

**Notes**  
on the  
**Seminar on Promoting Resettlement as a Way  
to Address the Refugee Crisis,**  
Held on the  
**10<sup>th</sup> of November 2016**  
at  
**Vanha Ylioppilastalo**

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## **Abstract**

The following document presents summarised key notes from the European Union seminar titled “Promoting resettlement as a way to address the refugee crisis”, held on the 10<sup>th</sup> of November 2016 at Vanha Ylioppilastalo in the Helsinki. The event, organised by The European Commission Representation in Finland and the Ministry of the Interior of Finland, sought to address and promote resettlement as one of the solutions to the refugee crisis, and compared some of the adequate practices of resettlement policies through the Finnish and Swedish examples.

Keywords: EU, European Union, migrant, migration, refugee, asylum seeker, crisis, issue, resettlement, quota refugee, quota refugees, cultural orientation, Finland, Sweden

## **Acknowledgements**

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## Main Points

Prior to the start of the seminar, some of the publications and brochures of the European Commission, including “The EU in 2015” and “State of the Union 2016”, and of the Finnish Immigration Service, namely “Resettlement and Humanitarian Admission Programmes in Europe: what works? - National Report of Finland”, were provided to the participants. The seminar began at 14:15. Sari Artjoki, the Head of the European Commission Representation in Finland, welcomed the participants through a brief opening word, and introduced the moderator, Fatbardhe Hetemaj, as the Year 2009 Woman Refugee, an award conferred yearly since 1998 by the Finnish Refugee Council, won by Hetemaj for her activism against xenophobia. Hetemaj is also a Finnish politician active within the National Coalition Party and a Human Resources Management professional.

The first participant to speak was Frans Timmermans. The First Vice-President of the European Commission began by linking the concrete measure that need to be taken to the vision that Europe has for its future, and asserting that keeping a border-less Europe inside is contingent upon solving the problems outside. Timmermans considered the ongoing refugee crisis to be stemming from demographic growth not on par with economic growth, and therefore would not necessarily come to an end with peace in Syria. Balancing demographic growth with economic growth goes necessarily through development in Africa, in Timmermans' opinion, who then proceeds to emphasise on the microeconomical measure that could balance such macroeconomical disparities, none other than woman empowerment. Timmermans' point is very relevant, and has long been one of the objectives consistently and constantly raised in European Union and United Nations 2020 development and gender equality programmes, among other. Timmermans then proceeded by explaining the internal aspect of the migrant crisis and the causes that led to the Dublin Regulation falling out of hand, which is none other than countries turning a blind eye to migrants going through. He asserted that the solution would only be reached through a fundamental debate in order to come up with an equitable and comprehensive European agreement. This would not only ensure a borderless Europe, but would also drive smugglers out of the crisis middle-man business. Timmermans concluded his seven-minute address by praising the experiences of Finland and Sweden, and their responsible burden-sharing and trailblazer role, and reiterated that burden shifting and finger pointing are the farthest from being effective practices in solving such crises.

The next address was given by the Minister of the Interior of Finland Paula Risikko. Risikko's structured speech began by describing the pioneer role of Finland's quota refugee programmes and their international uniqueness, as well as the immense effort put into the integration of the refugees admitted under the aforementioned programmes; a point rightfully

accurate. The Minister proceeded by enumerating the different steps of the resettlement and integration processes and the cooperation between the trinity of the Finnish Immigration Service, the International Organization for Migration, and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. Risikko equally highlighted the Finnish vision with regards to integration, characterising it with a comprehensiveness that starts already at the selection mission, and that aims for a continuity manifesting through the selected placement of refugee groups. Newly selected quota refugees are provided with residence permits within two months, and are granted upon arrival, the same rights as their municipality-residing peers. They will, in addition, have an individually-crafted integration plan. The Minister stated that, while Finland has increased its quota for 2014 and 2015, it must be ensured that everyone who comes to Finland would be integrated, and concluded by voicing the country's interest in the European Union's plans to encourage other countries to start similar resettlement plans and participate in the global responsibility sharing, in the hope that refugees would end up committed and active.

