



CALL FOR A REAL COMMON EUROPEAN ASYLUM POLICY

CEMR Policy Committee, Nicosia, 20 April 2016

We, mayors, local and regional elected representatives, gathered at a meeting of the Policy Committee in Cyprus, on the occasion of the Congress of European Municipalities and Regions - representing the 130,000 European local and regional authorities that are members of our 55 national associations - call for a common European Asylum Policy and following our resolution from 7 December 2015:

Express our commitment to the human values underlying the European project and recall the need for solidarity between European Union Member States and beyond;

Reaffirms that successful integration requires refugees to respect European values, in particular human rights and gender equality;

Recall that the refugee crisis needs to be solved at European level by a European Asylum Law involving all Member States and therefore **welcome** the recent proposals of the European Commission for reforming the Common European Asylum System and developing safe and legal pathways to Europe;

Reaffirm our commitment while keeping with the existing Treaty Provisions on Freedom, Security and Justice to the establishment of a fair, solidary and permanent relocation system of refugees in all EU countries, directly from the hotspots and EU neighbouring countries through a safe passage;

Take note of the recently achieved EU agreement with Turkey; however, **call** for a sound and rigorous monitoring of its implementation and an assessment of its result within a reasonable period;

Recall that EU Member States and Turkey, where applicable, need to respect international and European humanitarian and asylum laws enshrined in the UN Charter, the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights, the Geneva Convention and the Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees as well as the EU Treaties and directives;

Call for controlled and well-managed relocation procedures beyond the implementation of the agreement reached in September 2015 for 160.000 refugees from Greece and Italy, as well as the one with Turkey, under the protection of international and European law;

Express our full solidarity with mayors from across Europe and the Balkans, but also in Turkey and the Middle East, including Lebanon and Jordan, who host and transfer refugees in their municipalities and **reaffirm** our support for measures aiming at combating the root causes of the crisis in countries of origin;

Request that the European Union and the Member States respect local and regional self-governance and ensure the necessary means for the reception of refugees through appropriate funding for host local and regional governments and a permanent dialogue on the procedures to be followed with the central governments;

Remind European leaders about the Charter of Local Self-Government and **insist** that the partnership principle be applied when allocating refugees in our municipalities and regions;

Confirm the commitment of local and regional governments, equipped with the necessary support and resources, to provide the appropriate measures to achieve successful integration in the mid and long-term perspective emphasising that local and regional governments are the main provider of local public services.

Accordingly, and in order to respond to the humanitarian emergency created by the arrival of refugees and to integrate them in our communities in the best possible way, **we emphasise the following:**

On the financial aspects

We recommend

1. The current Operational Programmes of the Structural Funds to be adapted, where applicable accordingly to enable regional and local governments to finance associated costs for mid and long-term integration, which usually are borne by services of general interest (i.e. housing, health care, social support, education, etc.) the core-domain of local public services;
2. That in the negotiations on the revision of the future Multiannual Financial Framework, financing of hosting and integration of refugees should be taken into account;
3. EIB interest-free loans be made available to municipalities and public bodies for the construction of housing and infrastructure;
4. The possibility to invest financial resources of public budgets for creating and strengthening utilities for hosting and integrating refugees.

On the security aspects

We support

1. The European Commission's proposals to maintain the Schengen system, for strengthening the security of the EU's external borders by the means of an operational European Border and Coast Guard as well as the announced reform of the Dublin Regulation to be implemented as soon as possible, while keeping with existing Treaty provisions and opt-outs of Freedom, Security and Justice and Schengen;

We call for

2. A close monitoring of the status of "safe countries of origin" under international law in order to avoid illegal collective expulsions to war zones while agreeing on a list at European level in order to speed-up registration processes;
3. Speeding up the processes to obtain international protection in order to transfer refugees to a destination given by the European Union; nevertheless, and where possible, the specifics of the refugees and the country in question should be taken into consideration;
4. Particular consideration to be given to unaccompanied minors and their rights in order to guarantee their protection in a permanent and fair European relocation mechanism between Member States;
5. The recognition of the need of unaccompanied minors that are particularly vulnerable to abuse and exploitation; they are at heightened risk of becoming victims of trafficking of human beings and therefore entitled to protection;
6. Measures to protect women refugees, who also constitute a group prone to be exposed to abuse and human trafficking.

On the integration aspects

We acknowledge

1. The request to require, according to national law, that refugees who receive social benefits aiming at facilitating their integration, to stay in the hosting local authority they have been assigned to for the period during which they receive support in line with the recent jurisprudence of the CJEU¹.

We need

2. Increased efforts to better coordinate actions in dialogue between local, regional and national governments and to distribute refugees fairly and with solidarity across all regions and municipalities at the European level;
3. Central governments to support local and regional authorities to avoid crowding-out effects in the welfare state systems and the potential risk of increasing xenophobia;
4. Investments in education and further initiatives to help and encourage newcomers, and in particular women, to enter the labour market;
5. Special attention to conflict prevention at all levels of government through the encouragement of dialogue between hosting communities and refugees in order to avoid rejection, xenophobia and potential radicalisation;
6. To recall our commitment to the principle of solidarity and our rejection of any political exploitation of the refugee crisis.
7. Support to be given to CEMR and its member associations by the EU institutions to create a specific platform of exchange of practices and experience, focused on the integration of refugees by local and regional governments.



¹ C-443/14 and C-444/14