Resolution on the breach of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and the use of minors by the Moroccan authorities in the migratory crisis in Ceuta

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The European Parliament adopted a resolution on the breach of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and the use of minors by the Moroccan authorities in the migratory crisis in Ceuta.

From 17 May 2021, an unprecedented surge of crossings to Spanish territory occurred with around 9 000 people entering, swimming or walking into the Spanish autonomous city of Ceuta after the Moroccan police temporarily eased border controls, opened the gates of their border fence and did not take action to stop illegal entrance. Most of the migrants crossing illegally were Moroccan nationals, at least 1 200 were unaccompanied minors, and many whole families.

The present crisis has given rise to unprecedented diplomatic tensions between Morocco, on one side, and Spain and the EU, on the other. Whatever the purposes may be behind the situation created in Ceuta, this unjustifiable incident does not accord with the long-established cooperation and trust-based relationship between both sides, particularly in the field of migration.

On 1 June 2021, the Moroccan authorities decided to facilitate the re-entry of all unaccompanied but identified Moroccan children who are in the European Union irregularly. According to the International Organization for Migration, many have already been returned through family reunification and tracing assistance. However, many of the children are still on Spanish premises, such as at the Tarajal warehouse and the migrant reception centres of Pinier and Santa Amelia, under the guardianship of the autonomous city of Ceuta, in order to undergo an assessment of their identity, personal circumstances, vulnerabilities, and risk of persecution and irreparable harm.

Families are desperately looking for their missing children. This can lead to further risks to the children’s physical, mental, moral, spiritual and social development, as enshrined in the UN Declaration of the Rights of the Child.

The resolution rejected Morocco’s use of border control and migration, and unaccompanied minors in particular, as political pressure against a Member State of the EU. It deplored, in particular, the participation of children, unaccompanied minors and families in the mass crossing of the border from Morocco to the Spanish city of Ceuta, putting their lives and safety at clear risk.

Parliament called for an appeasement of recent tensions, and for a return to a constructive and reliable EU-Morocco partnership. It also called on Spain and Morocco to work closely to allow for the repatriation of children to their families, which must be guided by the best interests of the child and carried out in compliance with national and international law, in particular the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

The Commission is urged to provide emergency funding to address the situation in Ceuta, including funding additional shelter capacity for unaccompanied children. Both the Commission and Morocco should cooperate and formally conclude an EU-Morocco readmission agreement with the necessary legal safeguards as soon as possible.