

# Justice and Home Affairs in the EU

Liberty and Security Issues after Enlargement

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## 18. Taking the Bogus out of the Discourse concerning Asylum

Constança Urbano de Sousa

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### 18.1 INTRODUCTION

Pondering the theme 'taking the bogus out of the discourse concerning asylum', as part of a discussion on 'balancing openness with control', some of the ambiguities in asylum policy, stemming especially from its increasing links to immigration, immediately sprang to mind. Although they are related, immigration and asylum are legally separate issues. Nevertheless, amid security concerns, post-11 September, and the success of far-Right parties in France, the Netherlands and Denmark, basing their campaigns around the issue of controlling immigration and its link to insecurity, the EU has been infected by the discourse of fear. In fact, as far as immigration goes, the EU appears to be set on pushing through measures to increase control of external borders and to fight illegal immigration.

This narrow vision of immigration policy may, however, strengthen the dangerous link in the minds of individuals between insecurity and the increase in the number of immigrants. This might foster, in turn, the idea that Europe is being invaded by fraudulent asylum seekers: in other words, that 'the boat is full', to coin Pim Fortuyn's expression.

On the one hand, as pointed out by the Commission in its Social Situation Report 2002, Europe needs immigrants to secure sustainable labour markets and pension systems. In other words, immigration should not be looked at as a problem, but rather as a solution to problems. On the other hand, the number of asylum seekers is falling. According to the data from the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, the total number of asylum seekers arriving in the European Union last year (384 530) was nearly half the number in 1992 (675 460).

Nevertheless, security concerns are making the discourse on asylum increasingly ambiguous, if not contradictory, especially if we consider the agreement by the European Council at its special meeting in Tampere, to