



HOUSE OF COMMONS
CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES
CANADA

Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration

CIMM • NUMBER 125 • 1st SESSION • 42nd PARLIAMENT

EVIDENCE

Tuesday, October 16, 2018

—
Chair

Mr. Robert Oliphant

Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration

Tuesday, October 16, 2018

• (1535)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. Robert Oliphant (Don Valley West, Lib.)): I call the meeting to order.

Good afternoon, and welcome.

This is the 125th meeting of the Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration. Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2), we are continuing our study of migration challenges and opportunities for Canada in the 21st century.

I notice a number of substituting members today. That's great. Welcome.

I thought Bill Casey was here, but he's gone.

Mr. Matt DeCoursey (Fredericton, Lib.): That's the way....

The Chair: You're now a double substitute. Very good.

Mr. Jati Sidhu (Mission—Matsqui—Fraser Canyon, Lib.): Oh, okay.

The Chair: To bring the substituting members on board so you know what is going on, this is a longer study than we've normally done on this committee. It's looking at migration in the 21st century. It's looking at the challenges, the reasons people are on the move, and where they're on the move from and to. That's both forced migration in terms of refugees, and planned or voluntary migration by economic migrants and those related to that, such as students or temporary migrants, etc.

This is a big picture study to look at what Canada's response should be to a world that is on the move more than it's ever been in the history of humanity. We're doing that study. We've had a number of meetings.

Today we're going to welcome His Excellency Peteris Ustubs, who is a representative of the European Union here in Ottawa; and with him is Brice de Schietere.

They have very graciously accepted our invitation to come and give us a European perspective.

In the second hour of the meeting, we'll be following up on some of this in an in camera meeting. That's just to give you a heads-up that what we ask about in this first hour could inform our discussion in the in camera meeting as well.

It's over to you, Your Excellency. Thank you for accepting our request to come to us.

His Excellency Peteris Ustubs (Ambassador, Delegation of the European Union to Canada): Thank you very much for the invitation. Thank you very much for the opportunity to come and be a witness.

Thinking about what I am going to say about migration and your ongoing preparation of the reports, I can definitely assure you that there is quite a lot the European Union and Europe can say about the current developments and current undertakings related to migration. I hope today's conversations will help you in drafting the report in different ways and from different perspectives.

Migration is not a local phenomenon, nor can it be reduced to a national or even regional challenge. Wars, violence and persecution drove worldwide forced displacement to a new high in 2017 for the fifth year in a row. Therefore, we are talking about something that is somehow becoming permanent.

As of the end of 2017, 68.5 million people were displaced. Among them were 16.2 million people who became displaced just during 2017 itself, indicating a huge number of people on the move. If we deduce it more precisely, it is equivalent to 44,500 people who are displaced each day, or approximately one person displaced every two seconds. These numbers speak for themselves. It is truly a global phenomenon that continues and is likely to continue for the foreseeable future to have a major impact on our societies, on our economies, and on our political debates.

The European Union, due to its geographical location, its intrinsic openness, its interconnections to trade and travel routes, and its open frontiers, is in the midst of this challenge. The EU is located in close proximity to several crisis zones. Our situation is different from that of other countries that have secure physical borders.

We are also close to some of the countries with the highest population growth. To give you one example, Nigeria has less than 200 million inhabitants today, and it is estimated it will have one billion at the end of this century. This is an enormous challenge, but let me add, also an enormous opportunity.

Being a global phenomenon, migration requires global attention, political will, and a global shared vision. In this respect, we are grateful that Canada remains our strong partner in international fora at the UN as well as at the G7, calling for solidarity and global migration management. We also acknowledge the contribution of Canada in resettling 40,000 Syrian refugees since 2015.

After this brief yet necessary introduction, let me address the first point raised by this honourable committee, and that is the state of play in the European Union or its neighbourhood.

It is fair to say that a combination of the factors in 2015 and 2016 led to the unprecedented influx of irregular migrants to the EU. It is also fair to say that the EU was less than optimally prepared for an event of such proportions. I will not delve into details. Suffice it to say that between 2015 and 2017, the EU received over 3.4 million asylum seekers.

To compound the problem, the vast majority of these applicants arrived in a very limited number of countries, which did not have sufficient structures with the capacity to handle such an inflow. That said, the EU today is far better prepared to handle the migration phenomenon and to face the challenge.

We have made significant, important strides during the last 18 months. We have stemmed irregular migration. Arrivals have been dramatically reduced, down by 97% on the eastern Mediterranean route and 80% on the central Mediterranean route. Numbers are now back, if I may say so, to those of pre-crisis years.

● (1540)

Meanwhile, we have saved over 690,000 lives at sea in the past three years, 690,000, thanks to the combined efforts of the EU and its member states. This impressive progress has been made possible by the improved management of our external borders. As Canada knows very well, the effective management of external borders is a precondition of any successful migration policy.

