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*Check against delivery - Seul le prononcé fait foi*

**Report "Border Regions Facing Migration Phenomenon"**

**Strasbourg, France, 6 November 2018**

Dear colleagues,

Although, the arrivals at the shores of Italy, Spain and Greece in the first 6 months of 2018 were five times lower than in the same period in 2016, the numbers on people who **have drowned this year on the passage between Northern Africa to Europe, is going up.**

**In fact 1 852 people have lost their lives.**
**This is unacceptable.**
We, local and regional authorities, face a big challenge: to deal with the most formative phenomenon.
Formative phenomenon for local societies, for our countries, for the whole European continent.
And I deliberately refer to a "phenomenon" and not a "crisis" because, as described by the former President of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, Anne Brasseur, a crisis reaches its peak and comes to an end – which is not the case for the "phenomenon" which is of permanent nature.
The migration phenomenon.

Dear colleagues, I am not standing here in front of you just to express our concern about what is happening at the European borders nor am I here to point fingers on whom to blame for the lives lost.

I am here today to encourage you to take use of the means the Congress offers to us in such situations.

As regional representatives and as local authorities, let us use this chamber as a megaphone to make our voices heard all around.

In our first report on migration adopted in March 2017 “From reception to integration: The role of local and regional authorities facing migration” we started discussing the challenges of migration from a more general perspective.
One year later, we went into detail by focusing on children in the report “Unaccompanied refugee children: the role and responsibilities of local and regional authorities”.

**During the debate on border regions facing migration, held in the Regional Chamber during the 32nd Congress Session in March 2017, it became clear** – and I am sure that those of you who attended this debate will remember vividly – **that there is a particular need to discuss the role of border regions in Europe**.

The report “Border Regions facing the Migration Phenomenon”, adopted by the Current Affairs Committee during its meeting in June this year, **is the confluence of all of this**.

**Although putting a focus on border regions, the report is addressed to all regions in Europe, no matter how far away the shores of the Aegean Sea or the reception camps of Sicily are from your town halls**.

Dear colleagues,

If there is one thing that we have learned in the past years, this should be that **solidarity and shared responsibility** is crucial for successfully facing the migration phenomenon.

I know that some both in this room and outside **rather prefer to close eyes and borders, pretending that the situation does not concern them**.
This strategy is simply not sustainable.

Migration is a process that affects all parts of Europe and will eventually turn out for our benefit.

For the benefit of humanity.

Just recently **a study from Austria has found out that in particular, the mayors and the populations of small municipalities hope that asylum seekers will stay** in their municipalities.

Although the benefit of migration is slowly being acknowledged by the many,
the costs are still burdened on the few.

This report is therefore calling for an **integrated approach**.

North and south, east and west, national and local level, arrival, transit and countries of origin – **all stakeholders must be integrated in the work**.

**We must not be deceived by the currently decreasing numbers of people arriving in Europe**.
Like I said in the beginning, **new, other and more alarming challenges for us are appearing on the horizon**.

Therefore, **in our *Resolution*, we call on local and regional governments to cooperate across borders and make use of international bodies**.

Further **we call on authorities to share the responsibility between and within regions**.
Of course border regions are very differently affected in comparison to hinterland regions. Nevertheless, hinterland region authorities must show solidarity with their challenged partners at the border.

We further **emphasise that policies need to be introduced that provide not only directly but also indirectly better opportunities to migrants within the labour market**.

**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**.

We **recommend Member States to approach migration as systemic issue** with **long-term benefit** instead of seeing it as a crisis situation.

Furthermore **national governments should campaign at the European level for solidarity**. **We encourage them to support alternatives to the Dublin Regulation as a mechanism of sharing responsibility**.
At this point, **we also advise Member States to take into account the proposal of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe to introduce the status of a "European refugee"**.

Dear colleagues,
I believe that our work can have an impact if we follow it up.
Regional authorities can carry a heavy burden.
But they can only do so if they can be assured of the support from higher political levels and the solidarity from hinterland regions.
So we must go on and build the external and internal solidarity front european societies need.

To conclude I would like to thank all my dear colleagues who participated in the fruitful reflection group meeting that we had last March,
in particular Joseph Frey, Nawel Rafik-Elmrini and Yoomi Renström as well as our experts Eleni Marianou from the Conference of Peripheral Maritime Regions and Roland-Francois Weil from UNHCR.

Colleagues,

I invite you to adopt this resolution and the recommendation

in the name of Democracy,

in the name of rule of law,

in the name of the social cohesion for our societies,

in the name of human rights.

Thank you for your attention.