis Management
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Subject: A call by concerned researchers for immediate action and radical revision of current EU policies on mobility and migration governance

We, the undersigned researchers, working on projects funded by the European Commission (Horizon 2020, ERC, MSC, etc.) to improve migration governance, border crossing, and the treatment of refugees in the European Union, want to express our paramount concern regarding the violent course of action that is taken by the EU and individual member states in these testing times.

In recent years, numerous EU-funded research projects have meticulously studied diverse aspects of human mobility into and inside the EU. Paying special attention to pressing issues like border crossing and asylum procedures, academics have been critically examining: asylum bureaucracies, deportation and detention regimes, commercial interests from security and military sectors in the management of entry and border control, protection practices and the criminalization of solidarity, rescue missions at sea, implications of the EU-Turkey deal, externalization of borders, hotspots, so-called ‘hot returns’ and pushback operations, family reunification, mobility infrastructures, xenophobic tendencies and the rise of populist politics, and much more.

Current EU policies, in combination with increased measures towards the ‘securitization of migration’ taken by member states, go on exposing the displaced border crossers to grave dangers. The recent situation in the EU-Turkish land and sea borders is testimony of the negative effects that these policies have had both on asylum seekers and the local societies. The militarization of the refugee issue, the marketization of border control technology, and the

ill-treatment of asylum seekers have all led to the normalization of violence and in certain instances to the suspension of the right to asylum. Under these conditions, the safety of people in camps is neglected, the humanitarian regime is under attack, and an enormous protection gap is emerging. In the context of the recent COVID-19 epidemic in the EU, we are on the brink of a humanitarian disaster that may unnecessarily cost many lives.

As experts, who have been given the task to study these complex realities, we find the course taken by the EU doubly disturbing. First, it is evident that much expert knowledge, which we have been working hard to produce, and which is funded by taxpayers in the EU, is being outright disregarded by decisionmakers. Second, on the ground, politicians and policymakers push for policies that fail to meet minimal human rights standards or live up to the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights.

The line of action adopted by the EU has directly resulted in an extremely dangerous situation for some of the most vulnerable people in and around the EU. It is also perilously playing into the hands of existing anti-immigration and xenophobic tendencies, which are promoted by populist and extreme right-wing groups.

We believe that the difficult times we confront call on us to exercise much prudence and wisdom in drafting adequate policies that can meet effectively and humanely the enormous challenges we face. For as researchers, it seems contradictory, to fund with public money big research projects that aim to improve migration governance and enhance the protection of refugees, and then completely disregard their findings and knowledge building about humane, forward-looking, and sustainable options, when drafting crucial new policies.

In a constructive spirit, we call upon the EC to put into use the expert knowledge that it has been investing in for years. We therefore urge a radical revision of current EU policies, and we offer our time and expertise to help preparing new guidelines, together with EC officials, on the following crucial issues:

- In the most urgent sense, confronting the deadly COVID-19 pandemic, we call on the EC and member states to treat migrants and refugees in camps across Europe in a similar way to that of EU citizens and evacuate the overcrowded hotspots in the Aegean;
- A move away from a strategy of containment and deterrence and towards the application of pan-state solidarity in accordance with a rights-based approach to global migration governance, fundamentally based in an attempt to alleviate the disproportionate burden on Greece, Italy, Spain, and particularly the island societies in the Southern borders of the EU;
- A move towards acting in accordance with the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights and the principles of the New York Declaration. Accordingly, the EC should demand that individual member states apply adequate reception actions, restore asylum procedures, restrain from the production of an official discourse that encourages xenophobia, and strongly denounce all acts that threaten both asylum seekers and humanitarian workers;
- An immediate decision to create an evidence-based policymaking structure that obliges EU officials to take into account the research findings of academics, who are studying human mobility and the best ways to deal with the challenges we face in this field.

Signatories (partial list, updated by March 26, 2020)

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Evelyn Ruppert, Professor, Department of Sociology, Goldsmiths, University of London [ERC CoG ARITHMUS: Peopling Europe - How data make a people]

Polly Pallister-Wilkins, Associate Professor, Department of Politics, University of Amsterdam [H2020 ADMIGOV: Advancing Alternative Migration Governance]

Anna Triandafyllidou, Professor, Canada Excellence Research Chair in Migration and Integration, Ryerson University, Toronto [H2020 scientific coordinator of GREASE and BRaVE]

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Russell King, Professor, Department of Geography, School of Global Studies, University of Sussex [H2020 ADMIGOV: Advancing Alternative Migration Governance]

Michelle Pace, Professor in Global Studies, Roskilde University, Denmark and Honorary Professor, University of Birmingham, UK. [H2020 SIRIUS: Skills and integration of migrants, refugees and asylum applicants in European labour markets]

Bridget Anderson, Professor, University of Bristol [H2020 ETHOS and FP7 BEU-CITIZEN]

Claudia Aradau, Professor of International Politics, King's College London [ERC SECURIT FLOWS Enacting border security in the digital age: Political worlds of data forms, flows and frictions]

Umut Korkut, Department of Political Science, Glasgow Caledonian University [Respond: Multilevel Governance of Migration in Europe and Beyond]

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Jeroen Doomernik, Senior Researcher, Department of Political Science, University of Amsterdam [H2020 ADMIGOV: Advancing Alternative Migration Governance & H2020 CEASEVAL: Evaluation of the Common European Asylum System under Pressure and Recommendations for Further Development]

Martin Lemberg-Pedersen, Assistant Professor, Department of Political Science, University of Aalborg [H2020 ADMIGOV: Advancing Alternative Migration Governance]

