Article

European Parliament

Refugee crisis: "If Schengen collapses, it'll be start of end European project"

Migration commissioner Dimitris Avramopoulos warned MEPs the refugee crisis was "getting worse" during a meeting organised by the civil liberties committee on 14 January. He said the EU's unity was at stake amid an increase of "populism and nationalism". The commissioner also called on member states to deliver on their own promises and show solidarity to each other: "If Schengen collapses, it will be the beginning of the end of the European project".

Avramopoulos, who is responsible at the Commission for migration and home affairs, discussed the effectiveness of measures to tackle the refugee crisis so far at the meeting of Parliament's civil liberties committee presided by UK S&D member Claude Moraes.

Relocation scheme

Last September MEPs backed two emergency proposals to relocate 160,000 asylum seekers from EU countries hit hardest by the arrivals of new migrants. However, so far only 272 people have been relocated to other member states. "All member states have to play the game," said Avramopoulos, stressing that EU countries should not become prisoners of domestic political agendas.

MEPs also referred to the scheme's lack of success so far. Cornelia Ernst, a German member of the GUE/NGL group, said: "How on earth can we implement anything if member states keep saying no, no, no."

Need to review existing rules on asylum applications

Existing EU rules concerning refugees are based on the Dublin regulations, which stipulates that asylum demands should be dealt with by the first EU country the applicant entered. During the debate, MEPs and the commissioner generally agreed on the need to revise the legislation. The European Commission will propose new measures in March.

Timothy Kirkhope, a UK member of the ECR group, said: "We do not need gestures dressed up as policies. I hope the Dublin review will be a solid review."

Common list of safe countries

EN

Directorate General for Communication
European Parliament - Spokesperson: Jaume Duch Guillot
Contact: webmaster@europarl.eu

1 | 4

Parliament is currently working on proposals for a permanent relocation mechanism as well as a common list of safe countries of origin. If migrants come from a country on the list, then their request for asylum would be less likely to be approved. Swedish EPP MEP Anna Maria Corazza Bildt said: "We need to distinguish between those with right to international protection and those without."

Border controls

The need to better protect the EU's external borders was another issue that was discussed in detail during the meeting. Nathalie Griesbeck, a French member of the ALDE group, said the EU's external borders needed "to be properly policed to ensure Schengen doesn't collapse".

The Commission has already proposed to strengthen EU border agency Frontex in order to turn it into a body that would even be able to act in some cases without the approval of the country concerned. The Parliament has already welcomed these plans. These proposals would also require countries outside the EU to collaborate. However, commissioner Avramopoulos warned: "If third countries are not engaged, there is no hope."

Birgit Sippel, a German member of the S&D group, wondered if this cooperation was aimed at handling the refugee situation or just "to keep them there". Green German MEP Ska Keller added that according to reports Turkey was already "pushing refugees back to Syria" as a direct consequence of its agreement with the EU.

Hot spots

Reception centres, also known as hotspots, are being set up in Greece and Italy to help distinguish between refugees, economic migrants and terrorists seeking to slip into Europe. The centres receive and register those who made the crossing through measures such as fingerprinting, establishing adequate reception and promptly selecting and relocating asylum applicants.

However, it is still early days for these centres. Laura Ferrara, an Italian member of the EFDD group said: "In Italy the hotspots are not working, the identification process is too slow." She added that people whose asylum requests were rejected had neither been helped nor accompanied back to the border. Commissioner Avramopoulos said the hotspots were indeed a work in progress that he himself was following, adding: "All member states have the responsibility to welcome refugees in a dignified manner."

Tragedies

MEPs also brought up recent tragedies such as the terrorist attacks in Paris and Istanbul and the events surrounding the New Year celebrations in Cologne and elsewhere. Avramopoulos insisted on the need to avoid any "amalgamation" of migrants and terrorists. Vicky Maeijer, a

EN

Directorate General for Communication
European Parliament - Spokesperson: Jaume Duch Guillot
Contact: webmaster@europarl.eu

2 | 4

Dutch member of the EFN group, called EU policies "very dangerous", adding: "We need to close the border."

Upcoming proposals

Commissioner Avramopoulos said the Commission was woking on a long list of middle and long-term measures in order to create a more sustainable migration system for the future. He said this would include substantial financial to help those who have been most affected, a revision of the blue card system and a new system for resettling asylum seekers. In March the Commission will release its smart borders proposal.

Find out more
Video of the debate
Press release
European Commission press release: measures to address the refugee crisis (5 January 2016)
Migration top story
Civil liberties committee

EN

Directorate General for Communication
European Parliament - Spokesperson: Jaume Duch Guillot
Contact: webmaster@europarl.eu

3 I 4

Syrian refugee child being held by her mother ©UNHCR/Mark Henley

▶ **No let-up in the refugee crisis**
http://www.europarltv.europa.eu/en/player.aspx?pid=e4b37711-937a-45f1-9b91-a58700dac775

EN

Directorate General for Communication
European Parliament - Spokesperson: Jaume Duch Guillot
Contact: webmaster@europarl.eu

4 | 4