I should also underline that the EU has reinforced its external borders, not closed them. It has put in place structures to speed the processing of claims at the border and to register and process arrivals.

Furthermore, given the geographical situation of the European Union, a robust migration policy should not be limited to effectively managing the borders. It is an illusion to imagine stemming the flow of people by erecting walls or building fences. For that matter, it is difficult to imagine where any such wall could actually be built around Europe, given our interconnections with Asia and Africa.

A successful integration policy and immigration policy has to encompass an external dimension aimed at tackling the root causes that force people to move.

We have stepped up our co-operation with countries of origin and transit on returns and readmission. Despite some success in concluding new non-legally binding arrangements with Bangladesh, Guinea, Ethiopia, the Gambia, and soon, hopefully, Ivory Coast, securing third countries' cooperation on the readmission of their own nationals remains a challenge. Lack of cooperation from certain origin countries is not helping, and it represents perhaps the major challenge at this stage.

In the longer term, the situation can only improve by addressing the roots of the phenomena, such as what we have seen in Syria and tackling issues of good governance in Africa. Given the projections of demographic trends, people will only be willing to stay in their countries if they have good economic prospects but also freedom and the protection of fundamental rights. Assisting African countries in creating better economic opportunities, improving their governance and fighting corruption and mismanagement is not an expense; it is an investment in our future.

The EU is Africa's closest neighbour, biggest investor, main trading and development partner and a key security provider. I would like to mention just a few figures for reference. The EU is providing 31 billion euros in official development assistance to Africa between 2014 to 2020 to boost Africa's economy, to give young people in the continent a chance to build a future, to ensure food security and access to energy, and to anchor good governance and respect for human rights. The EU member states held an investment stock of 291 billion euros in 2016 in Africa, making the EU the biggest investor in that continent. The EU also offers free access to the EU market via economic partnership agreements with the countries of North Africa, and, for everything but arms schemes, with the rest of the continent.

Let me provide an overview of other developments in migration and what we are doing right now.

First of all, I would like to state the obvious, which is that migration is something that features very strongly on the political agenda of the European Union. Here are just three examples. Ministers of the interior of the European Union, 28 member states, discussed migration on October 12. Ministers of foreign affairs met yesterday, and heads of state of governments will discuss migration later this week when they have a meeting on October 17 and 18.

Just to demonstrate that migration is definitely high on the agenda of political leadership, in the state of the union speech last month, the President of the European Commission, Jean-Claude Juncker, announced a number of new important proposals that will strengthen our work on migration and asylum. Allow me to mention some of them.

EU leaders agreed to strengthen the role of the European Border and Coast Guard Agency with 10,000 permanent staff with their own equipment and tools, provided by national border agencies; a budget of 2.2 billion euros between 2021 and 2027 to finance its operations; and a strong mandate to launch joint operations, not only with its own staff within the EU but also outside the European Union.

● (1545)

As I said, this is crucial to effectively manage European external borders and provide a high level of security within the European Union, but at the same time, Europe will not close its borders and will continue to offer safety to those in need of protection.

In addition to strong external borders, we are proposing to reinforce the European Union Agency for Asylum. This agency will become a major tool in strengthening European solidarity and in increasing readiness to manage future migration challenges. To assist member states to better handle migration, this agency will be able to provide operational technical assistance in a timely manner.

While granting protection to the most vulnerable remains a priority, returning migrants who are ineligible according to international legislation are equally important for the good functioning of our asylum and migration system. Despite increased efforts, the rate of effective returns throughout the EU decreased from 46% in 2016 to 37% in 2017. We will work to expedite return procedures and increase the overall return rate in full respect of fundamental rights.

Legal migration is an integral part of the EU's comprehensive approach to migration and goes hand in hand with a firm policy in tackling irregular flows and ensuring stronger border protection, streamlining asylum procedures and more effective returns.

We have a legal path of legal migration for skilled workers, the EU Blue Card scheme. We have adopted new rules to make it easier for foreign students, researchers, trainees and volunteers to get a permit to come to the EU and to facilitate their access to the labour market—for example, the double scholarships and placements for students from African countries.

We launched an initiative to coordinate pilot projects with selected third countries on legal migration to fill shortages in the labour markets and help countries of origin build capacity through circular and labour migration projects.

The EU internal resettlement initiatives have demonstrated that unsafe and irregular migration can be replaced with legal and safe channels for persons in need of international protection. We need to make full use of other legal avenues for persons in need of protection.

Since 2015, two successful EU internal resettlement programs have helped over 38,000 of the most vulnerable people find shelter within the EU between different EU member states. To coordinate European efforts in the long term, the European Commission has proposed to set up a permanent union resettlement framework as part of the overall asylum framework.

