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Committee on Migration, Refugees and Displaced Persons

International Migrants' Day, 18 December

Declaration

adopted by the Committee on 5 December

Despite a very significant drop in the numbers of migrants arriving in Europe since the peaks registered in 2015 and 2016, immense challenges remain for all European states.

With the closure of the Balkans land routes, over 100 000 migrants attempted to cross the Mediterranean Sea in 2018 to reach the European Union. The International Organization for Migration's Missing Migrants Project recorded more than 2 000 deaths of boat migrants in the Mediterranean in 2018, which constitutes two-thirds of all migrant fatalities globally. Europe cannot look away while the Mediterranean Sea continues to be a mass grave.

Turkey is hosting more than 3.5 million registered refugees from Syria. There are more than 1.5 million refugees in Germany. This number of refugees is nearly equalled by the number of registered IDPs in Europe. Hundreds of thousands of undocumented migrants are stranded in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Greece, Italy, Spain and other member States of the Council of Europe. Many more hundreds of thousands are trafficked and exploited in Europe, most of them vulnerable migrants.

Behind these figures are individual human fates – men, women and children compelled to leave their homes, who depend on humanitarian support, whose human rights must be respected and who must be allowed to contribute to our common future.

Until 30 years ago, Europe was divided for several decades by an "iron curtain". Building new walls in Europe against migrants and refugees is not an option, as it is neither practically feasible nor morally acceptable.

This predicament concerns all member States of the Council of Europe alike, whether members of the EU or not. Therefore, the Council of Europe and its Parliamentary Assembly must continue to prioritise action in this field.

The United Nations Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration (Marrakesh, 10-11 December) will require follow-up action in all regions of the world. As a regional organisation with observer status to the UN, the Council of Europe is in a prime position to discuss and identify responses by member States to the Global Compact. While immigration constitutes a competence of each member State, a coordinated approach is needed to prevent political cleavages and conflicts on the European continent. The decisions are often difficult, yet parliamentarians in Europe must lead the debate.

International Migrants' Day on 18 December is a reminder for everyone in Europe that there is still a long road ahead of us before migrants' fundamental rights are respected and their voices heard. National parliaments members of PACE have a key role to play in upholding the human rights and democratic standards of the Council of Europe, and in working towards safe and sustainable migration management for the future.