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Brussels, 21 May 2015

ETF URGES EUROPEAN COUNCIL TO TAKE UP ITS RESPONSIBILITY IN THE MEDITERRANEAN MIGRATION AND ASYLUM CRISIS

At its Executive Committee meeting in Brussels on 20-21 May 2015, the European Transport Workers' Federation (ETF) expressed its sorrow for the 800 people who died in the Mediterranean Sea on 19 April in the hope of finding a better or safer life in Europe.

Since the beginning of this year at least 1,800 people have died while trying to reach Europe — 30 times higher than last year, which was already a record. Mediterranean countries, such as Italy, Malta and Spain are the main receptors of migrants and refugees from the African continent. While austerity affects their capacity to offer in a proper way safety and protection to migrants, the EU seems to be immune to these human catastrophes. At the same time, some countries as Spain prefer to close their boundaries violating human rights in a terrible way.

In a joint letter to leaders of all 28 EU Member States, the European Community Shipowners' Association (ECSA), the European Transport Workers' Federation (ETF), the International Chamber of Shipping (ICS) and the International Transport Workers' Federation (ITF) have warned that the crisis is spiralling out of control. The EU has to fight to avoid catastrophic loss of lives.

The shipping industry also suggests that the EU and the international community need to provide refugees and migrants with alternative means of finding safety, without risking their lives by crossing the Mediterranean in unseaworthy boats.

The shipping industry says that the development of solutions to this crisis must be treated as an absolute priority as 'it is literally a matter of life and death'. The shipowners' representatives and unions are therefore requesting that this issue is added, as a matter of real urgency, to the agenda of the European Council and relevant meetings of EU Ministers.

The ETF Executive Committee is of the opinion that these kinds of tragedies could have been avoided. The solution proposed by the EU is far away from the concept of European solidarity.

The solution proposed by the Council of Ministers at the European Council counts on military actions to fight human smugglers and involves taking "all necessary measures" against vessels and assets, as "discard" or make them "inoperative" in the territory of the concerned coastal state, according to a resolution of the Security Council of the UN or the consent of that country.

The Council of Ministers also indicates that it should "assess whether the conditions for a transition beyond the first phase are met," taking into account "any resolution of the Security Council of the United Nations applicable and consent of the coastal states concerned".

While pretending to develop these military operations, there is no other alternative to tackle the real problem of refugees, which is a tragedy both for the countries receiving migrants and for the refugees.



President Lars Lindgren

General Secretary Eduardo Chagas

Vice Presidents Alexander Kirchner
Ekaterina Yordanova



Whilst the EU summit agreed on the principle of sharing resettlement of asylum seeker, a step in the right direction providing the asylum seekers concerned agree to it, the figures announced by various governments are low compared to the millions of refugees in Africa and in the Middle East. The EU cannot leave all responsibility to those Members States receiving massive amounts of refugees.

Therefore, the ETF calls for:

1. The restoration of EU-funded search-and-rescue operations similar to the Mare Nostrum programme;
2. To increase effort to ensure suitable living conditions of asylum-seekers and refugees;
3. To comply with the UN Geneva Convention and to establish safe, legal routes for those who flee war and prosecution, and to increase the number of recognition of refugee status;
4. The suspension of the Dublin convention according to which the EU country of arrival is responsible for processing the asylum claims of applicants, placing an unfair strain on countries involved in the rescue operations, in this case Italy, Greece, Malta, Spain, and Cyprus;
5. To establish legal channels of migration and to support regularisation of undocumented migrants;
6. To support ethical recruitment and retention of migrant workers in the public sectors;
7. To carry out ex-ante social, economic and humanitarian impact assessments of EU external interventions.



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