Activities of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe and its Committee on Migration, Refugees and Population in the Field of Migration and Refugees

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The Committee on Migration, Refugees and Population of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe pursues three aims: firstly, it elaborates policies for the protection of rights of migrants, refugees and internally displaced persons with a view to bring about an improvement in their humanitarian situation. Secondly, by proposing political solutions in line with the values of the Council of Europe, it responds to concrete refugee situations in troubled regions of Council of Europe Member States. Finally, it contributes to the general debate on the management of migration flows including the questions of burden-sharing and combat against illegal migration.

In practical terms, the Committee initiates the Assembly’s recommendations in the field of refugees and migration. These recommendations, although not legally binding, are instrumental in promoting improvements in national legislation regarding immigration, asylum and integration, and harmonization at the European level. The Assembly, inspired by the Committee, is also well placed to initiate the elaboration of international legal instruments such as conventions and partial agreements.

The Committee’s activities include preparation of reports, organization of seminars and conferences, cooperation with national parliaments, governmental and non-governmental humanitarian organisations such as the UNHCR, the ICRC, the IOM and various refugee and migration organisations.


Another important issue on the Committee’s agenda was the initiative to establish a European Migration Observatory/Agency under the auspices of the Council of Europe and open to the participation of non-Council of Europe Member States. This new political body should be instrumental in gathering, processing and distributing data on migration as well as in facilitating the preparation of policy debates between countries of origin, transit and destination of migratory flows.

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The idea of cooperation, at the parliamentary level, with the countries of origin, non-members of the Council of Europe, has been gaining more and more support over the last years. In October 2003, the Committee organised, in cooperation with the Parliament of Cyprus, the First Euro-Mediterranean Parliamentary Forum on Migration with participation of Members of Parliament of several Mediterranean non-European countries like Algeria, Egypt, Tunisia or Jordan. The Committee is planning to hold a Euro-Asian Parliamentary Forum organised along the same lines, with participation of parliamentarians from Asia in 2005.

Furthermore, the Assembly, at the initiative of the Committee, addressed the issue of common policy in the field of migration and asylum (Recommendation 1624(03)) in which it set up some minimum standards and called for harmonization of legislation regarding migration and asylum at the Council of Europe level.

Internal displacement was another question on the agenda of the Committee. The final result was the adoption by the Parliamentary Assembly of Recommendation 1631(03), which called on the Member States to review their national legislation with a view to introducing laws safeguarding rights of displaced populations in accordance with the Guiding Principles on internal displacement, elaborated by the Representative of the UN Secretary-General on Internally Displaced Persons.

In response to concerns expressed by some NGOs, the Committee examined the question of forced returns of Roma from the former Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, including Kosovo, to Serbia and Montenegro from Council of Europe Member States. It proposed a number of recommendations relating to three stages of the process of expulsion (legitimacy of the decision on deportation, conditions in which deportation takes place, situation upon return) aimed at better protection of the human rights of those forcibly returned, which were subsequently adopted by the Assembly (Recommendation 1633(03)).

Another issue examined by the Committee related to access, assistance and protection for asylum seekers at European seaports and coastal areas (Recommendation 1645(03)). The Assembly called on the governments to harmonise and in some cases improve conditions in which asylum seekers are received at seaports and coastal areas, in particular as far as access to the asylum procedure is concerned.

Moreover, the Committee dealt with the links between the Europeans living abroad and their countries of origin, and in the recommendation submitted to the Assembly, and subsequently adopted, it recommended the establishment of institutional links with expatriate communities, and launched the idea of creating, under the auspices of the Council of Europe, a Council of Europeans abroad, a body representing European expatriates at a pan-European level.

The Committee is currently working on migratory flows in the Mediterranean, and preparing a report on new trends and challenges for Euro-Mediterranean policies (Rapporteur: Mr Danieli, Italy, LDR). This report is a follow-up to the above-mentioned Euro-Mediterranean Parliamentary Forum on Migration and aims at establishing an institutionalised dialogue among countries in the region.

Furthermore, the Committee has been concerned with the situation of refugees and displaced persons in the Russian Federation and other selected CIS countries, the plight of the deported Meshkettian population, asylum seekers and irregular migrants in Turkey, and persons unaccounted for as a result of armed conflicts or