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Human rights: Channel Tunnel

European Parliament resolution on the issue of refugees and obstruction of rail freight through the Channel Tunnel

The European Parliament,

- A. having regard to the obstruction of freight trains through the Channel Tunnel since November 2001 and the complete stoppage of rail freight traffic which has been a frequent occurrence over the past month because migrants for whom illicit entry is the only way to reach the UK are attempting to access the trains,
- B. whereas the main problems at the entrance to the Channel Tunnel are getting worse, in spite of a number of joint efforts made by the French and British governments to curb the attempts to travel through the tunnel illegally, which are proving ineffective,
- C. having regard to the failure of the French and British authorities to provide adequate security for the Calais-Fréthun rail freight terminal,
- D. having regard to the decision of a French court on 1 February 2002 to reject an application made by Eurotunnel to seek the closure of the Sangatte refugee centre, which is located only about a mile from the freight terminal and the Tunnel entrance,
- E. whereas efforts to resolve these difficulties must address the real causes of this situation, namely the presence, close to the Channel Tunnel, of illegal immigrants and asylum-seekers who daily, and in large numbers, attempt to travel through the tunnel in order to reach the United Kingdom, and having regard to the absence of an appropriate response,
- F. having regard to the single market requirement for free movement of goods between Member States and the fact that trains from Italy, Germany, Spain and other Member States as well as France and the UK are adversely affected,
- G. whereas the question of asylum-seekers in the Calais area is not a new problem, considering that the British and French governments have been fully aware of the worsening situation for over two years and have not taken effective action,
- H. whereas at least nine people have already died in their attempts to travel illegally through the Channel Tunnel and there is a serious risk of further fatalities and accidents in the Tunnel,
- I. whereas the impact of the situation on trade and businesses is deeply damaging, with a threat to some 8000 jobs, with business losses of some EUR 12 million a week expected; whereas, furthermore, the impact of these developments on private operators such as Eurotunnel has been particularly damaging, with EUR 30 million of losses attributed directly to the disruption of services and a further EUR 8 million to the cost of extra security,

- J. whereas the inability of rail freight operators to guarantee secure and dependable rail shipment between continental Europe and the UK means that 2 250 000 extra lorry kilometres are being driven every week, with clear adverse environmental and safety implications,
- K. whereas, as they currently stand, neither national nor Community legislation can provide a satisfactory response to the difficulties connected with the presence of illegal immigrants close to the Channel Tunnel, and recognising that a sensible, practical and effective approach needs to be adopted by the British and French governments and coordinated with other Member States,
1. Draws attention to the critical and deteriorating situation around the Channel Tunnel, which requires urgent action by the authorities concerned to restore normal conditions as soon as possible;
 2. Deplores the fact that the Commission, on the basis of Council Regulation (EC) No 2679/98 of 7 December 1998 on the functioning of the internal market in relation to the free movement of goods among the Member States¹ (the 'Strawberry' regulation), can only intervene in a limited way when major obstructions to the free movement of goods occur; urges the Commission and the Member States to take all necessary and proportionate measures, without further delay, to ensure the free movement of goods through the Channel Tunnel between France and the UK; urges the Commission to draw up proposals to strengthen the rapid intervention mechanism provided for in the 'Strawberry' regulation;
 3. Acknowledges that, in order to provide a satisfactory long-term response to these difficulties, it is necessary to adopt a humane and practical approach in terms of asylum and immigration policy;
 4. Considers that the long-term solution lies within European asylum and immigration systems, including responsibility-sharing; calls therefore for urgent action to ensure that asylum-seekers can be processed fairly and rapidly, while traffickers and illegal immigrants are effectively deterred;
 5. Calls on the British and French governments to reach a solution dealing with the asylum claims at the Sangatte centre and to take a lead in developing further EU measures;
 6. Calls upon the French authorities and SNCF, as a matter of urgency, to further upgrade security at Fréthun and other vulnerable points leading to the Channel Tunnel and to ensure that effective security measures are deployed at all times;
 7. Urges the UK and French governments to provide immediate support and compensation for rail freight operators and other businesses which have been adversely affected by the restrictions on rail freight using the Channel Tunnel;
 8. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Council, the Commission and the British and French governments.

¹ OJ L 337, 12.12.1998, p. 8.