

The EU needs a new migration policy

The recent refusal of the new Italian government to accept a boat carrying many migrants has thrown into sharp contrast varying attitudes on the continent to this vexed issue. Mrs Merkel who used to speak for Germany and the EU still thinks the EU should welcome in all who want to come. The newly constrained Mrs Merkel trying to keep together a coalition of opposites on this as so much else after her bad defeat in the election is having to compromise and toughen her position. Her one time allies, the CSU, are in open disagreement from inside government.

The Italian government and the German AFD Opposition, along with the CSU, challenge the idea behind the EU humanitarian policy of picking up anyone from the Med who is seeking to come to the EU and delivering them safely to Italy or Greece. Doesn't this, they ask, just encourage more nasty get rich quick people smugglers to take their money and embark migrants on unsafe boats in the knowledge they will soon be picked up by EU naval vessels? Why are economic migrants brought to the EU if they do not have permits rather than be returned to the last safe country they left? On the other side Mrs Merkel points out that the EU is a group of decent nations who come to the humanitarian aid of those in peril on the sea, however this has come about. Indeed at the peak of the recent migration Mrs Merkel went further and saw the migrants as a plus for a strong German economy in need of extra labour.

The large number of migrants places demands on housing, infrastructure and public services. Electors in Eastern Europe, Germany, Italy and elsewhere are voting in larger numbers for restrictions on migrant numbers. The EU has allowed countries to build big walls and border fences to arrest the flows, and has helped finance a very long Turkish border defence now there is free movement between Turkey and the EU. Mr Salvini in Italy and the CSU in Germany are now in a position to demand change. Meanwhile the UK can get on with designing a new border system which is generous to asylum seekers, helpful to business needing skilled people, but capable of delivering the controlled migration Mrs May has always promised us.