



CONFERENCE ON “MIGRATION, SOCIETAL AND MARKET TRANSFORMATIONS – PERCEPTIONS, DEBATES AND POLICIES IN ASIA AND EUROPE”

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Introduction and Background

The movement of people across frontiers has been a constant feature of human history. However, the relentless pace of globalisation, the rapid development in modern transport and communications, rising gap in wealth distribution and many other factors have resulted in large scale migration of all patterns in recent times. These wide-scale migration and immigration patterns pose several challenges to nation-states, societies and communities.

Societies are now faced with intensifying debates on the pros and cons of migration, and increasing anxieties and fears of the impact of immigration on the social fabric of societies. As many developed societies confront the problems of aging and possible shortage of labour and need to revitalise the economy, discussions are now focused on controlled migration and the competition for skilled labour. Globally and regionally, policy makers are grappling with difficult issues of designing policies and programmes that would look at labour migration and immigration from both the perspectives of sending and receiving countries. For receiving countries in particular, immigration is increasingly attracting central attention as the rapid pace and scale of immigration bring consequences to bear on employment and wages in the economy and on social and cultural issues of integration and citizenship.

In Europe, the European Union (EU) and its member states have responded to the challenges brought about by migration and immigration with a variety of policies. Immigration issues now feature prominently in public debates in European societies, and “public perception of immigration and immigrants tends to be increasingly negative throughout Europe”.¹ This is particularly after the events of September 11 and the series of terrorist attacks and arrests within the European Union, from the Madrid bomb blasts in 2003 to the 2005 attacks on the British transport system. The

¹ Ricklef Beutin & et al. “Migration and Public Perception”. Paper by the Bureau of European Policy Advisers, European Commission, 04/10/2006.
http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/policy_advisers/publications/index_en.htm

view that migration is harmful rather than beneficial and should be restricted rather than facilitated has dominated the policies of the EU and its member states. Yet, at the same time, the EU also subscribes to the belief on protecting human rights (including rights of immigrants) and values against racism and xenophobia.

Increasingly, purely national migration policies are not sufficient in addressing EU's urgent migration challenges. The internal free movement of people within the EU has brought with it the growing need to coordinate the immigration policies of the member states. Yet progress to date on a common EU policy has been patchy. Against this backdrop, it is positive that the French presidency has put immigration high on its agenda for 2008. At the same time, it is important to consider carefully which areas should be for common action, and which areas should continue to be dealt with at the national level.²

Turning to Asia, a wide range of migration flows is largely characterised by the search of better opportunities and livelihoods".³ Driven primarily by the need for gainful employment, intra-regional or inter-regional migration flows are increasing not only in volume but in spatial complexity. While a large part of Asia are positioned in the international migration system as labour sending countries⁴, some of the countries in Asia are also experiencing labour shortages, ageing population and declining fertility rates and have to confront issues of increasing immigration of labour migrants ranging across the skills spectrum. This brings in train similar issues for receiving nation-states comparable to the European context, relating to local-foreign encounters and perceptions of the "other", issues of social cohesion and the politics of identity. At the same time, there are also significant differences in the migration regimes operating in Asia in regulating different forms of transnational labour flows as well as different societal approaches and values on integration, rights and responsibilities. A comparative study of immigration issues in Europe and Asia will hence be instructive in examining the way similar issues play out differently in different socio-political contexts.

Of particular concern is irregular migration, a serious issue in Asia because of various push and pull factors. Asian governments are increasingly concerned with high levels of irregular migration, with intensified problems of migrant smuggling and human trafficking together with other transnational crimes such as drugs and terrorism. All these cross-border issues and transnational crimes cannot be effectively tackled alone and many governments in the region have begun to explore regional initiatives on combating these problems.⁵

What all the above show is that with increasing visibility and importance, immigration attracts controversy and debates. Issues ranging from security threats such as terrorism, perceived threats to national identity, social cohesion, and broader questions of human security arising from illegal migration and human trafficking

² Jakob von Weizsacker, "Strait is the Gate- Europe's Immigration Priorities", Bruegel Policy Brief, July 2008, Issue 2008/05.

³ NTS Alert "Managing Migration", a fortnightly Bulletin of current NTS issues confronting Asia, published by the S Rajaratnam School of International Studies.

⁴ As a source of labour migrants, Asia offers some important lessons with regards to labour emigration and diaspora management. This will however not be the focus in this conference.

⁵ Chapter on "Asia and Oceania" – World Migration Report 2005

intertwined giving rise sometimes to emotional debates and responses that do not address adequately the complexity of the different issues involved. Policy responses taken in reaction to public perceptions and populist sentiments may not in the long run address the real issues and face up to the fact that human migration that have long existed cannot be halted but can only be managed.

Objectives and Purpose of Conference

The conference on “Migration, Societal and Market Transformations - Perceptions and Debates in Asia and Europe” will bring together scholars and policy researchers from Asia and Europe to address the debates ongoing in both Europe and Asia over securitisation of the migration issue, the insecurity over identity and ways of life, and the different policy responses to managing migration and integration.

This conference will specifically focus on the issues and responses to immigration by receiving countries in the EU and Asia. The aims of this conference are as follows:

- To understand the broad political economy approach towards migration in Asia and Europe, and in particular the underlying philosophy and assumptions informing migration regimes in various receiving countries;
- To discuss the transformations to society and labour market brought about by immigration and migration;
- To understand public perception and debates on migration and how they are formed and how they can be managed;
- To revisit the various migration policies in receiving countries and evaluate if they adequately address the real challenges of migration;
- To highlight useful and substantive insights from case studies and draw out implications for policy design; and
- To look into cross migration flows between Asia and Europe and foster discussions on how countries in each region manage these flows

Outline of the conference

The conference will comprise an opening keynote session and three panel discussions.