Integration of third country migrants into the labour market is key to ensuring a positive impact of migration. We are interested in how Canada's immigration policy addresses the admission of immigrants with skills that match economic needs and facilitates the long-term integration in the labour market, including recognition of foreign credentials and mentoring programs.

In conclusion, much has changed since 2015, but we do have a lot of work ahead of us to manage migration in a safe and orderly manner, pursuing a comprehensive migration approach, including on legal migration.

We have shared our experience with and learned from our Canadian counterparts at various levels on numerous occasions. Despite geographical differences, we know that the challenges we face are increasingly similar. We are grateful for Canada's continued co-operation and we look forward to further exchanges that are beneficial for both sides.

Thank you very much.

• (1550)

The Chair: Thank you, Your Excellency.

I'd like to have given you an hour. That's very helpful.

Ms. Zahid, you have seven minutes.

Mrs. Salma Zahid (Scarborough Centre, Lib.): Thank you, Chair.

Thank you for coming today and sharing information about the programs you are doing in the European community.

We have seen that as of 2015, Europe has faced the biggest wave of mass immigration since the Second World War, and the peak in migrant numbers was over one million back in 2015-2016.

Do you have any recent numbers?

Mr. Peteris Ustubs: Yes. I can go back to the presentation. I will not read it again, don't worry, but I will come back to you and I will tell you exactly what the figures are if we split it among the years.

We had 1.3 million in 2015. The figure was more or less the same in 2016. In 2017 it dropped to 800,000 people. The overall tendency is going down.

• (1555)

Mrs. Salma Zahid: Have you done any studies on what is motivating the crossers? Is it the economic background or is it some other reason? What are the factors driving more migration?

Mr. Peteris Ustubs: It is a very complex question, and I will try to be as concise as I can.

I think we need to split the arrival of migrants to the European Union via different kinds of routes, and I think the main reasons for people migrating to Europe would have different backgrounds.

First of all, if we look at the eastern Mediterranean route, which is the link between Turkey and Greece, either the land border or the sea border, we see that most probably the highest number of people come from Syria. That was the case in 2015 and in 2016. Nowadays there is a certain shift in nationalities coming to Europe via that route, but the main reason was the ongoing war in Syria, which sparked a high increase in the numbers of people.

If you move to the central Mediterranean route, the story is slightly different, because the nationality you would see on those boats would come from Bangladesh; you would see Eritreans and Libyans, and most recently, an increasing number of Tunisians and many from western Africa; Nigeria is dominant.

For them, the main reason would be economics, trying to reach Europe for economic benefit. I'm not playing down the conditions in some of those countries for those people, but it is not migration because of war or other disasters.

The most recent phenomenon is migration in the western Mediterranean linking Morocco and Spain. Again, the migrants you would see on those ships would come mostly from west Africa. They are of a slightly different composition than in the central Mediterranean. They would come from Côte d'Ivoire, Senegal and Nigeria. There again it would mainly be economic migration.

Mrs. Salma Zahid: In our last few meetings, we have heard from some witnesses about the relationship between the legal and illegal immigration channels and how eliminating legal channels can drive migrants to use the illegal routes. For example, when Spain eliminated the seasonal work visa for Africans, it led to a migrant surge, and bringing back a visa program saw the number of illegals drop.

You have mentioned some programs you have brought in, in Europe. Have you seen that bringing some more legal programs decreases the number of illegal immigrants? What relationship do you find between them?

Mr. Peteris Ustubs: I would like to mention specifically here several things linked with our Operation Sophia in the Mediterranean. The mandate of that operation, which is the EU's operation together with member states, gave in 2016 the possibility of arresting smugglers and taking away the means of migration, meaning the ships.

The third element for that operation was to increase the capacity of Libyan coast guards. To mention just a few examples, because of that operation, we managed to arrest around 200 individuals who were directly involved in smuggling operations. Secondly, because of the operation, we managed to dismantle or take away approximately 500 ships that were involved in illegal migration activities.

Last but not least, if you look at the events taking place outside the Libyan coast, due to the increase in the capacity of the Libyan coast guards, basically during the last couple of months, the numbers were significantly decreasing, because all the operations were contained and managed by the Libyan coast guards, which did not exist before.

The short answer to your question is that there is a lot of ongoing illegal activity, and there is a lot of need to be active in attacking or tackling it. If you know where to address it, then smuggling activities might go down.

• (1600)

Mrs. Salma Zahid: Sometimes it's—

The Chair: I think I need to stop you there.

Mr. Maguire is next.

Mr. Larry Maguire (Brandon—Souris, CPC): Thank you, Chair.

I want to thank the ambassador for being here today, and Mr. de Schieter as well.

