

## ***The lesson of Ceuta – Solidarity within Europe and with our Mediterranean neighbors on the migration issue***

In July 2026, a migration crisis in the Mediterranean sparked an irrational uproar. The sudden influx of 72,000 people from Thursday, July 30 to Friday, July 31 was politically exploited. The migration issue weaponized and a main source of division in Europe, even though it should require solidarity and unity (1). During the "refugee" crisis in the summer of 2015, Germany showed solidarity, with the encouraging words expressed by its chancellor, Angela Merkel, who said at the end of August 2015, "*Wir schaffen das*" (we will manage). Since then, the European Union has tightened its migration policy with a rightization of the Council of the European Union and the European Parliament. In 2024, the "migration and asylum pact," designed by the European Commission in consultation with all European governments, was a compromise reached among the twenty-seven EU countries. Adopted in June 2026, several member states wanted to strengthen the externalization of migrant management by developing "return centers" outside the EU, to avoid the thorny issue of relocating exiles within the European Union, each State seeking to escape it. (2)

Catherine Withol de Wenden, an expert in migration and emeritus director of research at the CNRS, recalled three recent facts. They can explain the massive influx of exiles in the Spanish enclave of Ceuta, a crossing of an external border of the European Union that caused the death of 72 people (3). In early July, a Spanish Supreme Court ruling prohibited the immediate refoulement of migrants trying to reach the Spanish enclaves of Morocco of Ceuta and Melilla by sea. In April, the Spanish government announced the regularization of 500,000 undocumented migrants before the end of 2026. At the end of July 2026, the celebrations marking the coming to power of the King of Morocco were able to direct Moroccan police forces towards the country's cities and not towards the coast. Catherine Withol de Wenden insists on the Moroccan strategy – Morocco "has become aware of the geostrategic place" that its country occupied for Europe. "Only 13 kilometers separate Gibraltar from the Moroccan coast and the cities of Andalusia." Morocco has favored a bilateral approach, signing an agreement with Spain in 2023 to combat irregular immigration. The one border concerns the entire territory, and particularly the undocumented migrants from Sub-Saharan Africa. The Kingdom is, however, reluctant to enter into multilateral agreements with all European countries "that would oblige it to take back undocumented migrants who have transited through its territory". Since 2017, Morocco wishes to join the Community of West African States and thus maintain good relations with its African neighbors. Until then, Morocco had been the herald of multilateralism "in the global governance of migration". In 2018, it signed the Marrakesh Pact, initiated by the United Nations; previously, he had organized a symposium on the 1990 United Nations Convention on the rights of migrant workers and their families. Signed by about sixty countries, all in the South, it guarantees rights to undocumented migrants. Since 2021, already in Ceuta, Morocco has integrated the migration issue into its diplomatic relations with its African and European neighbors, sometimes playing the card of solidarity with the countries of West Africa or that of collaboration with Europe for the protection of its external borders.

Alberto Alemanno, Professor of European Union Law at HEC Paris, Chair Jean Monnet, recalls the central principle of the European project: "pressure on an external border is a common responsibility" (4). The murderous episode of Ceuta and its political recuperation was a test that many European countries failed. "The question was not whether Europe should control its borders; it must and does.

The question was whether pressure at an external border would remain a shared responsibility or become a reason for governments to stand up against each other." So it was not a question of "border management but of political solidarity". The Italian academic recalls that when 10,000 migrants arrived on the island of Lampedusa (Sicily) in September 2023, the Italian government of Georgia Meloni had received support from the president of the European Commission, Ursula von der Leyen. There is therefore a difference in treatment between Pedro Sanchez's Spain, which is considered as "a government that contributed to its own crisis," and Georgia Meloni's Italy, which is "treated as a country with a common burden." European solidarity cannot be conditional. For Alberto Alemanno, this strategy of variable geometry within the EU is a "flaw that external actors have quickly exploited". US President Donald Trump and his vice president, JD Vance, once again spoke of an "invasion of the West," and billionaire Elon Musk likened the situation in Ceuta to a "World War Z" zombie movie. This last letter, which has become the rallying sign of pro-Putin supporters, did not escape Ukrainian Foreign Minister Andrii Sybiha, who "reported more than 1,500 publications on Ceuta relayed by pro-Russian networks" linked to the Russian propaganda media Pravda and Russia Today (RT). Alberto Alemanno's conclusion is edifying: "If solidarity depends on political alignment, the Schengen area ceases to be a union," and becomes a "currency of exchange" in negotiations that can sow discord within the EU.