Opening Keynote Session – Policy debates and updates on migration in EU and Asia

Two speakers, preferably officials or experts involved in policy design, one from the European Union and one from ASEAN, will be invited to provide an update on the policy debates and changes, perceptions and public discourse within EU and ASEAN with regards to migration in the respective regions. Examples of different migration regimes at national level and regional coordination on managing migration flows, protecting the rights of migrant labour, etc will be the focus of this session.

Following the opening session will be three panel discussions. Each panel will have three speakers.

Panel One – Assumptions and Approaches towards Immigration

This panel will explore the underlying philosophy and assumptions that inform attitudes and approaches towards immigration within society in general, and among policy makers in particular. How is migration viewed – as an historical and ongoing part of the human condition to be accepted and managed or as an ongoing challenge to sovereignty and security to be tightly controlled if not prevented? How does one square strong economic motivations underlying most migration globally with equally powerful nationalistic political impulse to protect jobs and identity? Paper presenters will address the complex attitude and debates towards immigration and migrants evolving in some of the European and Asian recipient countries, and analyse the linkages between globalisation, concept of sovereignty and citizenship, and immigration. The evolving picture of immigration politics across developed economies and cross cutting challenges will also be discussed.

Panel Two – Managing Diversities: Approaches towards Integration and Social Cohesion

This panel will explore not only the official policy responses to the management of diversities in societies with substantial stock of immigrants, but how other non-state actors, interest groups, trade unions, media react to the new migrants. In already heterogeneous societies in which there are existing minority groups, there is an added dimension of possible differences between how the majority populations and the minority groups viewed the arrival of new migrants. The challenges for policy makers in coming to grips about migrants are not only about tackling public perceptions and reducing fears about economic competition and cultural identity, but the broader debates on multiculturalism and the issue of what integration should mean and how to live together and bring the best out of the existing diversities. The speakers will also address the institutions and mechanisms that ground social cohesion as well as the possible inter-group tensions that may threaten them. Last but not least, this panel will also examine at what constitutes the critical parameters that need attention for well-designed migration policy

Panel Three – The Securitisation of Migration: Consequences and Impact

This panel will focus on how the issue of migration has become securitised and appeared in public debates as a security threat to be handled. The terrorist attacks of September 11 on the US energised this trend of securitization and the migration-security nexus have really come to the forefront of many debates on migration in Europe. Immigration is now seen as an existential threat to both societal and state survival. Issues such as internal security, social stability, economic independence and cultural identity are all “enmeshed” and linked to migration. Speakers will therefore address the sense of insecurity – whether it is from terrorism, global economic competition – that influence the debates and discourse on migration. Within the last decade, the most dramatic change has been the securitisation of migration debates. The consequences of such securitisation will be the central theme of this panel.

Expected Outcome

At the end of the Conference, a Special Policy Brief on “Migration challenges – Issues for receiving countries” would be produced based in part on the Conference and in part on additional background research.

Additionally, the papers that are presented at the Conference would be put together for academic publication – either as a Special Edition of an Internationally-refereed Journal or a book by one of the main academic publishers such as Routledge or Palgrave.

ABOUT THE ORGANISER:

The European Union Centre in Singapore

The European Union (EU) Centre in Singapore is an initiative of the European Commission, and was established on 16 April 2008 in partnership with the National University of Singapore and the Nanyang Technological University.

The EU Centre aims to promote a better understanding of EU institutions, policies, its positions on regional and global issues in general and more importantly, a greater appreciation of EU’s role in Southeast Asia and its engagement with Singapore. It strives to raise awareness and promote knowledge of the EU in Singapore through different outreach activities, education, research and publications. Specifically, the Centre will

- Work with the various educational institutions to develop a base of EU studies;
- Develop a series of public talks, lectures, seminars, publications and research to enhance understanding and knowledge of EU and its policies; and
- Facilitate the expansion of exchanges and academic links between the EU and Singapore

PARTNERS:

Asia Research Institute – NUS

Established as a university-level institute in July 2001, the **Asia Research Institute** (ARI) is one of the strategic initiatives of the National University of Singapore, as it focuses its sights on being a world-leading hub for research and education on Asia. ARI engages the social sciences broadly defined, and especially interdisciplinary frontiers between and beyond disciplines. It seeks to be a space of encounters for scholars around the world working on Asia. Within NUS, it works particularly with the Faculties of Arts and Social Sciences, Business, Law, Design and Environment, and the Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy, as well as the other Asia institutes to support research, conferences, lectures and graduate study at the highest level.

Its research clusters are organised around the following themes:

- The Changing Family in Asia;
- Asian Migration
- Cultural Studies in Asia

- Religion and Globalisation in Asian Contexts
- Southeast Asia-China Interactions
- Sustainable Cities

Centre for Non-traditional Security (NTS) Studies – RSIS/NTU

The mission of the Centre for NTS Studies located within the S Rajaratnam School of International Studies is to conduct research and produces policy-relevant analyses aimed at furthering awareness and building capacity to address NTS issues and challenges in the Asia-Pacific region and beyond.

To fulfil this Mission, the Centre for NTS Studies aims to:

- Advance the understanding of NTS issues and challenges in the Asia-Pacific by highlighting gaps in knowledge and policy, and identifying best practices among state and non-state actors in responding to these challenges.
- Provide a platform for scholars and policy-makers within and outside Asia to discuss and analyse NTS issues in the region.
- Network with institutions and organisations worldwide to exchange information, insights and experiences in the area of NTS.
- Engage policy-makers on the importance of NTS in guiding political responses to NTS emergencies and develop strategies to mitigate the risks to state and human security.
- Contribute to building the institutional capacity of governments, and regional and international organisations to respond to NTS challenges.



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