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Harmonisation of European asylum policy

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The appearance of great numbers of refugees is an urgent problem encountered by a number of European countries. Swedish news programmes have shown pictures of unacceptable treatment of asylum seekers especially in certain Mediterranean countries, in this case Greece. A memorandum from the EU Commission indicates the same unsatisfactory conditions in receiving asylum seekers. European countries must simply become better at receiving asylum seekers in a humane manner.

The harmonisation of European asylum policy through the European Union's legal framework has as objective to offer protection for refugees based on full application of the terms of the Geneva Convention. It should have as a result that the same conditions and guarantees are ensured to those who are really in need of protection and the protection is ensured on equal terms in all member states. The member states have to work jointly with common core values to help those who are entitled to asylum. It is important to find ways to distinguish those genuinely seeking asylum from all other asylum groups – as opposed to irregular immigrants.

The situation of asylum seekers during their assessment period needs to be improved. At the same time the authorities have to be aware of the fact that many people seeking asylum come from very difficult conditions and have sometimes been subjected to torture and persecution.

If we are to achieve harmonisation in the way it is intended, it is important that all of European countries work together with these problems with humanism as our guiding star. Also we within the Council of Europe must help each other to a greater extent. It is of primary importance that refugees and asylum seekers are treated humanely even if circumstances are difficult sometimes.

In this context my concern is: what is the role of the Council of Europe in ensuring that asylum seekers in member countries are protected on the grounds prescribed in international conventions?

How can the Council of Europe member countries act to quickly improve the situation for the countries which today take a very great responsibility for these streams of refugees? In so doing, how can unnecessary suffering be avoided for those who have already been on a very difficult journey?

