



Malta-EU Steering & Action Committee

JUSTICE & HOME AFFAIRS (Supplement) MIGRATION



27.02.2009

COUNCIL MEETING

2927th meeting of the Council
Justice and Home Affairs
Brussels, 26-27 February 2009

ILLEGAL IMMIGRATION IN THE MEDITERRANEAN (26.2.2009)

Among other items on the agenda for the first day, the Council had an exchange of views on combating illegal immigration in the Mediterranean, following the presentation of a paper put forward by Cyprus, Greece, Italy and Malta.

The purpose of this paper is to raise awareness and suggest action at EU level on the challenges posed by illegal migration and asylum in the Mediterranean region. It takes inspiration from the Pact on immigration and asylum adopted by the European Council in October 2008. It sets out how the fundamental principles set out in the Pact could be reflected in a series of measures that will be implemented at both EU and national levels.



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Justice Minister Carmelo Mifsud Bonnici, present at the Council, said that Malta welcomes the Commission proposal of the setting up of the European Asylum Agency. He also expressed Malta's interest in hosting it while stressing that importantly it should address the rising problems of migration and asylum all over the European Union.

The Minister also laid emphasis on the European Pact on Migration and Asylum, stressing that while all of it is important, some measures should be given a higher priority. He also stated that the measures should be included in future EU plans so that these are implemented.

The main tasks of European asylum support office would be the following:

- facilitate, coordinate and improve cooperation on asylum matters between the EU countries, improving therefore the international protection to asylum seekers;
- assist EU governments in comparing good practices and organising training at EU level in order to develop a more consistent and transparent asylum policy in the EU ;
- coordinate teams of national experts who can be deployed at the request of any EU country facing a heavy influx of refugees;
- provide scientific and technical assistance in cooperation with national authorities and the UN High Commission for Refugees;
- increase practical cooperation on asylum matters between EU and third countries.



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European Economic & Social Committee (EESC) plenary session debates common asylum and immigration policy with Commissioner Barrot

On 25 February 2009 the EESC plenary session held a debate on a common EU asylum and immigration policy with Jacques Barrot, Vice-President of the European Commission responsible for Justice, Freedom and Security. Mr Barrot's speech focused on the concrete measures and instruments required for an integrated European framework for immigration and asylum. Mr Barrot also provided details of the European Integration Forum, a joint EESC-Commission initiative. The EESC adopted a series of key opinions linked to this topic.

EESC President Mario Sepi assured Commissioner Barrot of EESC support for the Commission's efforts to harmonise legislation on asylum and immigration policy. He also stressed "the importance of respecting fundamental rights in our immigration and asylum policies, particularly in the context of a deepening economic crisis: Immigrants must not become the scapegoat of the crisis". Mr Sepi underlined the importance of the European Integration Forum for channelling civil society's views on this topic, which will be held on 20-21 April 2009.

Commissioner Barrot emphasized the positive impact of immigration on the EU market in an era of demographic ageing; he also highlighted the EU blue card scheme, designed to attract highly skilled workers, while underlining that it constitutes a first pillar of a more comprehensive legal immigration policy. Mr Barrot reiterated the Commission's determination to combat illegal immigration, which is largely organized by traffickers exploiting the most vulnerable members of society. He underlined the need for dialogue with third countries with a view to ensuring efficient and optimal management of migratory flows. "There will be no fortress Europe, our immigration policy will not impede free movements of persons", said Commissioner Barrot.

Mr Barrot concluded by underlining the EESC's key role in the preparation of the European Integration Forum. "Because of the knowledge accumulated by the civil society organisations that the EESC represents, the Committee must be an active stakeholder in common immigration and asylum policy".

The EESC adopted opinions on "A common immigration policy for Europe", and "Policy plan on asylum", both drafted by Luis Miguel Pariza Castaños (Group II, Employees, Spain). Mr Castaños emphasized that the Lisbon Treaty is a fundamental step towards a common policy on immigration. The third opinion on "Migration, mobility and education" drafted by Mário Soares (Group II,



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Employees, Portugal), focused mainly on the challenges for EU education systems, with particular attention for the future of immigrants' children.

During the debate, Georgios Dassis, President of the Employees' Group, stressed the need to adopt binding legislative measures in order to better protect immigrants and refugees. Lucien Bouis (Group III, Various Interests, France) highlighted the need to support the associative sector, in the current social crisis, in their action for integration. Pedro Almeida Freire (Group I, Employers, Portugal) said that the crisis showed the need for a common EU policy and the importance of better communication and cooperation between the Member States.