

# Searching for solidarity in EU asylum policy

The European Parliament's civil liberties committee offers a snapshot of the European "state of mind", says its chair Juan Fernando Lopez Aguilar. Its biggest challenge will be getting member states to unblock the EU asylum package. *By Nikolaj Nielsen*

Article 80 of the Lisbon Treaty says European Union policies must be governed by the principles of solidarity and fair sharing of responsibility.

It is an article that Spanish socialist MEP Juan Fernando Lopez Aguilar often repeats in the face of the major backlash among member states when it comes to overhauling the EU's complex asylum system.

As chair of the European Parliament's civil liberties committee (LIBE), Aguilar is faced with a daunting task to pressure capitals into applying article 80 in practice.

His coordinators may choose to work with him or against him.

On the EPP side is Roberta Metsola (Malta). The socialists have Birgit Sippel (S&D, Germany), the liberals Sophie In't Veld (Renew, Netherlands), plus there is Terry Reintke (Greens/EFA, Germany) and Tineke Srik (Greens/EFA, Netherlands).

There is also Annalisa TARDINO (ID, Italy), Patryk Tomasz JAKI (ECR, Poland), Cornelia Ernst (GUE/NGL, Germany) listed as a provisional coordinator.

LIBE's biggest challenge over the next five years will be getting the EU Council, representing member states, to unblock the asylum package.

If Aguilar succeeds, it will also be the committee's biggest achievement.

'Dublin', a regulation that determines who is responsible for processing asylum applications, remains the most contentious item in the package as EU states balk over a provision to share out people seeking international protection.

Aguilar is not shy about his committee flexing its muscles in the face of an uncompromising council, telling EUobserver that member states have to understand that migration and asylum are no longer solely issues for national legislators.

"We need a positive approach, we need a constructive approach and we need to cooperate, both co-legislators, the council and the European parliament, to have that legislation adopted. That would be, in my view, the number one priority," he said.

But he also directed some of his complaints towards the upcoming European commission under president-elect Ursula von den Leyen, saying the cross-cutting nature of the files will make it more difficult to hold

the future commissioners to account.

Von den Leyen has promised a new pact on migration. Details remain sparse. "Protecting the European Way of Life" (previously migration), home affairs, transparency, justice and equality are all spread across five commissioners and in ways that are difficult to delineate.

Aguilar says security is a second priority.

It means making sure the security package aligns with fundamental rights and respects the principles of necessity and proportionality, he says.

Among the big files is tackling terrorist content online, plus e-privacy, and e-evidence. The inter-operability of EU-level security and police databases is also key.

But having to deal with some of the most politically toxic issues also means LIBE is bound to attract a diverse range of views.

Aguilar describes his committee as a snapshot of the European "state of mind" - with MEPs who oppose the European Union and dabble in hate speech.

"The LIBE committee is always the busiest committee in the house, very active, very intense, debates are often passionate, the issues are hot and divisive," he said.



Juan Fernando Lopez Aguilar is chairing Libe for the third time.

Photo: European Union 2019 – Source: EP