Parliamentary Assembly
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COUNCIL OF EUROPE
CONSEIL DE L'EUROPE

Doc. 13337
15 October 2013

Illegal immigration and loss of children in the Aegean Sea

Written question No. 646 to the Committee of Ministers
by Mr Konstantinos TRIANTAFYLLOS, Greece, Socialist Group

Notwithstanding the fact that the Council of Europe presents, through its monumental Convention and its Protocols, a remarkable record in promoting human rights and fundamental freedoms protection throughout a vast geographic area, it is rather disquieting to note that, in the field of illegal immigrants, including more specifically children, there is unfortunately still much left to be desired. Out of the nine Council of Europe conventions currently in force, there is none which directly targets the protection of children's rights and which may deal sufficiently with the causes of the aforementioned, mushrooming, sad phenomenon. Concurrently, other entities, such as States, international organisations and NGO's strive to deal with its harsh reality and the severe social and economic ramifications, while others merely ignore them altogether.

In this context, it is to be stressed that FRONTEX, in its 2013 annual report with regard to the analysis of the dangers on the borders of the European Union, acknowledged in particular that in 2012 there was a steep increase in the entry and detection of illegal immigrants in the region of the Aegean Sea. A contributing factor to this increase has arguably been the building of a barrier (fence) in the Evros region, separating Northern Greece from Turkey. There is no time for more delays and FRONTEX's initiatives have to be significantly reinforced further in order to prevent illegal immigration and not simply to cure it, namely by eradicating "fatal travelling" at its very beginnings on the coasts and in the ports of Asia and Africa. That said, the ensuing responsibility rests naturally upon the shoulders of every member State of the European Union and the Council of Europe.

Mr Triantafyllos,

To ask the Committee of Ministers:

– What is the role of the Council of Europe in ensuring that illegal immigrants, including children, are protected on the grounds prescribed in Council of Europe conventions, when they are forced to journey in extreme life-threatening situations, facing inhuman and degrading behavior from traffickers?

– What specific initiatives can the Council of Europe undertake, so that, in particular, the arduous task of FRONTEX can be simplified in practise and its operational field extended in order to deal with the problem at its very roots, namely at the eastern coasts of the Aegean Sea, from where European countries are inundated by illegal immigrants?

– What steps can the Committee of Ministers take in order to ensure that the burden of receiving the aforementioned displaced population, including children, will be shared among member States of the European Union and the Council of Europe in order to avoid conditions of 'overcrowding' in host-countries, which are "de facto" unable to manage the entire number of this population?