This is a great deal of information that you've provided. You just mentioned Operation Sophia as one of the areas you've been dealing with, but I'm wondering if you can update me on other progress. I've been reading a bit about the Dublin agreement and the renegotiation in that area. I wonder if you could update us on that Dublin agreement in regard to the settlement of refugees.

Mr. Peteris Ustubs: The Dublin agreement is under revision at the moment. The European Commission presented its proposals to the European Council. At the moment, it is for the member states to discuss and come up with a final decision.

It is evident that the Dublin arrangement should be revisited. We need to make sure that member states actually find the relevant compromises between themselves, specifically related to the fact of where the migrant is registered—either it is the first entry or not—and how that information is then circulated among the EU member states.

Of course, there is another element that I mentioned, and that is internal resettlement of the migrants and refugees who reach the EU.

Discussions among member states are ongoing, and not always are those discussions easy. I don't want to predict any kind of calendar for when that discussion will be finalized, but the mere fact that heads of state and governments are going to discuss migration again at the summit later this week demonstrates that it is not only for ministers of the interior to find a compromise; it is also for the highest level of heads of state and government to do so. This is one of the key priorities: to get the legal framework and co-operation framework between member states done.

Mr. Larry Maguire: Yes, and when you look at it, I understand that people who are immigrants or asylum seekers arriving in Europe today still aren't allowed to choose the country or state that they may want to be present in as far as an asylum request goes. Do you think there's anything we can do in Canada? Does it make any sense for Canada to enter into similar agreements with European countries, such as some of the European countries are doing right now, in regard to entertaining claims from asylum persons?

Mr. Peteris Ustubs: That definitely would be—

Mr. Larry Maguire: With the goal—

Pardon me. It would be with the goal to prevent this idea of shopping around to find the country you want to be in.

Mr. Peteris Ustubs: One of the things that played an important role for addressing the Dublin arrangement was that in order to avoid possibilities of migrants arriving in Europe and shopping for a country, we needed to have all the database, fingerprinting and applications done at the first stop, in one first place. Otherwise, if those fingerprints weren't taken, they would not be stored, and then the asylum shopping might start.

Now it is addressed in a far more comprehensive way. It is done in Greece and done in Italy for all who arrive. Then it is just the agreements between EU member states that make sure that the migrants actually move around in internal resettlement.

Concerning the interest of Canada to participate, that definitely would be a sovereign decision of Canada. There might be different kinds of approaches because, within the groups arriving in Europe, we see people who are definitely coming from war zones and we need to find protection for them on humanitarian grounds or for other reasons, but then there is a third category, which would be more linked with economical migration.

It would require a certain definition, potentially from Canada, about what kind of specific migration you would be interested in. Either there is the one type, with people coming from war-torn countries like Syria or elsewhere, or you would be interested to have more of the economic migrants, who might come with skills and would be interested in finding their way there.

• (1605)

Mr. Larry Maguire: Thank you.

Just in relation to time, do any of the EU countries issue work permits to those currently waiting for an asylum hearing?

Mr. Peteris Ustubs: I'm sorry?

Mr. Larry Maguire: Are there any EU countries that issue work permits?

Mr. Peteris Ustubs: Yes.

Mr. Larry Maguire: Are they for job opportunities for the asylum seekers that are there presently?

Mr. Peteris Ustubs: We have several approaches. One approach is that for those who have skills, we are facilitating their integration into the labour market. Some of the EU member states are very keen to make sure that integration is happening fast. They facilitate, let's say, the openness of the businesses in the EU within different EU member states to find a job for them because, basically economical integration is the easiest way of addressing it.

Having said that, there is another scheme, which I alluded to in my introductory remarks, and that is the EU Blue Card, which is not for those who arrived as asylum seekers or migrants into the territory of the EU but those who are in third countries and who have knowledge and credentials for all kinds of work. They can apply for the EU Blue Card, which would be a working permit. That is an ongoing activity.

Mr. Larry Maguire: Are there countries that you know of, specific countries in the EU today, that are working on encouraging the private sponsorship of refugees, such as private organizations, groups of five, non-profits, church groups, or that sort of thing?

The Chair: Please answer very briefly.

Mr. Peteris Ustubs: Yes, very briefly, we have had several private endeavours that have helped to save lives on the sea. That activity has been provided by private sponsors, *Médecins Sans Frontières* and others, who actually chartered the ships. A large part of their financing came from private groups.

As for the movement of the migrants under the private scheme, it's not so often visible at the moment in the European Union. Canada is definitely having a different kind of approach to this.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Ms. Malcolmson, welcome, and congratulations on your upgrade.

Ms. Sheila Malcolmson (Nanaimo—Ladysmith, NDP): Thank you very much, Chair.

I'd like to start by recognizing that the University of Toronto Women in House program is on the Hill today. I'm very glad to have Gabrielle da Silva with me, who is training in human rights, among other things. This is an especially good day for her to be shadowing us on the Hill.

