EMN Norway Conference 21. June 2018

Challenges – introduction by Tor Mikkel Wara (ca. 15 minutes)

INTRODUCTION

- Good morning! The long-term challenges of migration from poor to rich countries is a challenging topic, which has led to an ever more polarised debate throughout Europe, not least after the refugee crisis of 2015.

- Citizens are reacting to increasing numbers of migrants, multi-culturalism and insecurity, and many are questioning current migration policies.

- I commend EMN Norway for organising a conference that goes to the core of the issue, and challenge our thinking on refugee and migration policy.

- I find today's topic relevant and interesting for an evidence based and long-term, policy making, that is less "reactive" and not "panic-driven" – to put it in the words of Paul Collier and Alexander Betts.

SUSTAINABLE MIGRATION

- Migration up to a certain level and a certain composition is beneficial. For example, labour migration of educated, skilled migrants, many having modern, liberal values, with competences demanded by our labour market, is usually of great value for rich countries like Norway.

- But at a certain level migration stops being beneficial. For instance, if many such skilled migrants leave their poor home country, that country may experience a destructive and unsustainable “brain drain”. For us living in one of the rich destination countries, the picture is quite different. Our concern is the mixed migration flows of mostly low skilled irregular migrants, with limited education – often young men between 25 and 40 from vulnerable countries with poor institutions and governments. Many with limited language skills, and bearers of culture and values quite different from our own. Many of them will enter the Schengen-area irregularly and apply for asylum at national borders, or arrive through family migration.

- Quite a few of them are bona fide refugees. But many are also economic migrants struggling to get a better life for themselves and their family members. In many cases their closest family members will soon apply for family migration, and later on move to Norway.

- Will we be able to sustain the “Nordic Model” and our own welfare state in the future with continued transformations of the population and the socio-economic and cultural set up as we have seen the last 30 years? Will we still have trust and solidarity between different groups, and between people and the government? Will we be able to produce a set of values and common culture with the newcomers?

- And last but not least: Will we in the future be able to generate jobs for low skilled people like for example many of the immigrants from poor

countries? Will they be able to find work in an even more digitalized world of tomorrow?

- Or will they have to depend greatly on the welfare state?

- These worries are certainly not limited to Norway, but shared by many European countries. Similar worries "exploded", so to speak, in the second half of 2015, when we experienced the migration crisis.

- The route from a "politics of welcome" to a "politics of closed borders" became short, especially for the European countries receiving the greatest numbers of migrants. They experienced that the migration politics of the past was not sustainable. It led to "panic and regret" – as Collier and Betts describe it in their paper.

BALANCING THE PICTURE

- Let me make a small interlude and balance the picture to some extent. Today, the level of arrivals of asylum seekers to Norway is low, and immediate challenges are therefore not so pressing. However, an unknown number of family members, related to the great number of asylum seekers from 2015 – and before – will arrive in the coming years.

- I also think Norwegian integration politics has worked fairly well over the years. We have so far avoided the formation of parallel societies in the bigger cities. Let us also not forget the many second-generation immigrants with refugee background who are doing well. So the picture is indeed varied, also for immigrants from poor countries and with a refugee background.

CHALLENGES

- There are various aspects we need to keep in mind when we want to assess the challenges of tomorrow's migration:

- We learn from Collier's book *Exodus* that *marginal growth* of the number of immigrants is important for understanding migration dynamics. The "marginal growth" in quantity can suddenly lead to qualitative jump. For example, an immigrant group may develop into a parallel society when the critical mass of persons making up the group is big enough to sustain the inner cultural logic of that group. This group or society may also become a pull factor in itself – a "workhorse" for accelerating immigration, to use the language of Collier.

- Then to other more long-term challenges: I have already mentioned technological change and the question of how to get jobs for low-skilled immigrants. How many will the labour market be able to absorb and what will be the immediate effects of marginal growth of the various groups?

- Another equally compelling question is the size and composition of future immigrant flows. Conflicts, bad governance and human rights violations are well-known reasons for forced displacement. Climate-induced migration represents another most alarming migration related challenge. The World Risk Report estimates that climate change may trigger population movements of up to 200 million people. Population growth, economic development, rising aspirations and ability to migrate are yet other key drivers of migration from poor to rich countries.

- If we also note the predictions of the *World Development Report 2016*, that around two thirds of the low skilled workers in developing countries stand to lose their current jobs due to automatization, we may agree that the migration challenges of tomorrow *may* be formidable?

THE CURRENT ASYLUM SYSTEM

- Do we have a system to handle the challenges? In my opinion not quite good enough. The current asylum system is often said to favour the few who have sufficient strength and means to pay the smugglers to the richer and preferable destinations.

- Left behind in regional havens are the remaining 85 prosent of the refugees with minimal support compared to the investments in the few who were lucky to reach the richer countries. The picture becomes even more bleak and unjust if we continue back the migration chain from the regional haven to the country of origin where we find the internally displaced and *the bottom billion* (title of Collier's book), who do not even have the ability to leave their locality.

- What will happen if a greater number of the bottom billion will be able to pass from dream to reality – from aspiration to ability – and start their own migration project towards the richer and more fortunate countries?

- Another key challenge with the current asylum system is the loss of valuable human resources for post conflict recovery for the country of

origin. According to Collier and Betts, 30-50 prosent of the entire university educated Syrians have managed to reach European countries and settled there. Will they ever go back to help rebuild Syria? Probably not. What happened to the rationality of the Refugee Convention based on temporary settlement for as long as refuge is needed?

TODAYS CONFERENCE

- My goal for this conference is to highlight some of the challenges and questions and not to suggest solutions. Luckily we have gathered here today a broad number of reputed and highly qualified experts who will hopefully inspire us and guide us towards innovative, solution oriented policy making that will benefit the many and not only the few.

- I think we can all agree on the importance of debating what "*sustainable migration"* means, although there is no agreement yet as to how we more precisely shall define the concept. I assume Jørgen Carling from Peace Research Institute here in Oslo will highlight the similarities and differences. I look forward to that.
- Then follows Professors Paul Collier and Alexander Betts from Oxford well known and indeed highly influential in challenging current migration policy making in several European countries.

- My impression from reading their paper and meeting them yesterday is that their "*Sustainable Migration Framework"* will be a stimulating and relevant guide for thinking and policy making to improve the current system.

- Having recently completed my second master and this time in Moral Philosophy, I certainly like the way the framework of Collier and Betts starts out from first principles, namely our moral obligations towards refugees and indeed also poverty stricken, fragile countries. This conference, I hope, will help us all broaden our understanding of *Sustainable Migration* and possible implications for action.

ENDING

- One final point before I close off: The value of this conference is not only limited to knowledge development or possible future policy developmentt. As noted at the outset, I find the topic and questions asked daring and intriguing and the definitions and frameworks produced stimulating. This is of great value in itself as it helps us to sustain – and even increase – the public interest and feed public opinion and debate around migration and refuge issues.

- (Unfortunately, I will have to leave the conference at 11 as I have to attend this week's State Council. I am sure both the King, as well as the prime minister, see the great value of our conference, but unfortunately, I have to stick to normal proceedings.)

- I wish you all a happy conference!