

## New Perspectives on the “European Return Regime”

**10<sup>th</sup> Pan-European Conference of the European Union** (ECPR Standing Group on the EU, in Rome, on 4-6 June 2020)

**17<sup>th</sup> Annual IMISCOE Conference** (Embedded in the new Research Initiative ‘Revisiting Return Migration in Shifting Geopolitics’, in Luxembourg, on 30 June – 2 July 2020)

### Panel Chairs:

- [Laura Cleton](#) (University of Antwerp)
- Reinhard Schweitzer (University of Vienna)
- Robin Vandevoordt (University of Antwerp/Ghent University)

### Abstract

Since the so-called ‘migration crisis’ in 2015 (Crawley and Skleparis 2018, Guiraudon 2018), the EU and its member states have increasingly taken a ‘restrictive turn’ in their migration policies (Barker 2018, Kalir and van Schendel 2017). This has manifested itself in tightened border control, the criminalization of migrants and volunteers aiming to help them on the Mediterranean and the EU’s efforts to deter migration from reaching EU soil (Krause and Tauner 2008; Pécoud 2010; Casas-Cortes et al. 2015). As part of this ‘restrictive turn’, the European Commission and Member States have put considerable efforts into making returns from European states more ‘effective’ – increasing the number of irregularly-staying migrants effectively returning to their countries of citizenship (ECRE 2019; Majcher 2019). This push for higher return rates by Brussels’ policy makers was directly caused by the perceived high number of people arriving in Europe in 2015 (ECRE 2019) and resulted in various Commission communications and practical guidelines on ‘making returns more effective’ (European Commission 2015, 2017a, 2017b). Scholars researching the various ways in which return from European states is effectuated have explored the recent rise in immigration enforcement by means of ‘voluntary return’ programmes and coercive deportation practices (De Genova 2002, De Genova and Peutz 2010, Kanstroom 2012, Welch 2006), macro-level structures (Gibney 2008, Collyer 2008, Ellermann 2010) and micro-level actors (Vandevoordt 2018, Cleton and Chauvin 2019, Eule 2018) that shape such enforcement regimes, as well as the human experience of return and its societal impacts (Schuster and Majidi 2014, Peutz 2006, Drotbohm 2015). Others have explored the political uses of ‘voluntary return’ programmes for the removal of ‘irregular migrants’ (Webber 2011, Kalir 2017, Lietaert, Broekaert and Derluyn 2017, Leerkes et al. 2017) and the ways migrants decide to take part in such ‘voluntary return’ programmes, either by means of persuasion (Khosravi 2009), incentives (Lietaert 2017, Koser and Kuschminder 2015) and/or disincentives (Ataç and Rosenberger 2019, van der Leun 2006).

Building on this literature, this panel aims to explore current return policies and politics in the European context, and to conceptualize the specificities of a “European Return Regime”. By drawing on the concept of a ‘migration regime’ (De Genova and Peutz 2010, Eule et al. 2018), we highlight the multi-faceted nature of immigration enforcement in Europe and extend the focus to all actors and agencies involved in the process of returning ‘unwanted migrants’. We therefore welcome contributions from different disciplines, including but not limited to comparative politics, sociology, anthropology, geography, socio-legal studies and social work that focus on the workings of this return migration regime.

We welcome empirical and theoretical contributions on:

- The practices and experiences of street-level bureaucrats, policy makers, implementing organizations, returnees and other involved actors who shape this return migration regime;
- The institutional setup or social structures impacting the enforcement of 'voluntary return' programmes and deportation;
- The intensification of return policies (cf. ECRE 2019) or qualitative changes in their use (Guiraudon 2018);
- Return policies and practices in EU member states, 'transit countries' and alleged 'countries of origin' (such as the work of IOM and UNHCR in returning migrants from 'transit countries');
- The experiences and perspectives of returned migrants anywhere in the world.

Such a diverse range of contributions will lead us to develop a better understanding of the policies, discourses, practices and experiences shaping the European return regime.

If you are interested in contributing to this endeavour, please send an abstract of max. 250 words to Laura Cleton [[laura.cleton@uantwerpen.be](mailto:laura.cleton@uantwerpen.be)] **before 24 November 2019**. Please indicate your name and affiliation, as well as your preference/availability for one (or both) of the two conferences. We are looking forward to receiving your contributions.

With kind regards,

Laura Cleton (University of Antwerp)

Reinhard Schweitzer (University of Vienna)

Robin Vandevoordt (University of Antwerp/Ghent University)