The Chair: I think we may have some others out there. Welcome.

This won't come out of your time, Sheila.

Ms. Sheila Malcolmson: You're a great chair.

On my first question, I'm going to speak from my own experience in Canada and the riding of Nanaimo—Ladysmith that I represent.

We're hearing a lot from people on the ground in British Columbia about the lack of capacity within Canada's immigration system to handle the massive influx of applications. The particularly painful one for families is when they apply to sponsor a family member or hope that their study permit will be extended, and they have to wait and wait and wait. There's stress on the family. They're unsure of their status. They're separated. They're unable to make long-term

plans because of feeling like they're in limbo and a constant state of uncertainty.

Last year, this committee recommended that Canada provide more information to applicants to explain its visa denials. Right now what we get is a kind of terse and generic letter that doesn't provide any detail of the specific reasons for the denial. People don't know the reasons, and if they want to reapply they don't know how they might be able to correct that.

I'm curious. Given the volume of migrants that the EU has experienced, do you have programs in place so that visa applicants have a clear idea of the road map ahead of them, but especially to explain their visa denials so that they can be properly amended and have some assistance in navigating the bureaucracy?

•(1610)

Mr. Peteris Ustubs: There are two answers to your question.

First of all, I can't speak on behalf of EU member states because visa applications and visas—and that would be for any kind of third-country person outside of the EU who has applied for a visa and is travelling to the EU—are the prerogative of the EU member states individually.

Although we have the Schengen system and therefore travelling between the EU member states is easy, the person deciding to apply to travel to one specific country, and that country's embassy, whatever it would be, would take that forward. What kind of answer that member state would give when the application process is over is still the responsibility of that country. I don't have a good answer to that.

As it concerns the migrants of all kinds arriving and already being in the territory of the EU, we are doing our best to make sure that the processing of their requests is done in the shortest possible time.

One example of that is the number of EU staff I mentioned. The European border security agency will have 10,000 people—that is, 10,000 additional people will be sent as help, if required, to any EU member state who might face very challenging environments. It is basically the mobilization of border guard capacity all over the EU. If in any of the countries there is a spare capacity, it might be sent to that country to help tackle the problems as they arise. That would help registration and processing.

Ms. Sheila Malcolmson: Excellent.

Mr. Peteris Ustubs: Therefore, for us, the key point is the personnel and the availability of the numbers of people who would tackle the given numbers.

Ms. Sheila Malcolmson: Excellent. Thank you.

Another difficulty that I've heard, in particular from the Central Vancouver Island Multicultural Society, is the lack of available child care. The pattern they've observed for refugee families and immigrant families who have come to Nanaimo is that they often stay at home to take care of their young children if they can't find affordable child care. That then limits their ability to take language lessons, and therefore leaves them more isolated and out of the workforce.

Do you have examples that you've seen within the EU programs that are made available to such families—child care or otherwise—that ensure they can get access to language training and get the support at home they need to be able to leave for job training and language training, so that they have economic and integration possibilities?

Mr. Peteris Ustubs: With regard to language training, definitely.... That is one of the key issues for any migrant arriving in the territory of the European Union. Again, that will depend from country to country where the migrant would arrive, be settled and stay.

To my knowledge, social systems of individual countries would make sure that language training is the priority, trying to accommodate and give possibilities to those who don't have the capacity to address and participate in language training. That might also encompass elements of child care, making sure that child care is linked with the language training.

That would help the integration process.

• (1615)

Ms. Sheila Malcolmson: That's good confirmation. Thank you.

A third area that we've had difficulty with in Canada, in my own riding, is on the topic of family reunification. We hear very plaintively from refugees who've come to Canada. They cannot relax in this country while they know that their family is still in danger. They can't completely settle.

I have a constituent named Fatima. She and her two daughters were refugees from Eritrea. Once they had come to Canada as refugees, sponsored by the neighbourhood church in Nanaimo, which has been terrific at supporting them, they found that the father of the family who they thought had been killed in the civil war in fact was alive. They've now been waiting years since then. They can't get a timeline within our system about when his processing will be complete. At this point, her daughters are starting to say to her, "We don't even believe that our father is still alive. There's no evidence of him." This is one example of a big heartache in the community.

Do you have examples of programs that can shorten and facilitate the family reunification process to avoid that dislocation?

The Chair: Please answer very briefly.

Mr. Peteris Ustubs: One of the priorities we try to address when the migrants arriving in Europe are registered is whether or not they already have some relatives in the EU. They might travel to the EU or undertake very dangerous trips across the sea basically for reuniting with the family. If that is the element, then actually that facilitates the process. If there is no link with any family registered, then of course it's a slightly different case.