Morgan Johansson, the Swedish Minister for Justice and Migration, started his address by praising the convivial set-up, reminiscent of Lund, his Scandian homeland. After the expressions of gratitude, Johansson commended the leadership of the European Commission and the bold measures taken during the crisis, stating that while he disagrees with some of these measures, he agrees with the general stance. The Minister brought the international context into attention, stating that the seminar takes place two days after the 2016 United States presidential elections, and asserting that, while their results could suggest a global change, European and universal values would still need to be abided by. Johansson's answer to the measures that Europe can properly take in order to solve its largest migrant crisis so far, began by detailing his personal visit to the Azraq refugee camp in Jordan, and emphasising on the poor conditions faced by adults and children alike, as well as his personal encounters with refugees in Sweden, whom he described as very grateful. Johansson stated that accepting refugees is simply the right thing to do, and was assertive in stating that the refugees will join the strong employment market and will contribute to the 3.8% gross domestic product growth. He justified the existence of a border that breaks the Schengen rules, by the limited capacity of the Swedish State to counter the migrant flow caused by other countries letting migrants through, emphasising anew on the importance of equitable sharing. Regarding resettlement, the Minister stated that Sweden is committed to providing safe and legal pathways that reduce illegal immigration and discourage risking one's life at sea, mentioning however, that despite an increase in the quotas, with Sweden's Congolese, Somalian, and Syrian 1900 refugee quota being the highest per capita in Europe, a gap remains between what can be done and what needs to be done. Johansson speculated that if every state in the European Union would take the Swedish

example, around one hundred thousand refugees could be resettled each year. The Minister concluded by stating the Swedish intention to increase the quota to 5000 by 2018, hoping that other states would follow, in order to properly reflect the values that the European Union was founded upon. The moderator then thanked him, and joked about how he had avoided eye contact when his allocated time approached its end.

Jaako Niinistö, the Deputy Mayor of the City of Vantaa was next. After introducing the city, Niinistö gave a few statistics about its three reception centres serving around 1000 young Iraqi male customers. As Niinistö's responsibility's cover multiculturalism and employment, his challenges were to ensure that foreigners learn the language and become active in the workforce, in spite of high unemployment and a weak economic situation. The Deputy Mayor gave an example of the challenging decisions relevant to this particular context: With three thousand unemployed foreign nationals currently living in Vantaa, and many newcomers around the corner, who should be prioritised among these two groups, taking into account the challenging employment and housing situations? The solution in Niinistö's opinion is twofold: More funding and more power for the local governments, i.e. through a thorough discussion between the central government and their local counterparts, in order to better solve ongoing issues such as refugee concentration in Southern areas coupled by the relative lack of resources allocated for the same areas. The Deputy Mayor then stated that, despite the negative outlook and the multicultural issues, measures to improve the situation were taken, namely organising volunteer groups to teach Finnish. Niinistö believes that this has helped in many ways, not the least preventing any security issues that might arise from having 1000 men with neither activities nor language skills in Vantaa.

Hetemaj initiated the panel debate with a question addressed to Timmermans about the roles of the member countries in shaping European policies as a whole, to which the First Vice-President of the European Commission replied by stating that the countries could provide the leading example through being realistic about the situation and avoiding scaremongering, and asserted that political promises of keeping refugees out will only work for a while and are not in any way a solution. Morgan Johansson agreed with Timmermans' point, stating that some political leaders hide behind their electorate, which he sees as weak leadership, in contrast to a strong leadership that he defines as a realistic admission of what needs to be done, i.e. learning Swedish and a integrating the job market, preferably through a fast competence scan followed by a tailored education before employment. Johansson further asserts that the demographic composition of refugees is nothing but complementary to its ageing Swedish counterpart. Timmermans concludes the panel debate by reiterating his point about the need for collective responsibility sharing, and reminding that migration crises are global and local at the same time.

The seminar concluded with three questions discussing the future of resettlement in Europe, sustainable development goals, and integration efforts.

Overall, while holding a seminar about resettlement in Finland is no different than preaching to the choir, since the country's commitment, along with that of its Swedish neighbour, have been rather consistent, the European Commission needs to capitalise on these experiences and do its role in paving and taking the way for a comprehensive migrant resettlement agreement. The seminar reflected a slight yet apparent divide, if not between Swedish and Finnish policies, then towards the expectations of the roles of refugees in their host communities. Both Finnish and Swedish parties agreed nevertheless that the key to integration is language and that the coronation of integration is employment. The lack of any mention of the EU-Turkey Statement was also a point that all parties abided by, despite its mention in the seminar description. The organisation aspect was exemplary and the seminar was in general informative.