Parliamentary Assembly
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COUNCIL OF EUROPE
CONSEIL DE L'EUROPE

Resolution 2088 (2016)[1]

The Mediterranean Sea: a front door to irregular migration

Parliamentary Assembly

1. The Parliamentary Assembly refers to its Resolution 2050 (2015) "The human tragedy in the Mediterranean: immediate action needed", Resolution 2072 (2015) "After Dublin – the urgent need for a real European asylum system", Resolution 2073 (2015) "Countries of transit: meeting new migration and asylum challenges", Resolution 2089 (2016) on organised crime and migrants, as well as its other relevant resolutions.

2. A sharp increase in mixed migratory flows along the eastern Mediterranean coast from Turkey to Greece since the beginning of 2015, adding to a constant flow along the central Mediterranean route from Libya to Italy, has resulted in an unprecedented migratory and refugee crisis in Europe. An estimated total of 1 million people arrived on the various European shores of the Mediterranean in 2015, compared to 219 000 in 2014 and 60 000 in 2013.

3. Regrettably, the number of deaths at sea increased proportionally until April 2015. The death toll in the first four months of 2015 exceeded 2 500. Despite commendable international joint efforts and large-scale rescue operations launched by a number of countries in May 2015, deaths at sea still occur, albeit on a considerably smaller scale. According to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), approximately 70% of those who arrive can be considered as refugees in terms of the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and are entitled to international protection. The majority are Syrians but there are also Iraqis, Afghans, Somalians, Eritreans, Nigerians, Senegalese and Gambians.

4. The majority of those now arriving in Greece are people who, at different stages of the armed conflict in Syria, had fled to Turkey, Lebanon or other neighbouring countries where in many cases they had stayed for several years. Turkey alone has been hosting 2 million refugees from Syria. After years of increasing pressure and insufficient international support, the economies of the neighbouring host countries are struggling to cope, making it increasingly difficult for refugees to find shelter and jobs and to access health care and education. This is what pushes them to undertake the dangerous journey across the Mediterranean.

5. The spike in arrivals in Greece and the continuous migratory flows to Italy have put enormous pressure on the reception capacities of both countries. It is clear that neither of them can cope with the migration flows on their own.

6. The Assembly is convinced that only a common European response can address the present migratory and refugee crisis. A comprehensive political debate based on the principles of solidarity, responsibility and the highest human rights standards (as enshrined in the European Convention on Human Rights (ETS No. 5)) should accompany strategic migration management policies at European and national levels.

7. In this context, the Assembly welcomes the European Union's efforts to develop a common European response involving internal and external stakeholders, including non-European Union countries of transit and origin. In particular, it looks forward to the implementation of a Joint Action Plan with Turkey. It commends a number of emergency measures put in place, such as largely increased search-and-rescue operations, agreement on the relocation of 220 000 people and the resettlement of 40 000 others.

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1. *Assembly debate* on 27 January 2016 (5th Sitting) (see Doc. 13942, report of the Committee on Migration, Refugees and Displaced Persons, rapporteur: Ms Daphné Dumery). *Text adopted by the Assembly* on 27 January 2016 (5th Sitting).

8. At the same time, the Assembly regrets the absence of a global, comprehensive vision of the migration phenomenon in the modern world, including all of its implications and consequences for society. It has to be acknowledged that the challenge largely exceeds the measures agreed upon so far and that there are currently no clear prospects for a sustainable solution.

9. The Assembly points out that the debate cannot be limited to the question of quotas and their compulsory or voluntary nature. While it is necessary to address the immediate humanitarian emergency without further delay, long-term measures and solutions should be identified and implemented as soon as possible.

10. The idea of identifying people in need of international protection and organising external processing of asylum applications through "hotspots" set up outside Europe deserves support, provided human rights of refugees and migrants are guaranteed. It would certainly contribute to saving the lives of many potential candidates who would otherwise attempt to cross the sea.

11. Tackling the root causes of the Mediterranean refugee and migration crisis is the most important and unavoidable long-term measure. It implies adequate, enhanced development co-operation between Europe and countries of origin and transit, including not only considerably increased financial support but also, more importantly, viable economic projects which will contribute to sustainable development. The peaceful settlement of the hostilities in Syria, Iraq and Afghanistan is a necessary condition for ending the human exodus and making possible the return of refugees to these countries.

12. The Assembly calls on member States:

12.1. with regard to rescue at sea and human lives lost, to:

12.1.1. continue search-and-rescue operations in the Mediterranean Sea on at least the same scale as at present;

12.1.2. create a centralised register and introduce unified procedures for recording and identifying the dead with a view to enabling the tracing of missing persons throughout all European countries;

12.1.3. step up investigations and action to disrupt smuggling networks and prosecute smugglers;

12.2. with regard to reception conditions, to:

12.2.1. substantially increase specific financial support aimed at the immediate creation of large-scale emergency facilities in Greece and Italy;

12.2.2. provide emergency response assistance to Serbia and "the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia";

12.2.3. support, financially and institutionally, the establishment of hotspots to receive, assist, register and screen arrivals, with a view to identifying those in need of international protection;

12.2.4. implement agreements on the relocation of refugees from Greece and Italy to other European countries and put in place a permanent relocation mechanism;

12.2.5. demonstrate a spirit of solidarity and respect for human rights in compliance with the European Convention on Human Rights and the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees with a view to reaching an agreement in the European debate on sharing of responsibilities with regard to migratory flows;

12.3. with regard to legal channels of entry, to:

12.3.1. increase access to legal migration channels to Europe, including enhanced resettlement and admissions for humanitarian reasons, family reunification for the beneficiaries of subsidiary protection and student visas for refugees from countries neighbouring Syria;

12.3.2. consider the establishment of hotspots and the processing of asylum applications outside Europe with a view to identifying those in need of protection before they risk their lives on a journey;

12.3.3. raise awareness of the situation of refugees and ensure the elimination of all types of discrimination, intolerance or xenophobia against them;

12.3.4. reflect on the emerging challenges faced by integration policies in states which have been confronted with unprecedented numbers of migrants;

12.3.5. support grass-roots initiatives in the field of integration and education;

12.4. with regard to reducing the incentives for irregular migration, to:

12.4.1. harmonise return practices and implement them when appropriate;

12.4.2. expand Frontex's mandate so that the agency can scale up its support to member States in order, *inter alia*, to facilitate, organise and fund return operations;

12.4.3. establish a European border guard system;

12.4.4. establish a stronger partnership with countries of departure with a view to preventing irregular crossings;

12.5. with regard to addressing the root causes, to:

12.5.1. step up development co-operation between Europe and the countries of origin, including not only financial support but also economic projects which would contribute to sustainable development;

12.5.2. engage in a meaningful and comprehensive dialogue with the African and Asian countries of origin and transit in order to jointly manage migration and asylum flows in a spirit of shared responsibility;

12.5.3. make full use of the Emergency Trust Fund for stability and address the root causes of irregular migration and displaced people in Africa;

12.5.4. establish, in co-operation with the UNHCR and the International Organization for Migration, multipurpose centres similar to the one which was set up in Niger.