I think the reunification element is always kept in mind specifically because of the humanitarian aspect of it and each individual country decides on the application that has the highest priority. I can't give you any kinds of specific figures on how often and how frequently it is used, and whether it is a positive *bilan* or not, but I know definitely that it is used very often as one of the reasons for proceeding and stepping up the process if it is linked with a family reunification.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Tabbara is next.

Mr. Marwan Tabbara (Kitchener South—Hespeler, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to the witnesses for being here. I also have two University of Toronto students in the back who are observing today.

Thank you for your presentation, your initial speech. It was excellent and very well articulated. You mentioned that the EU received 3.4 million asylum seekers. That is the largest migration since the Second World War.

The *International Migration Report 2017* from the UN concentrated mostly on economic migrants. I'm going to show you some of the numbers because we're discussing migration trends around the world and understanding what Canada is facing in the future.

In 2000, we had 173 million worldwide economic migrants; in 2010, we had 220 million; and in 2017, we had 258 million. In your testimony, you mentioned Africa and the reason a lot of these migrants are leaving is because there are not stable economic conditions to prosper and flourish. We're not just seeing that in Africa, but we're seeing that in various places, and the numbers indicate that there are many migrants travelling all over.

I wanted to get to a specific country and understand in an EU state what the scope of these conditions is meaning. How many migrants were accepted in the EU last year? What are those numbers in Germany and how do they compare to other EU countries? We want to have a comparison to see what Germany has done and some examples we can learn from.

• (1620)

Mr. Peteris Ustubs: In terms of the numbers, asylum application and citizenship for main groups for Germany, the number last year, 2017, was 222,562, so 222,000.

Mr. Marwan Tabbara: You mentioned that in 2015-2016 you had relatively the same number of asylum seekers, roughly 1.3 million. Then in 2017 that went down to 800,000.

Mr. Peteris Ustubs: Yes.

Mr. Marwan Tabbara: Is the number of asylum seekers going to Germany higher than the 220,000 in other years?

Mr. Peteris Ustubs: As overall numbers declined, the applications for Germany also went down. To mention the origins a little more, specifically for Germany: 50,000 of that figure came from Syria alone, approximately 23,000 were from Iraq and approximately 18,000 were from Afghanistan. Those were the three major countries that generated the applicants for Germany.

Mr. Marwan Tabbara: We're seeing more asylum seekers coming to Canada. Last year we had a significant number of Haitian migrants in the summer, and this year we're having more Nigerian migrants. That matters, because depending on what's happening in certain regions of the world—population growth, economic opportunities—more asylum seekers are looking to have better prospects. Those numbers increased previously. In 2008 we had a spike in those numbers as well, and we faced these numbers this summer as well.

What are the main issues that the EU faces in migration? Again, I'm going to Germany. How is Germany addressing the issues of migration?

Mr. Peteris Ustubs: What Germany is doing would be best for the Germans to answer, because that's a national activity. That's not from the EU's perspective. Individual countries are tackling it in each case; that's the responsibility of the individual EU member states. There is not much we can say from the EU's perspective.

In terms of the internal political debates as well as the activities undertaken by the German ministries and the services involved, first of all they do enormous allocations of people to make sure that the number of people involved in addressing the applications and processing them has been drastically increased over the last couple of years. To tackle that particular problem was the number one issue for the German system.

Mr. Marwan Tabbara: In your opening remarks you mentioned fast integration and skills, and matching those asylum seekers or immigrants going there. Does the EU have a process to speed migration processes while maintaining security?

Mr. Peteris Ustubs: Economic opportunities and openness of European businesses have been high on the agenda for many EU member states to make sure the opportunities in economic sectors and activities are open to the migrants. The track record among different EU member states will differ. In some member states—not naming them—this activity had very good results, and the migrants found jobs relatively easily. In some other places that took far longer, with not-so-active participation from the businesses themselves. I think how they approach the migration issues in general is because of the previous culture in different countries, which, let's say, might have held back some businesses from being active in that activity.

•(1625)

The Chair: We need to end there. Thank you. We ran a little over on the other side.

I want to ask one question about Venezuela.

The migrants coming out of Venezuela are largely going to other South American countries and into Central America. I've been told a number of people are going to Europe from Venezuela, about half a million. I'm wondering whether you have any information on that. I heard it was Scotland in particular, which is still part of the EU this week.

Mr. Peteris Ustubs: You are very pessimistic, somehow.

I don't have the deadline of this week. I think this might still last for 2019. That's a different hearing.

The Chair: I have Scottish background; I would support that.

Mr. Peteris Ustubs: Yes, I know.

Concerning Venezuela, there are two things there. I know Mr. Grandi, who is the UN high commissioner for migration, visited the region earlier last week. He actually participated in debates yesterday in the Foreign Affairs Council in Brussels, as he comes from the region around Venezuela, to make sure that EU member states and ministers of foreign affairs are well informed on the increasing migration problem in the region.

