

The Mediterranean must not be a graveyard

Late on the night of April the 18th, more that 800 people died at Europe's maritime borders, marking the deadliest drowning incident in the Mediterranean Sea since World War II. But the tragedy of deaths at sea has been going on for more than two decades, and has cost the life of no less than 30,000 people. This situation will not change unless the EU changes its ways. The ongoing conflicts, the increase of inequalities and exacerbated climate change effects in the neighboring regions of Africa and Asia, often aggravated by Western interests, are likely to create an even greater mass influx of displaced peoples.

Over the years, the EU and its Member States have consistently made it more difficult for migrants and refugees to enter into their territory, and have increasingly tried to seal off their external borders against irregular migration – doing so without providing any possibility for legal access. This policy has contributed to the nurturing of a criminal and dangerous business of human smuggling (worth at least 20 billion Euros per year), leading to the arrival of even more vessels. It disproportionately focused on repression, the protection of frontiers and the cynical use of deterrent effects of such tragedies, thus taking out precious resources from integration and social policies.

The “Fortress Europe” approach today appears to be particularly ineffective and cruel, when hundreds of thousands of people are being forced out of their homes by violence and war. National practices violating EU and international law, which often involve asylum seekers, such as on-the-spot deportations in the area of Melilla's bordering fence must be brought to an end.

The disappointing results of the Special EU Council on the 23rd of April 2015 demonstrate that the priority of EU Member States remains to keep out as many people as possible except for those considered as being useful, and not to respond to the increasing loss of life and human suffering. This ignores the legitimate urge for people to find a safe place to live. Instead, the EU needs to create legal routes for migrants seeking to come to the EU to live and work: we therefore strongly oppose the militarization of the European approach towards refugees.

On the other hand, the proposals presented by the European Commission on May the 13th finally showed some will to use its power of initiative, and to address some very controversial issues like the redistribution and relocation of asylum seekers. It however falls dramatically short in terms of numbers, and does not give any indication of a policy on legal migration. It still concentrates too much on border controls, as demonstrated by the proposal of the Commission to extend the mandate of Frontex to return migrants.

Instead of Frontex, we need a European effort to rescue people, supported by all Member States and a completely different border regime, based on Human Rights.

The European Greens:

- Express their deep sorrow and solidarity with the victims and their families.
- Consider that it is time for the EU to face up to its responsibility and act in order to bring about a stop to the deaths at sea, and to consistently increase its role in helping refugees and migrants. The EU must find the resources necessary to develop a common action plan coherent with the values of solidarity and respect of human rights. Such an action plan should be based on five major axes:
 1. A EUROPEAN MARE NOSTRUM: The immediate establishment of a humanitarian European search and rescue operation, which, like Mare Nostrum, should also operate in international waters and be equipped with an appropriate budget in order to stop the deaths at sea. Such an operation should also include effective instruments to counter human trafficking. The tripling of the Triton budget decided by the EU Council is not enough, as it will not have the effect of diminishing casualties unless its resources, its scope and operational plan are changed.
 2. FULL USE OF THE EXISTING LEGAL INSTRUMENTS TO ENSURE SAFE AND LEGAL ACCESS. These include: The swift completion of negotiations on the Visa code, currently blocked at the Council; the granting of Humanitarian visas; the possibility to apply for *[such]* visas in countries of origin; the application of the 2001 temporary protection directive, notably to address the Syrian crisis; the immediate lifting of visa requirements for Syrian refugees; better funding and an easier implementation of measures like family

reunification, private sponsorship programs, study and labour migration schemes. The European Greens oppose the proposal to set up European asylum centres in third countries, because of a complete lack of guarantee for the respect of rights of would-be refugees.

3. **A MORE AMBITIOUS RESETTLEMENT AND RELOCATION PROGRAMME.** On April the 23rd 2015, the EU council agreed to resettle 5,000 refugees. On May the 13th, the Commission proposed to trigger art. 78(3) of the Treaty, a proposal for a temporary distribution scheme of refugees already in the EU territory (relocation), and to resettle 20,000 displaced persons. Even if this is an improvement in relation to the past, it remains a completely inadequate measure, considering that UNCHR asked for at least 130,000 resettlement places. It is urgent to put forward a substantial program for sharing the responsibility by relocating refugees from Italy, Greece or Malta to other member states. It is also necessary to put in place alternatives to the current Dublin regulation, to make the system more fair to both asylum seekers and Member States. This includes bringing forward proposals to allow for the mutual recognition of positive asylum decisions and the transfer of international protection status within the EU.
4. **CHANGE THE FOCUS OF TRADE AND DEVELOPMENT POLICIES AND STOP FINANCING AUTHORITARIAN REGIMES.** The link between trade, agriculture, fisheries, and investment policies on one hand, and development and migration on the other hand, should be acknowledged and be at the center of the political agenda. One of the medium and long term policies of the EU should be the eradication of all the factors that cause people to flee their countries: unfair trade and development policies, support of non-democratic regimes, arms trade, climate change and so on. Instead of cutting development aid, there is an urgent need to increase it. EU policies must aim for sustainable living conditions also for youth and skilled people in African countries.
5. **REJECT MILITARIZATION OF MIGRATION POLICIES** Reject the policy proposed by High Representative Mogherini and the Commission and supported by the European Council to pursue a military operation under the Common Security and Defense Policy (CSDP) against smugglers in the Mediterranean including in Libyan waters and even on Libyan soil. We consider that to be a dangerous military adventure when what we need would be a save and rescue mission. Furthermore, this policy sends a disastrous signal to other parts of the world; one current example being the tragic incident near the South East Asian coast.