he most relevant and honest way to approach the migration issue remains the economic angle. According to Hakim El Karoui, founder of the Action Committee for the Mediterranean, even the most extremist European leaders on the migration issue "do, once in power, what their demographics require" (4). He recalls that in 2024, the fertility rate of the European Union fell to 1.34 children per woman. The observation is simple: "Without immigration, Europe's working-age population could shrink by 20% by 2050." The decline would be 31% in Italy and 29% in Spain. The government of Giorgia Meloni, with its violently anti-immigration rhetoric, is expected to allow a growth of more than 10% of the immigrant population – 452,000 foreign workers (2023-2025) and 500,000 (2026-2028). Viktor Orbán's Hungary (2010-2026), which is also anti-immigrant, has opened its country to "guest workers" - residence permits have increased from 20,751 in 2015 to 87,624 in 2024 (twice the level in France). The Danish social-democratic government, a benchmark for its "uncompromising and dissuasive migration policy," issued three times as many residence permits as France in 2024 (50% of which were for nationals of non-OECD countries). Hakim El Karoui insists on the obvious – labor immigration is a necessity for the European Union. It is better to seriously organize the ways that allow to cross borders legally rather than to fuel the patent and murderous failure of an illusory and irrational closure of borders. Labor shortages do not only affect low-skilled jobs; the proportion of graduates among European professions in shortage (or under strain) is also increasing. The bilateral agreements signed between Germany and India are an example to follow. Their goal is to build a sector. About 90,000 Indian workers arrive in Germany every year. Asylum applications have fallen by half since 2021. The German economy has moved from "suffered migration to organized mobility." This virtuous strategy should inspire European migration policy.

An original and revolutionary proposal by Hakim El Karoui concerns the Mediterranean migration policy. He suggests no longer to favor a security approach (some visas against border surveillance) but to organize "training, recruitment, and the movement of skills between the shores of the Mediterranean." That Europe "invests together with the Moroccan, Tunisian, Egyptian or Algerian universities in fields which train more engineers than it recruits". The mobility of their young graduates could become a funding instrument for Mediterranean countries, like transfers of players in professional football. A "transfer market" would be opened for young graduates between the countries of the North and South of the Mediterranean – a "talent passport" source of emulation between Europe and North Africa. In an aging Europe, youth and training are the future.

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- (1) Editorial « L'exploitation éhontée de la crise de Ceuta », Le Monde, dimanche 2 et lundi 3 août 2026
- (2) Anna Joubinet « Ceuta met au jour les divisions européennes », Le Monde , 5 août 2026
- (3) Catherine Wihtol de Wenden , spécialiste des migrations, et directrice de recherche émérite au CNRS « Le Maroc a conscience de la place géostratégique qu'il occupe pour l'Europe dans les migrations », Le Monde, 6 août 2026
- (4) Alberto Alemanno, professeur titulaire de la chaire Jean Monnet de droit de l'Union européenne HEC, Paris « Ceuta a montré à quelle vitesse les divisions politiques peuvent transformer une urgence frontalière en menace pour la solidarité européenne », Le Monde, 7 août 2026
- (5) Hakim El Karoui , fondateur du Comité d'action pour la Méditerranée « Le débat qui oppose ouverture et fermeture des frontières est de plus en plus déconnecté du réel », auteur du rapport « La Méditerranée par le travail », Paris, juillet 2026- <https://action-med.org/#report>