

Asylum: practical cooperation, quality of decision making in the common European asylum system

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The committee adopted the own-initiative report by Hubert PIRKER (EPP-ED, AT) on practical cooperation and quality of decision-making in the common European asylum system. The report welcomed the efforts that had been made in this area and strongly reaffirmed the need for a proactive common EU asylum policy, based on the obligation to admit asylum seekers and on the principle of non-refoulement.

The committee stressed that the "ultimate objective" of introducing a common asylum system must be to ensure a high quality of protection, of assessment of individual asylum claims and of procedures resulting in duly substantiated and fair decisions. Improved quality of decision-making must ensure that people in need of protection may enter the EU safely and have their claims properly processed.

The report strongly criticised the lack of adequate resources available to the Commission to monitor the implementation of the various directives dealing with asylum-related matters. To facilitate the Commission's task, it urged the Member States to submit a table of equivalences indicating what measures have been taken to implement particular provisions of those directives. It also said that coordinating activities in connection with practical cooperation on asylum-related matters must remain the task of the Commission, which should be provided with "resources appropriate to that task".

In order to ensure that refugee status is granted as quickly as possible to all those who are entitled to it, the Council and the Commission were urged to introduce in all Member States a single procedure which should make for fair and effective decision-making. In this context the committee pointed out that harmonisation in the area of asylum policy will be facilitated and speeded up if the Court of Justice can in future be consulted by courts other than national courts of first instance, as is currently the case. It therefore called on the Council to restore to the Court of Justice its full powers in the area of preliminary rulings granted to it under Title IV of the EC Treaty.

Among other recommendations, MEPs suggested that one of the improvements to be made to the EU asylum system should consist, for the sake of greater solidarity, in a fairer share of the burden carried by those Member States at the external borders of the EU. They also called for information campaigns to be carried out in countries of origin and transit to inform potential migrants about the risks inherent in illegal immigration, the consequences of denial of refugee status, the scope for legal migration and the possibility to apply for asylum in justified cases, as well as the dangers involved in trafficking in human beings, in particular women and unaccompanied minors.

The report also called for the rapid establishment of an EU repatriation procedure so that measures applicable to those who have not been granted refugee status or whose refugee status has been revoked can be implemented quickly and fairly with full respect for the human dignity and fundamental rights of the persons who have to be repatriated.

Lastly the committee called for the establishment of reception centres with separate facilities for families, women and children and suitable facilities for elderly and disabled asylum-seekers, and stressed the need for full use to be made of the opportunities afforded by the new European Refugee Fund.