You asked about the EU, and that is pre-crisis, I would say. In 2017, the highest number of Venezuelans were in Spain. That was approximately 12,000 people. That said, you need to know also that many Venezuelans have double citizenship. That would be Portuguese and Spanish citizenships. I would say if Venezuela were to enter an even more volatile situation, that would be a significant problem for the EU, because we would need to take care of the EU citizens.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Tilson, you have five minutes.

Mr. David Tilson (Dufferin—Caledon, CPC): Thank you.

We've listened to the Bulgarians who wanted to put up a wall, although the Bulgarian ambassador assured me it was a fence. Denmark had talked about reinstating border security, returning to border security. I've talked to British members of Parliament, and they've said that this migration problem is one of the many reasons for Brexit.

In the case of the Germans, of course Dr. Merkel said she welcomed all kinds of people. Then of course there are stories in the media today that one of her partners in the coalition went too far to the right and was just saying no, that they don't want anybody. That had an effect on the Bavarian elections.

There is obviously a dispute in many different ways among the member states. My question is this: to create European policy, how is the EU dealing with these differences, most of which are negative?

Mr. Peteris Ustubs: I should say that the debates in the European Union, imagining the 28 EU member states around the table, are not always easy ones, as there are different players and voices around the table.

Having said that, I should say that in 2015 and 2016, when the crisis hit the door of the EU, I was positively surprised by the speed in those circumstances, by how quickly the EU reacted and how quickly the EU took decisions.

Having said that, of course the political impact might take a certain time to reach the level of political reality. Probably now we see it in different kinds of elections, whether they are in Sweden, Germany, Denmark or Bulgaria.

I would assume that probably politicians in some of the EU member states will become more prudent regarding the migration issues. At the same time, the general trust in the room is that we need to improve our system and management, but this is not about closing the borders.

There might be different kinds of voices around, and of course different political players will use their voices. However, it is more about the capacity of handling it, and return policies—because not everyone who arrives in the EU is eligible to stay in the EU—and making sure those who need it get protection and not everyone who arrives gets the jobs. That type of debate will continue.

It will become more difficult in terms of the political landscape in the EU. Up to now, I see that actually the EU was not paralyzed in taking decisions when it comes to asylum and migration.

•(1630)

Mr. David Tilson: I have one more question, Mr. Chairman.

As you probably know, in Canada we have these illegal asylum seekers from the United States. The government will call them irregular asylum seekers. The issue that comes particularly in the cities of Toronto and Montreal is who pays. The Province of Ontario, the Province of Quebec, the City of Toronto, the City of Montreal say, “You caused all this, Mr. Prime Minister; you pay.” They have paid some, but not enough.

It reminds me of the migrants that come across the Mediterranean, particularly to Italy and Greece, where the issue was that the Italians and the Greeks would say, “The cost to us is awful compared to what it is in Sweden or other countries.” That issue was raised a number of years ago. The southern states said, “You aren’t sharing in the cost.”

Can you brief us on whether that issue has been resolved? If so, how did it get resolved?

Mr. Peteris Ustubs: One of the replies from the EU side—and I’m not saying it is perfect or the most successful one—is internal resettlement. It is the agreement between EU member states on proportionally how many migrants they would take from those countries that are the most exposed, namely Italy and Greece.

Of course, there are a number of member states who successfully implemented what they promised. There are others who unsuccessfully performed. There are others who actually brought the European Union member states as institutions to the European Court of Justice, saying it was illegal.

From one side, there was a decision taken by the EU that they will do it and will have the resettlements. They agreed on the numbers that everyone would accept. At the same time, the implementation side was slightly lagging behind.

There is something we can continue to improve in order to make sure the resettlement actually functions. Resettlement within the EU between member states is somehow the reply of solidarity between the EU member states.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. David Tilson: You have given an excellent summary of what’s going on in Europe, Mr. Ambassador. We thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you.

We started a little bit late because of the vote; however, I will give you two minutes, Mr. Ayoub.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Ramez Ayoub (Thérèse-De Blainville, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

[*English*]

The Chair: You may have a short preamble.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Ramez Ayoub: That is very generous of you. I will try to be brief.

Thank you for being here, Your Excellency.

I am interested in your opinion. Based on your experience in the European Union, is there an immigration crisis in Canada now?

H.E. Peteris Ustubs: Thank you for your question.

Crises are not all the same size. They can also be assessed in different ways. It depends on experience and the arrival of migrants to the country.

•(1635)

[*English*]

If I make the comparison between different EU member states and Canada, what the EU experienced in 2015 and 2016, of course, are by far the bigger numbers. From that pure perspective I would say that it was a crisis and that probably the current numbers of irregular migrants that Canada receives might be low.

Having said that, each individual case is completely different. We can’t make the comparison.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Ramez Ayoub: Thank you.