Maggi Leung, Associate Professor, Utrecht University [H2020 Welcoming Spaces in Europe: in Europe: revitalizing shrinking areas by hosting non-EU migrants]

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Charlotte Heath-Kelly, Associate Professor, University of Warwick [ERC Starting Grant: NeoliberalTerror: The Radicalisation of Social Policy in Europe]

Birgit Glorius, Professor, Department of European Studies and History, Chemnitz University of Technology, Chemnitz [H2020 CEASEVAL Evaluation of the Common European Asylum System under Pressure and Recommendations for Further Development]

Rinus Penninx, Professor Emeritus, University of Amsterdam [H2020 ADMIGOV: Advancing Alternative Migration Governance]

Albert Ali Salah, Professor, Utrecht University [H2020 HumMingBird: Enhanced migration measures from a multidimensional perspective]

Önver A. Cetrez, Associate Professor, Uppsala University [H2020 RESPOND: Multilevel Governance of Mass Migration in Europe and Beyond]

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Stephan Scheel, Assistant Professor, Sociology department, University of Duisburg-Essen [ERC CoG ARITHMUS: Peopling Europe - How data make a people]

Evelyn Ersanilli, Department of Political Science, University of Amsterdam [ERC RIGHTS: The bargaining power of sending countries in influencing the rights of their low skilled migrant workers]

Panos Hatziprokopiou, Assistant Professor, School of Spatial Planning and Development, Aristotle University of Thessaloniki [H2020 TRAFIG: Transnational Figurations of Displacement]

Blanca Garcés-Mascareñas, Senior Research Fellow, CIDOB – Barcelona Centre for International Affairs [H2020 ADMIGOV: Advancing Alternative Migration Governance]

Elspeth Guild, Professor, School of Law, Queen Mary University of London [H2020 PROTECT: The Right to International Protection. A Pendulum between Globalization and Nativization?]

Willem Schinkel, Professor of Social Theory, Erasmus University Rotterdam [ERC Monitoring Modernity: a comparative analysis of practices of social imagination in the monitoring of global flows of goods, capital and persons]

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Sarah Perret, Associate researcher, King's College London [ERC SECURIT FLOWS Enacting border security in the digital age: Political worlds of data forms, flows and frictions]

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Nishat Awan, Researcher, Goldsmiths, University of London [H2020 Topological Atlas: Mapping contemporary borderscapes]

Paolo Cuttitta, Marie Skłodowska-Curie Research Fellow, Université Sorbonne Paris Nord [LIBORG: EU Externalization of Migration and Border Management to Libya: the Role of Non-Governmental Organizations and Human Rights Implications]

Monika Szulecka, Researcher, Centre of Migration Research, University of Warsaw [H2020 RESPOND: Multilevel Government Migration of mass migration in Europe and Beyond]

Mehdi Lahlou, Professor researcher at University Mohamed V, Rabat [EU-funded Global Research GREASE: Radicalisation, Secularism and the Governance of Religion: Bringing together European and Asian Perspectives]

Annalisa Pelizza, Professor in Science and Technology Studies, University of Bologna [Processing Citizenship: Digital registration of migrants as co-production of citizens, territory and Europe]

Sabine Hess, Professor, Institute of Cultural Anthropology, University of Göttingen [H2020 Respond: Multilevel Governance of Migration in Europe and Beyond]

H.A. Hellyer, Senior Associate Fellow, Royal United Services Institute in London, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace [EU-funded Global Research GREASE: Radicalisation, Secularism and the Governance of Religion: Bringing together European and Asian Perspectives]

Yuri Kazepov, Professor of Urban Sociology, University of Vienna [H2020 COHSMO: Inequality, urbanization and Territorial Cohesion: Developing the European Social Model of economic growth and democratic capacity]

Tina Magazzini, Research Associate, Robert Schuman Centre for Advanced Studies, European University Institute [EU-funded Global Research GREASE: Radicalisation, Secularism and the Governance of Religion: Bringing together European and Asian Perspectives]

Ioana Vrabiescu, WIRL-COFUND Fellow, University of Warwick [DispoCIT: Policing and Deporting EU citizens]

Volker M. Heins, Professor, Centre for Global Cooperation Research, University of Duisburg-Essen [H2020 NoVaMigra: Norms and Values in the European Migration and Refugee Crisis]

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Manolis Pratsinakis, Onassis/Seesox Fellow, Department of Politics and International Relations, University of Oxford [H2020 EUMIGRE: New European Mobilities at times of crisis]

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Electra Petracou, Assistant Professor, Aegean of the Aegean, [H2020 RESPOND: Multilevel Government Migration of mass migration in Europe and Beyond]

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Bernd Kasperek, Researcher, Göttingen University [H2020 RESPOND: Multi-level governance of mass migration to Europe and Beyond]

Eniko Vincze, Professor, Babes-Bolyai University, Cluj- Napoca, Romania [Horizon 2020 RELOCAL: Resituating the local in cohesion and territorial development]

Emanuela Roman, Forum of International and European Research on Immigration [H2020 TRAFIG: Transnational Figurations of Displacement & H2020 CEASEVAL: Evaluation of the Common European Asylum System under Pressure and Recommendations for Further Development]

Katerina Rozakou, Assistant Professor, Department of Anthropology, Panteion University of Social and Political Sciences [ERC DEPORT REGIME: The Social Life of State Deportation Regimes]

Dina Vaiou, Professor Emeritus, National Technical University of Athens [ERC GRECO and GIEMA -Group of International Experts on Migration and Asylum]

Lois Labrianidis, Professor of Economic Geography, University of Macedonia [7th Framework Programme STREP: Generating Interethnic Tolerance and Neighbourhood Integration in European Urban Spaces]

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