
NINE EU MEMBERS STAY AWAY FROM UN MIGRATION PACT

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Three EU members voted against, five abstained and one didnt vote during the formal ratification on Wednesday (19 December) in New York of the Global Compact on Migration.

The UN General Assembly on Wednesday formally ratified a UN deal on migration by a large majority — but without the support of the United States and a string of other countries.

A total of 152 countries voted in favor of the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration, which was agreed upon earlier this month by 165 UN members at a meeting in Morocco.

Marrakesh UN forum adopts migration pact despite withdrawals

A United Nations conference adopted a migration pact in front of leaders and representatives from over 160 countries in Morocco on Monday (10 December), despite a string of withdrawals, including several EU countries, driven by anti-immigrant populism.

Five nations voted against it — the United States, Hungary, the Czech Republic, Poland and Israel.

Among the twelve abstaining countries are EU members Austria, Bulgaria, Italy, Latvia and Romania. Slovakia did not vote.

More than 50 delegations explained their positions.

Péter Szijjártó, Hungarys Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade, said that the General Assembly was about to commit a serious mistake by endorsing this unbalanced, biased and pro-migration document. Migration is a dangerous phenomenon, he said, emphasizing that Hungary reserves the sovereign right to decide on migration and security measures.

The representative of Bulgaria said his delegation joined several European nations, including Italy and Switzerland, in abstaining from todays vote. The proposed visa liberalization measures might lead to lesser control over migrants in general and the term newly arrived migrants may leave room for various interpretations, he said, noting that Bulgaria is not in a position to adhere fully to certain commitments and concrete actions associated with them.

According to diplomats, the United States had sought up to the last minute to convince other countries not to support the pact.

Belgium voted in favour, although its Prime Minister Charles Michel announced its resignation on Tuesday, having lost majority after its anti-immigration coalition partner N-VA abandoned ship.

In Slovakia, the foreign minister Miroslav Lajčák resigned last November, after the country's parliament voted against signing up to the Global Compact. Lajčák had helped to put together the initiative as president of the United Nations General Assembly in 2017.

Billed as the first international document on managing migration, the Global Compact lays out 23 objectives to open up legal migration and discourage illegal border crossings, as the number of people on the move globally has surged to more than almost 260 million, or 3.4% of the world population.

More than 80% of those moving between countries do so legally, but more 60,000 people have died trying to cross border illicitly since 2000, according to UN figures.

The agreement is not legally binding, which has raised concerns among NGOs and human rights advocates that its provisions may not be fully implemented.

Hungary once again denounced the pact as a serious mistake and raised the spectre of a fresh influx of migrants, while Brazil's far-right president-elect Jair Bolsonaro said migrants had made parts of France unlivable and announced he would withdraw from the pact.

Support safe migration

But UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres warned at the summit last week in Morocco for world leaders to sign off on the text that we must not succumb to fear and false narratives.

German Chancellor Angela Merkel also sought to quell fears at the meeting, saying the aim of the agreement was to prevent, rather than encourage, illegal migration.

This is about safe, orderly and regular migration – it says (this) clearly in the title, she said in Marrakesh.

The pact includes a series of principles – including the defence of human rights, recognition of the sovereignty of nations – as well as a list of collaborative tools, such as sharing information and expertise and integrating migrants.

It stipulates that the detention of migrants should only be a last resort in tackling the global problem.

Amnesty International, a human rights group that supported the pact, said the countries that refused to endorse it – including the United States, Australia, Hungary, Italy, Poland and Austria – had been responsible for the worst abuses against migrants in recent years.