Committee on Migration, Refugees and Displaced Persons

International Migrants' Day, 18 December

Declaration
adopted by the Committee on 2 December 2019

According to the International Organization for Migration (IOM), the number of migrants entering Europe by sea dropped by 15% in 2019 compared to the same period in 2018, standing at 82 978 migrants and refugees, of whom 45 105 landed in Greece and 20 036 in Spain. Greece and Spain alone were confronted with 78 % of irregular sea landings. In the first six months of this year, 1 080 deaths were recorded on the three main Mediterranean Sea routes, compared to 1 971 deaths confirmed during the same period in 2018. The Mediterranean Sea has thus remained a cemetery for hundreds of men, women and children each year.

We must keep these figures in mind at all times, as they illustrate both the small scale of these arrivals and the unacceptably high death-rate among the migrant women, children and men undertaking dangerous sea-crossings in search of safety. The same can be said for the other routes into Europe taken by desperate people fleeing hardship – the numbers are low, but the fatalities are shockingly high.

Two issues must therefore continue to be addressed until solutions are found. Firstly, responsibility-sharing through relocation, support with financial and human resources, better implementation of asylum procedures and other concerted action should enable European states to deal with migration without creating "crisis" situations. Secondly, every effort must be made to protect migrants and asylum-seekers against the dangers to which they are exposed, and to put an end to the smuggling and trafficking which today have become an almost integral part of the journey towards Europe.

In June this year, the Council of Europe's Human Rights Commissioner published 35 recommendations to member States on "Bridging the protection gap for refugees and migrants in the Mediterranean." The Parliamentary Assembly urges member States to use these recommendations as a roadmap to achieving better protection, reception and integration of migrants and refugees.

The Parliamentary Assembly held an urgent debate on saving lives in the Mediterranean on October 3 during its Autumn 2019 session. The Committee on Migration, Refugees and Displaced Persons' most recent work includes reports on trafficking, violence against children, combating pushbacks and border violence, and on missing children. It has contributed to, promoted and supported the Council of Europe's work, in particular the Action Plan for the Protection of Refugee and Migrant Children (2017-2019). In June, the Committee concluded a successful four-year Parliamentary Campaign to End Migration Detention of Children. Protection of people displaced through environmental change was also examined and must also be addressed in practice and policy if we are to avoid future crises.

These initiatives highlight the human rights and humanitarian issues at stake in relation to migration, and do not only point to problems but seek to propagate good examples and practices which can be reproduced and multiplied.

International Migrants' Day on 18 December is a reminder to all citizens that migrants' fundamental rights are still not respected, and their voices are still not heard. National parliaments, members of PACE, must continue to promote the values and standards of the Council of Europe, and work together towards safe and sustainable migration management for the future. 2019 marked the 70th anniversary of the Council of Europe. One of the

themes of this year's Conference of Presidents of Parliament held in Strasbourg on 24-25 October was "Our Common European Home: the next 70 years": in this context, new pledges and commitments were made by the Organisations' 47 member States to continue to uphold human rights and democracy throughout Europe in the future. Migration and displacement must be given high and renewed priority if this is to be achieved.