



26th Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference

Session on "Migration and Integration"

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Ad Hoc Committee on Migration; OSCE PA Vice-President

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Dear parliamentarians, esteemed guests,

Allow me to first extend my appreciation to the President of the Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference, Ms. Carola Veit, for the invitation to present the work of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly's Ad Hoc Committee on Migration.

I hope that my short address, which will focus on the experience and main observations of this Committee, will be of benefit to the new BSPC Working Group on "Migration and Integration".

I will reserve my personal opinions for the ensuing discussion.

The unprecedented levels of migration throughout the OSCE region in 2014 and 2015 prompted the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly to become increasingly active on this topic, including through a number of field visits to some of the OSCE countries most affected.

In February 2016, an Ad Hoc Committee on Migration was established with a mandate to serve as a focal point for the OSCE PA's work in this field, to develop policy recommendations aimed at enhancing the OSCE's work in the field of migration and at improving the treatment of, and prospects for, migrants in OSCE countries; and to promote exchanges of best practices.

The Committee currently consists of 23 members from 19 countries spanning North America and Europe.

It has actively pursued its mandate, carrying out four visits to France, Italy, Greece and Turkey and also engaging in extensive discussions in Brussels and Geneva with key European policymakers and international actors.

The Committee has also worked closely with counterparts on the OSCE governmental side in developing a co-ordinated Organization-wide response to the crisis.

Based on its findings, the Committee presented a draft resolution for debate at the 26th OSCE PA Annual Session last July in Minsk. The final text of the Resolution on Ensuring a Coherent, Shared and Responsible Governance of Migration and Refugee Flows was adopted on 9 July 2017, and can be found online at oscepa.org as an annex to the Minsk Declaration.

A report and more detailed recommendations will also be presented at the OSCE PA Autumn Meeting in Andorra on 3-5 October.

The Committee's recommendations are ambitious as they seek to address a number of the interlinking aspects of the current migration crisis, with the aim of developing a coherent, shared and responsible approach to migration governance.

They highlight a number of critical areas for action, including:

- Resettlement of persons in need of international protection from frontline states and increased support for Syrians and other refugees in border countries;
- Addressing irregular crossings as well as deaths in the Mediterranean;
- The need to stabilize Libya as the main departure point of irregular crossings in the Central Mediterranean as well as resolving the conflict in Syria;
- Respecting human rights and preventing xenophobic attacks and discrimination against refugees, migrants and persons perceived to be migrants;
- The protection of particularly vulnerable persons, especially unaccompanied and separated children as well as women;
- Ensuring access to education for migrant and refugee children;
- Combatting human trafficking and dismantling smuggling networks;
- Developing 'smart security policies';
- Reform of the EU asylum system, speeding up the processing of asylum claims as well as developing more effective family reunification processes;
- All OSCE participating States have furthermore been urged to take in unaccompanied child refugees at immediate risk of trafficking or sexual exploitation through mechanisms similar to the Dubs scheme adopted by the United Kingdom in response to the crisis in Calais.

The resolution also emphasizes the need to address the root causes of migration as well as the need to further promote safe and legal channels for migration of persons in need of international protection, especially vulnerable migrants and refugees.

A section of the resolution is specifically devoted to promoting integration in host countries, namely:

- Ensuring expedited family reunion once a claim has been recognized;
- Hosting refugees in smaller housing units rather than ghettos;

- Emphasis on education: ensuring that refugees and migrant children are able to attend mainstream schools as soon as possible;
- Ensuring that there are sufficient opportunities also for adults to learn the language and customs of the host country;
- Providing access to the labour market of recognized refugees.

As examples of best practice, the Committee has discussed the positive examples of Italy's SPRAR system (Protection System for Asylum Seekers and Refugees) and Canada's Programme of Private Sponsorship of Refugees.

The Committee has also highlighted the role of the media in countering misperceptions about the security threats posed by refugees and asylum-seekers by providing accurate data and presenting well-articulated outreach.

In contrast to the OSCE's governmental side, the Parliamentary Assembly does not need to operate by consensus and can therefore be more critical or specific on a given issue.

Agreeing on common recommendations regarding migration governance has been a difficult process given the complexity of the topic as well as the diversity of the Committee's membership. The Committee therefore agreed that it would not seek to adopt its report and recommendations by consensus, in order to ensure its aim to develop concrete, implementable and fact-based recommendations.

It is particularly challenging to address such a complex issue in a rapidly changing environment.

Already this year, about 3,500 migrant deaths have been recorded worldwide of which over 2,400 perished while attempting to cross the Mediterranean (as of 31 August 2017). It appears likely that last year's shocking record of over 5,000 migrant deaths in the Mediterranean could be broken.

Migration and refugee flows have become the new normal. These are issues which we will have to face for decades to come and which will only be exacerbated by conflict, poverty, climate change and demographics.

There is an urgent need for a cohesive, balanced and co-ordinated response to the situation. A global response based on shared responsibility is vital.

While there is no simple 'solution' to the ongoing migration crisis, a key component of a sustainable long-term migration management is the creation of additional channels for safe and legal migration.

Furthermore, purely voluntary mechanisms and appealing to countries' sense of solidarity do not usually work if not accompanied by financial or other sanctions.

Solidarity works both ways: EU Member States cannot expect to reap the benefits of membership without taking upon the responsibilities which come with membership.

It is vital to focus more on integration in host countries in order to prevent secondary movements and to ensure the success of European migration policies.

Countries such as the Baltic States which, like my own country Portugal, have historically low levels of refugees and asylum seekers, can show that a more welcoming attitude towards migrants and refugees can be accompanied by concrete demographic, societal, cultural and political benefits.

If we want to build secure societies, we need to be sure that newcomers are integrated and feel secure.

Education is key in ensuring integration. It is vital to invest in the education of refugee and migrant children in order to avoid lost generations.

Inter-institutional co-ordination and co-operation is crucial. We welcome further co-operation between the OSCE PA and the BSPC, and in particular between the OSCE PA's Migration Committee and the new BSPC Working Group on Migration and Integration.