

What holds the future for Europe's migration and asylum? Sharing best knowledge and EU practice on integration of migrants and existing challenges in Balkan countries, through Italian and Austrian models and best practices.

The crisis of solidarity?

Asylum Protection center-APC has organized a conference in Belgrade on 2-3 March 2017, under the name *"What holds the future for Europe's migration and asylum? Sharing best knowledge and EU practice on integration of migrants and existing challenges in Balkan countries, through Italian and Austrian models and best practices*, funded by the Central European Initiative and co-funded under the project – *Balkan Refugee Trail, a Pathway for European Solidarity supported by European Commission Europe for Citizens Programme*. This event brought together more than 30 experts from non-governmental and governmental organisations from 14 European CEI member countries strongly affected by the ongoing "refugee crisis", therefore timely representing an excellent platform for discussing the development of the concrete migration integration challenges, policies and practice, as well as for exchange of experiences, best practices and lessons learned from the field in their respective countries with special focus on interaction and integration models and positive practices from Italy and Austria.



During the panel on European solidarity, panelists discussed on models, concepts, for developing and strengthening in action and solidarity in compassion, most specifically in local communities as a facilitation methods to interaction, integration and inclusion. The panelists have also discussed about different interpretations of solidarity in countries along the so-called Western Balkan route, practices of CSO activists on the ground and their actions can be translated into a definition of solidarity. Being that the crisis is asymmetrical in many countries on the route and that those countries that not as heavily impacted by the refugee flow, show most ethnocentrism and xenophobia towards asylum seekers and refugees. Most panelists agreed that during the midst of the crisis in late 2015, civil society has vigorously and readily responded to the call to help refugees, while the countries along the route did manage well the emergency response to the plight of thousands of refugees into Europe. In that regard, the panelists stressed that civil society, including non-governmental organizations, volunteers and the local communities must continue to be involved in the process of actively finding durable solutions to the interaction, integration and inclusion of refugees in their

countries and that without a common, united action securitization along with the militarization of the borders of Europe will take hold, and human rights, humanity and human dignity will be undermined.

Panelists were Lea Horvat, from Centre for Peace Studies-CMS Zagreb, Croatia, Jasmin Redjepi from Legis Skopje, Macedonia, Miha Nabergoj from Legal Information Centre for Non-Governmental Organisations from Ljubljana, Slovenia, Marianna Fragkou from Greek Council for Refugees in Athens, Greece, Franjo Steiner from Interculturelles Zentrum from Vienna, Austria and Stefano Volpicelli from ICS - Ufficio Rifugiati from Trieste, Italy (also representative of CEI). Panelists have through deep emotion and compassion exchanged views on forgotten social values, the poor state of solidarity in society, apathy and the need to awaken local communities through targeted media campaigns and political advocacy.

In that regard, the panelists stressed that civil society, including non-governmental organizations, volunteers and the local communities must continue to be involved in the process of actively finding durable solutions to the migrant crisis, and that without a common, united action securitization along with the militarization of the borders of Europe will take hold, and human rights, humanity and human dignity will be undermined. More so, panelists acknowledged that there are many factors that have led to a crisis of solidarity but xenophobia is the central issue for the civil situation. Besides addressing xenophobia, the second focus should be advocating to find solutions in every country and to develop common European asylum system and to influence the public opinion. Solutions must be made on international levels and civil society organizations should make coalitions and then proceeded with the plan. Lastly, one of the panelists underlined that technological aspect of the crisis should also not be ignored – smartphones are one of the factors which made the refugee movements possible, while also it is the access to technology and the quickly changing face of technology which has led to a rising fear of islamophobia.



Overall, panelists presented examples of solidarity in action, activities they have implemented in order to address rising xenophobia and fear, disinformation, and have presented good practices in sharing information and working with the local communities, institutions, and with the government. More so, all have agreed that the role of activists, volunteers and CSO representatives is irreplaceable and will play a greater role in the future.

Stefano Volpiceli, as a representative of the Central European Initiative (CEI), said that in order to define the concept of solidarity, we need to disintegrate the root of the word solidarity, which essentially consists of empathy, compassion and integration. Stefano Volpiceli stressed that these three items are the main components of a true solidarity of one being with the other, and if successfully presented could and will lead to a social, cultural, and value-based convergence and integration of all human beings. As long as people are lost in standards, laws and institutional principles, solidarity, empathy, compassion and integration will continue to be defeated by negative media propaganda, xenophobia and ethnic nationalism.