Refugees, displaced persons, asylum-seekers: creating a European Refugee Fund

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The committee unanimously adopted a report (consultation procedure) by Pernille FRAHM (EUL/NGL, DK) approving, with amendments, the proposal for a Council decision creating a European Refugee Fund. The committee felt that the general conception of the Fund could be endorsed. The areas in question and the target groups (refugees as defined in the Geneva Convention, people who have applied for this status and displaced persons who have requested temporary protection) were consistent with the objectives and ideas put forward by Parliament in the past. It was a courageous step towards genuine solidarity and burden-sharing among the Member States, as it involved moving forward from giving support for certain worthwhile measures to providing financial compensation for Member States that take in more refugees and displaced persons. This was consistent with the intentions of the Amsterdam Treaty. However, the committee believed the funding level of EUR 36m was too low and did not even come close to actual requirements. Regarding measures at the time of the reception of refugees, the committee felt that the proposal needed to be worded more precisely. It also called for greater integration of refugee communities and said these should be involved in the design of the integration programmes. On the financial front, the committee called on the Commission to come up with financial estimates covering the whole period of the programme under the current financial perspective and, if necessary, with a proposal for the revision of these appropriations, since substantially higher amounts were required to achieve the objectives of the Refugee Fund. Lastly, it felt that a distinction should be made between refugees and displaced persons as, in contrast to refugees, displaced persons were interested in the prospect of returning together or individually.