Addressing refugee and migrant movements: the role of EU External Action

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The European Parliament adopted by 333 votes to 310 with 46 abstentions, a resolution on addressing refugee and migrant movements: the role of EU External Action.

Parliament underlined that in today's world there is an unprecedented level of human mobility. The international community must urgently undertake the strengthening of a **common response to address the challenges and opportunities that this phenomenon represents**. Given the multiple complex causes of human mobility, it called for evidence-based decisions to differentiate its elements and develop targeted policy responses.

It considered that international migration can contribute to socioeconomic development, as it has done historically. However, **xenophobic, populist and nationalistic discourses** have to be countered. It welcomed the 'Together' campaign launched by the UN to reduce negative perceptions and attitudes towards refugees and migrants and called on the EU institutions to fully cooperate with the UN in support of this campaign.

Parliament called for increased cooperation with the UN and other actors, including increased financial contributions for the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) as well as the International Organisation for Migration (IOM).

Parliament stressed that the **humanitarian aid system** is extremely overstretched and that its financial resources will never be sufficient to respond to forced displacement crises. EU development cooperation should continue to address and effectively tackle the root causes of forced displacement and migration, namely armed conflict, persecution on any grounds, gender-based violence, bad governance, poverty, lack of economic opportunities and climate change.

Parliament underlined that, in line with EU principles, one overall objective of the EU's external migration policies should be to establish a **multilateral governance regime for international migration**, for which the recent UN High-Level Meeting is a first step.

Better managed international migration: **a global responsibility**: Parliament considered the recent decision by the US administration to temporarily ban citizens of seven Muslim-majority countries from entering the US and to temporarily suspend the US refugee system fuels anti-immigration and xenophobic discourses. It welcomed the UN General Assembly High-Level Meeting to Address Large Movements of Refugees and Migrants of 19 September 2016 and the hosting of the Leaders' Summit by the USA, as migration flows are a **global responsibility which demand an effective global response and enhanced cooperation** between all stakeholders to achieve a sustainable solution fully respecting human rights. It stressed that global cooperation on migration and mobility should be built upon **regional and sub-regional frameworks**. In this regard, the EU is called on to strengthen cooperation plans with regional organisations such as the African Union, League of Arab States and Gulf Cooperation Council.

The resolution highlighted the international law obligations regarding refugees and called on all countries which have not yet done so to ratify and implement the Refugee Convention and its Protocol. It called on

all countries to expand protection to internally displaced persons, as is the case in mechanisms such as the African Union Convention for the Protection and Assistance of Internally Displaced Persons in Africa (Kampala Convention).

Parliament called on EU Member States to fully respect their own pledges concerning readmission agreements.

EU external action and partnerships with third countries: Parliament stressed that EU external action should be peace-oriented, proactive and forward-looking, instead of mainly reactive. It expressed support for closer cooperation between the EU and third countries in a number of fields to avoid new crises.

Parliament underlined that EU assistance and cooperation must be tailored to achieving development and growth in third countries – thereby also fostering growth within the EU – and to reducing and eventually eradicating poverty in line with Article 208 of the TFEU, and not to incentivising third countries to cooperate on readmission of irregular migrants, to forcibly deterring people from moving, or to stopping flows to Europe.

It recalled that both donors and the governments of aid-receiving countries must work to improve the effectiveness of aid. It noted that migration flows are an international reality and should not become an indicator of the performance of the EU's external migration policies, and that agreements with third countries need to be guided by long-term objectives and by establishing durable partnerships and the respect for human rights.

Parliament also stressed the need to **put in place a comprehensive approach** to external conflict and crises by **mapping** the direct and indirect economic, environmental, social, fiscal and political impacts of displacement on third countries in order to better adjust development policies to their needs.

Towards a common migration policy: while condemning the increasing criminalisation of migration, Parliament called for the establishment of a **genuine, human rights-based common European migration policy** based on the principle of solidarity among Member States as enshrined in Article 80 TFEU, with the securing of the EU's external borders and adequate legal channels for safe and orderly migration. Close cooperation with NGOs and experts working in the countries of origin of asylum-seekers is essential.

Parliament underlined that **partnership agreements** such as mobility partnerships should ensure that migrants can be safely received in countries of transit and origin, in a manner entirely consistent with their fundamental rights. It stressed that Parliament has a clear say in EU readmission and mobility agreements, as stated in the Lisbon Treaty (Article 79(3) TFEU), and specifically emphasised that Parliament must give its prior consent to the conclusion of association and similar agreements. It must be immediately and fully informed at all stages of the procedure.

Parliament is extremely concerned by the **continuing conflict in Syria** and called on the EU and the Member States to improve means dedicated to conflict prevention and crisis management. It expressed its full support to Syria's neighbouring countries, which continue to demonstrate extraordinary solidarity in hosting millions of refugees despite limited resources.

It called on the EU and its Member States to continue and step up cooperation and dialogue with Lebanon and Jordan and to increase financial support through both international organisations and European channels, as well as with other third host countries, to ensure firstly that refugee populations can enjoy decent living conditions and access to basic services, and are granted rights to free movement and work opportunities, and secondly that funds reach their final objectives.

On the other hand, it expressed regret that in the EU migration policy framework and refugee movements response, the EU and its Members States have opted for the conclusion of agreements with third countries, which **avoid the parliamentary scrutiny** attached to the Community method.

Appropriate means for action: Parliament acknowledged the Commission's proposal for a new and **ambitious External Investment Plan** (EIP) to mobilise investments in the EU's neighbouring countries and developing third countries. It noted that the proposed **European Fund for Sustainable Development** will be partly financed through the European Development Fund (EDF), the Development Cooperation Instrument (DCI) and the European Neighbourhood Instrument (ENI) allocations, which constitutes the use of development funds to foster private sector investment.

Parliament underlined that the sum of EUR 3.35 billion earmarked for the new European Fund for Sustainable Development (EFSD) as part of the EIP corresponds to over 5% of the total funds available from the EDF, DCI and European Neighbourhood Instrument (ENI) under the multiannual financial framework. It called on the Commission to provide more details regarding this estimation and the expected impact of these amounts.

Lastly, it noted that the creation of trust funds and *ad hoc* financial instruments, while helping to pool resources and bringing speed and flexibility to EU action, can also put at risk development effectiveness principles and undermines the unity of the budget and Parliament's budgetary authority. Parliament should be given a greater supervisory role in the use of these instruments.