

35th Session – Strasbourg, France, 06 November 2018 (Strasbourg – 6th of 8th November 2018)

## **„Migration is not a problem, but a phenomenon with long-term benefit !“: Chamber of Regions discusses and votes on „Border regions facing the migration phenomenon“ report**

The newly published figures of the „International Organisation for Migration“ in Geneva speak for themselves: In the first 10 months of 2018 more than 100.000 migrants have crossed the Mediterranean Sea. 49,000 landed in Spain, 28,000 in Greece, 22,000 in Italy, and about 2,000 people have died on their journey to Europe.

Against this background, Rapporteur Eirini DOUROU from Greece (SOC) strongly demanded governments to rethink their policies in this field. “We recommend that member states approach migration as systematic issue with long-term benefit instead of seeing it as a crisis situation, stressed the Governor of Attica. “In our recommendation, we suggest that national governments should establish an efficient and reliable legal framework that clearly distinguishes between local, regional and national competences and organises the fair distribution of newcomers,” she said.

According to her, this would mean that all regions in Europe – and not only those directly affected by migration – should work together to offer solutions. “We call on public authorities to share the responsibility of tackling migration between and within regions. Of course border regions are very differently affected in comparison to hinterland regions but hinterland regional authorities must show solidarity with their challenged partners at the border“, continued the Rapporteur, reminding her colleagues from 47 European countries that it is the authorities of cities and regions who are the first to deal with incoming migrants, before national governments step in. “I am here to encourage you to make use of the means the Congress offers us; as regional representatives and as local authorities, let us use this Chamber of Regions as a megaphone to make our voices heard“, stressed Ms DOUROU.

“In the name of democracy, in the name of the rule of law, in the name of human rights and in the name of social cohesion, I ask you to support this report“, she concluded.

Secretary General of the Association of European Border Regions (AEBR) Martin GUILLERMO-RAMIREZ from Spain , called on Europe to no longer speak of a ‘migrant crisis’: „ Migration is a phenomenon, a fact, not a problem!“, he stressed; „these are people who are forced to leave their countries“.He reminded Chamber members that re-establishing borders is in the limelight all over Europe again, from Spain to the current Ireland/Northern Ireland problem and to EU countries trying to close borders instead of opening them up. “In many countries migrants are needed to secure future pensions, income and even GDP“, he concluded, promising to promote the Congress report through the AEBR.

Laura FERRARA from Italy Vice-Chair of the Committee on Legal Affairs of the European Parliament and rapporteur on the Common Procedure for Asylum updated the Chamber on the EU situation: „There are still obstacles in dealing with the migrant situation but I am hopeful that a European solution can be found,“ she told the Chamber members, recalling Article 80 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union where „sharing responsibility“ is enshrined. “Coming from Italy’s Calabria region where many incoming migrant boats in spring and in summer put stress on the regional and local emergency and

support services, and where the mayors of the cities under Italian law are responsible for dealing with the influx of migrants, I can only support the recommendations of this report“, she underlined in conclusion.

Fatma ŞAHİN, Mayor of the – very close to Syria - Metropolitan Municipality of Gaziantep, President of the Union of Turkish Municipalities and President of United Cities and Local Governments' Middle East and West Asia Section (*UCLG*) ,presented an impressive picture of the migrant situation in her region. „My city has 2,5 million citizens and has offered a new home to 500,000 migrants. They are our neighbours and we decided to welcome them. Closing borders is no solution. They were forced to leave and we offered them a shelter“. From her experience, the former Nobel Peace Prize nominee explained that the education of children and of adults would be an investment in any future. “I call for more empathy for migrants and for a „Security zone“ in Syria where migrants could return to and work and live. My region would be prepared to support the people returning there“, she concluded and demanded EU to make good on its promise for funds ensuring faster transfers to cover costs.

The following nearly one-hour discussion mirrored the current views in Europe. Josef FREY, member of Germany's Baden-Württemberg parliament (SOC) described that in his region on the Germany- France-Switzerland borders agreed to work together across the borders to offer help and find new solutions for refugees. While members of the Moldovan delegation strongly supported the report expecting „new guidelines for many Eastern European countries“, Peter TOTH from Hungary strongly voiced his concerns. The migrant crisis had to be solved through measures in Africa and Syria and not in Europe, he said, adding that “the NGOs are not the solution; they are the motor of the crisis“, which is why he would reject many parts of the new report. The statement drew a reaction from the Youth delegates Johannes HASELSTEINER (Austria), Hannah REBIFFÉ (France) and Deedeni DEVOS (Belgium) who rejected the idea of any new walls and borders and demanded better co-operation of the many institutions dealing with the migrant situation. Younger people, DEVOS proposed, should be better informed and better educated to understand the full impact of the migrant situation and local and regional authorities should develop projects, taking action to provide guidance for young people's engagement.