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# Humanitarian action for refugees and migrants in countries in North Africa and the Middle East

**Reply to Recommendation**[1]: Recommendation 2203 (2021)
Committee of Ministers

1. The Committee of Ministers has carefully examined Parliamentary Assembly Recommendation 2203 (2021) "Humanitarian action for refugees and migrants in countries in North Africa and the Middle East" which, *inter alia,* calls on the Committee of Ministers to reinforce its action to improve the situation of refugees and migrants in this region. The Committee also forwarded the recommendation to the Group of Experts on Trafficking in Human Beings (GRETA) for information and possible comments.

2. The Committee of Ministers recalls that the Neighbourhood Policy, adopted in 2011, enabled the Council of Europe and the countries of North Africa and the Middle East to take steps towards creating a shared legal area based on the Organisation's values and instruments. While the creation of such an area cannot be assimilated to humanitarian assistance as such, it does directly contribute to the reinforcing of human rights, democracy and the rule of law in the countries concerned for the benefit of their population.

3. In November 2021, the Ministers' Deputies agreed to implement the proposals set out in a report prepared, at the request of the Committee of Ministers, by the Secretary General of the Council of Europe in the context of the tenth anniversary of the policy towards neighbouring regions (see SG/Inf(2021)14). Those proposals are geared in part to consolidating the progress achieved to date.

4. In this connection, the Committee of Ministers approved new neighbourhood partnerships for the period 2022-2025 with its most active partners in North Africa, namely Morocco and Tunisia.

5. The Committee of Ministers considers that these decisions regarding its policy towards neighbouring regions will make it possible to pursue the ongoing development of a shared legal area, through increased participation of the countries concerned in Council of Europe instruments, the drawing up and passing of new laws geared to these objectives and the setting up of additional democratic institutions.

6. The Committee of Ministers reiterates that its policy towards neighbouring regions is conducted in close co-ordination with the relevant international organisations, notably the European Union, and forms a contribution to the implementation of the United Nations 2030 Agenda by supporting several Sustainable Development Goals.

7. Furthermore, at the 131st Ministerial Session (Hamburg, 21 May 2021), and in the context of the Council of Europe's policy towards neighbouring regions, the Committee of Ministers instructed the Ministers' Deputies "to also reflect in this context on the contribution of the Organisation to the international order and global governance, as well as to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)". Discussion on the question is ongoing, and this process has been enhanced by a greatly appreciated contribution from the Parliamentary Assembly through exchanges of views with its President and Secretary General. The Committee of Ministers has also taken into consideration Recommendation 2203 (2021) notably as regards

1. Adopted at the 1429th meeting of the Ministers' Deputies (17 March 2022).

co-operation with the European Union and the African Union as well as the role of the Council of Europe offices in Tunis and Rabat and that of the North-South Centre. The Ministers' Deputies will inform the Parliamentary Assembly of the outcome of this reflexion process.

8. Under the Neighbourhood Partnership with Tunisia (2018-2021) and through the Council of Europe/ European Union joint initiatives "Support Independent Bodies in Tunisia" and "Regional Support to Reinforce Human rights, Rule of Law and Democracy in the Southern Mediterranean" (South Programme IV, 2019-2022), the Council of Europe's action to combat trafficking in human beings has also provided a platform for tackling the question of migration and associated phenomena in Tunisia and in the Southern Mediterranean region as a whole. In December 2021, the transfrontier launch of the Tunisian National Referral Mechanism (NRM)[2] was a major milestone in regional co-operation to combat trafficking in human beings. The Tunisian NRM includes different categories of trafficking victims, including foreign nationals, most of whom are irregular migrants.[3] The transfer of experience from the Tunisian NRM to neighbouring countries and the prospect of developing a regional NRM could pave the way for effective regional co-operation in the area of migration, including for the protection of victims of trafficking in human beings.[4]

9. Finally, the Committee of Ministers points out that the Special Representative of the Secretary General for Migration and Refugees and her predecessor have striven to improve contact and co-operation with the countries that are not among the Council of Europe's member States, highlighting the numerous achievements of the previous Council of Europe Action Plan on protecting refugee and migrant children in Europe (2017-2019). A number of concrete projects from that Action Plan continue to yield benefits, such as the human rights training (HELP) modules developed in co-operation with the HCR and made widely available, covering asylum and migration, protection of refugee and migrant children and alternatives to immigration detention. Another equally important achievement is the European qualifications passport for refugees (EQPR), particularly for the successful integration of recently arrived refugees. Awareness-raising efforts will also continue as part of the implementation of the new Council of Europe action plan on protection of vulnerable persons in the context of migration and asylum in Europe (2021-2025), taking advantage of existing bilateral and international co-operation.

2. www.mno.tn

3. In this context, a specific workshop focusing on vulnerabilities on migration routes and links between trafficking in human beings and migration was run in collaboration with the National Authority to Combat Trafficking in Persons (INLCTP), the Swiss Embassy and international experts for the benefit of over 20 professionals from the Southern Mediterranean region and sub-Saharan Africa, including from Libya, Jordan and Lebanon, Mali and Guinea.

4. Efforts are being undertaken within the European Union/Council of Europe Joint Programme on "Regional Support to Reinforce Human rights, Rule of Law and Democracy in the Southern Mediterranean" (South Programme IV) to create a network of national anti-trafficking mechanisms covering the entire Southern Mediterranean region.