Situation in the Mediterranean and need for a holistic EU approach to migration

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The Committee on Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs adopted the joint report by Roberta METSOLA (EPP, MT) and Kashetu KYENGE (S&D, IT) on the situation in the Mediterranean and the need for a holistic EU approach to migration.

Facing a humanitarian disaster: Members highlighted that in 2015 1.83 million persons were detected while attempting to cross irregularly the EU's external borders, setting an unprecedented record compared to the 282 500 migrants who arrived in the Union in the course of the whole 2014. In 2015, over 1.4 million applications for international protection were lodged in the EU+ (EU-28 plus Norway and Switzerland with numbers rising steadily since April 2015).

Recalling that solidarity must be the principle upon which Union action on migration is based, Members stated that starting from the premise that **saving lives must be a first priority and that proper funding**, at Union and Member State level, for search and rescue operations is essential.

However, Members called for a clear distinction to be made between those persons who are smuggled into the Union and those who are trafficked into the Union because, while the policy response must be properly integrated, they must also be properly targeted.

Members pointed out that humanitarian admission can be used as a complement to resettlement in order to give urgent protection, often on a temporary basis, to the most vulnerable where needed, e.g. **unaccompanied minors** or refugees with disabilities.

On the revision of the Dublin III Regulation: the report noted that the current system does not take into sufficient consideration the particular migratory pressure faced by Member States situated at the Union's external borders. Members called for changes in order to ensure fairness, solidarity and shared responsibility between Member States. In reality, the current mechanisms of the Dublin system have failed to be objective, to establish fair criteria for allocating responsibility for applications for international protection and to provide swift access to protection. Members pointed out that one option for a fundamental overhaul of the Dublin system would be to establish a central collection of applications at Union level – viewing **each asylum seeker as someone seeking asylum in the Union as a whole and not in an individual Member State** – and to establish a central system for the allocation of responsibility for any persons seeking asylum in the Union. They suggest that such a system could provide for **certain thresholds per Member State** relative to the number of arrivals, which could conceivably help in deterring secondary movements, as all Member States would be fully involved in the centralised system and no longer have individual responsibility for allocation of applicants to other Member States. Members stated that such a system could function on the basis of a number of Union 'hotspots' from where Union distribution should take place and underlined that any new system for allocation of responsibility must incorporate the key concepts of family unity and the best interests of the child.

Relocation and resettlement: the report called on the Member States to respect their obligations as regards the emergency relocalisation measure. It underlined that on 3 March 2016, only 338 of the 39 600 asylum seekers awaiting reassignment from Italian reception facilities to other Member States had actually been relocated, while in the case of Greece 322 out of the 66 400 projected relocations had actually taken place.

On resettlement, Members stressed that the Union needs a **binding and mandatory legislative approach to resettlement.** They recommended that, to have an impact, such an approach must provide for resettlement of a **meaningful number of refugees**, with regard to the overall numbers of refugees seeking international protection in the Union.

As regards **hotspots**, Members called for the allocation of technical and financial resources and support to Member States of first arrival, such as Italy and Greece, to enable the swift and effective registration and referral to the competent authorities of all migrants arriving in the Union with full respect for their fundamental rights.

Schengen: Members took note that on 15 December 2015, the Commission came forward with a proposal for a targeted revision of the Schengen Borders Code, proposing to introduce systematic controls of all Union nationals (not only on third-country nationals) against the relevant databases at the external borders of the Schengen Area. They recalled that the Schengen Area is one of the major achievements of European integration and that the **conflict in Syria** and other conflicts elsewhere in the region have triggered record numbers of refugees and migrants arriving in the Union, which in turn has revealed deficiencies at parts of the Union's external borders. Therefore, in response, some Member States have felt the need to close their internal borders or introduce temporary border controls, thus calling into question the proper functioning of the Schengen Area.

Returns: lastly, Members stated that it is necessary to adopt new EU readmission agreements which should take preference over bilateral agreements between Member States and third countries. The return of migrants should be carried out safely and where the country to which they are being returned is **safe for them**.