You are familiar with the Canada-U.S. Third Safe Country Agreement. What do you think of this agreement in terms of immigration?

[*English*]

Mr. Peteris Ustubs: I would say that it is internal politics between the two countries to make sure what kinds of definitions are used—for example, safe countries and safe returns. We have exactly the same kind of conversations in Europe specifically concerning the third countries, and I know how complex those conversations are.

I don’t have a good answer to give to the discussions you have between the U.S. and Canada.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Ramez Ayoub: Could I have your opinion on what happens in Europe when such an agreement exists?

[*English*]

Mr. Peteris Ustubs: We have a lot of discussions on safe returns with different types of countries. One example I would like to mention is Turkey, because we discussed safe returns and agreements with Turkey specifically after the events in 2016 and 2017 in that country—that is, what kind of definition we should have for that particular country.

There is always a debate on safe returns. When we discuss readmission agreements, that always comes to the front. We are trying to make sure that the definition is well interpreted and well implemented when it comes to the safe returns.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Your Excellency, for your generosity and your time.

I suspect we may come back to your office on this study to see if you have other information we may find helpful.

We’re going to suspend for a few minutes, and then we’ll move into an in camera meeting.

[*Proceedings continue in camera*]

Published under the authority of the Speaker of
the House of Commons

SPEAKER'S PERMISSION

The proceedings of the House of Commons and its Committees are hereby made available to provide greater public access. The parliamentary privilege of the House of Commons to control the publication and broadcast of the proceedings of the House of Commons and its Committees is nonetheless reserved. All copyrights therein are also reserved.

Reproduction of the proceedings of the House of Commons and its Committees, in whole or in part and in any medium, is hereby permitted provided that the reproduction is accurate and is not presented as official. This permission does not extend to reproduction, distribution or use for commercial purpose of financial gain. Reproduction or use outside this permission or without authorization may be treated as copyright infringement in accordance with the *Copyright Act*. Authorization may be obtained on written application to the Office of the Speaker of the House of Commons.

Reproduction in accordance with this permission does not constitute publication under the authority of the House of Commons. The absolute privilege that applies to the proceedings of the House of Commons does not extend to these permitted reproductions. Where a reproduction includes briefs to a Committee of the House of Commons, authorization for reproduction may be required from the authors in accordance with the *Copyright Act*.

Nothing in this permission abrogates or derogates from the privileges, powers, immunities and rights of the House of Commons and its Committees. For greater certainty, this permission does not affect the prohibition against impeaching or questioning the proceedings of the House of Commons in courts or otherwise. The House of Commons retains the right and privilege to find users in contempt of Parliament if a reproduction or use is not in accordance with this permission.

Also available on the House of Commons website at the following address: <http://www.ourcommons.ca>

Publié en conformité de l'autorité
du Président de la Chambre des communes

PERMISSION DU PRÉSIDENT

Les délibérations de la Chambre des communes et de ses comités sont mises à la disposition du public pour mieux le renseigner. La Chambre conserve néanmoins son privilège parlementaire de contrôler la publication et la diffusion des délibérations et elle possède tous les droits d'auteur sur celles-ci.

Il est permis de reproduire les délibérations de la Chambre et de ses comités, en tout ou en partie, sur n'importe quel support, pourvu que la reproduction soit exacte et qu'elle ne soit pas présentée comme version officielle. Il n'est toutefois pas permis de reproduire, de distribuer ou d'utiliser les délibérations à des fins commerciales visant la réalisation d'un profit financier. Toute reproduction ou utilisation non permise ou non formellement autorisée peut être considérée comme une violation du droit d'auteur aux termes de la *Loi sur le droit d'auteur*. Une autorisation formelle peut être obtenue sur présentation d'une demande écrite au Bureau du Président de la Chambre.

La reproduction conforme à la présente permission ne constitue pas une publication sous l'autorité de la Chambre. Le privilège absolu qui s'applique aux délibérations de la Chambre ne s'étend pas aux reproductions permises. Lorsqu'une reproduction comprend des mémoires présentés à un comité de la Chambre, il peut être nécessaire d'obtenir de leurs auteurs l'autorisation de les reproduire, conformément à la *Loi sur le droit d'auteur*.

La présente permission ne porte pas atteinte aux privilèges, pouvoirs, immunités et droits de la Chambre et de ses comités. Il est entendu que cette permission ne touche pas l'interdiction de contester ou de mettre en cause les délibérations de la Chambre devant les tribunaux ou autrement. La Chambre conserve le droit et le privilège de déclarer l'utilisateur coupable d'outrage au Parlement lorsque la reproduction ou l'utilisation n'est pas conforme à la présente permission.

Aussi disponible sur le site Web de la Chambre des communes à l'adresse suivante : <http://www.noscommunes.ca>