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11 December 2023

Saving migrants' lives at sea and protecting their human rights

Motion for a resolution

tabled by the Committee on Migration, Refugees and Displaced Persons

This motion has not been discussed in the Assembly and commits only those who have signed it

Tragedies at sea keep repeating themselves, with more than 2 000 migrants reported to have died in central Mediterranean in the first ten months of 2023 alone. The Adriana shipwreck on 14 June 2023 in Greece, which saw over 600 men, women and children drown, was qualified by many as “the worst tragedy ever” in the Mediterranean. All the victims had left their home fleeing either war, violence, political repression, or the consequences of climate change, looking for safety and a chance to live a decent life. They all had a distinct face, a name, memories, making each of them a unique person.

None of these victims was given the chance to pursue their life. There are reasons for that: the hideous role of smugglers making criminal profit over human tragedy, the prohibitive systems of surveillance of sea and coastal areas, the obstacles put on rescuing operations, the insufficient solidarity between member States of the Council of Europe, the lack of effective access to regular mobility channels for those not wealthy and educated enough.

Putting more obstacles against people on the move will not deter them from engaging in an odyssey perceived as a unique chance to survive. It will rather divert migration routes as demonstrated countless times. Instead, member States should co-ordinate to allocate tangible material and human resources towards the effective examination of the individual situation of migrants and refugees. Efforts so far have proved a failure, at odds with European solidarity and responsibility sharing. The Council of Europe must be at the forefront of the fight against deaths at European sea borders, living up to the spirit of the Reykjavík Declaration. The Parliamentary Assembly should reflect on ways to facilitate rescue operations, including those involving NGOs, as part of an effective response against the smuggling of migrants.

