

## **Extract from the REPORT of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe**

Thursday 14 April 2011 at 10 a.m.

Mrs STRIK (*Netherlands*) – I thank all members of the Assembly for their contributions, and for their broad support for the recommendations.

We are dealing with the consequences of rapid developments in all the Arabic and North African countries, although, as Mrs Reps pointed out, they are not confined to those countries. This is going on and on: we have not yet reached the end of it. Nevertheless, although Mr Leigh seems to think that democracy is not for everyone, we must help the North African countries to relieve their societies of the consequences of the migrations, and in particular ensure that individuals are received and protected in a dignified way. The core message of the report is about the obligation to protect.

I thank Mrs Hägg for referring to the extra attention that women deserve in these circumstances, because they are especially vulnerable. As we heard yesterday from the Commissioner for Human Rights, women arriving from Libya have spoken of being maltreated in Libya and other places from which they fled.

The report focuses on the short term because we must act now, but acting without thinking of tomorrow – failing to act for tomorrow – is as useless as failing to act immediately. We have identified some of the measures that will be necessary to support democratic and economic reforms in the countries concerned, and to establish stability in a democratic way. Let me put one of them in perspective. When we refer to the possibility of labour migration, we do not mean that the definition of a refugee should be extended or that borders should be opened without limitation. That is absolutely not the case. What we are saying is that labour migration programmes should be developed as part of a package of measures of co-operation with North African countries. They are our neighbours, and we also have an interest in a more prosperous future for them. It is, however, pointless to speak of labour migration if no jobs are available. That is crystal clear.

I want to raise one more issue. How do we help ourselves? As has been said, it took a long time for the Dublin Regulation to be adopted, but we do not need a revised regulation per se in order to act now, because the regulation also makes it possible for all member states to assess asylum requests and refrain from transferring people to Italy and Malta. Although I think that Italy and Malta deserve praise for their efforts to receive all those people in a dignified way, I agree with Mrs Reps that if we refrain from acting, the possibility will arise that Italy and Malta will no longer fulfil their obligations, either deliberately or because too many people are arriving. If we are to fulfil our obligations under both the Refugee Convention and the European Convention on Human Rights, we must act in solidarity with the southern member states and the North African states.

Finally, let me thank Mrs Heurtin, the member of staff who prepared the report at very short notice. I think that she will appreciate all our congratulations.

THE PRESIDENT (Translation) – Does the chairperson of the committee, Mr Choqe, wish to speak? You have two minutes.

Mr CHOPE (*United Kingdom*) – I thank the Assembly for agreeing to this urgent debate. I also thank Mrs Strik for her excellent report, and echo what she said about the fantastic work being done by the secretariat of the committee that I have the privilege of chairing.

A large number of people have participated in this debate, and I just thought I would share with you what the Committee on Migration, Refugees and Population is going to do now. We have established an ad hoc sub-committee that, with the agreement of the Bureau, will go to Lampedusa at the end of May at the invitation of the Italian delegation and the suggestion of Mr Santini.

We are also bringing forward reports on burden sharing, which has been the subject of a lot of comments during the debate. We heard from Mr Agius from Malta about the disproportionate

burden that Malta is bearing, which makes the problem in Italy seem relatively unimportant. We are bringing forward a report on asylum seekers and refugees and the sharing of responsibilities in Europe, and we hope to be able to debate it in the next part-session. We hope at the same time to debate the report on the interception and reception at sea of asylum seekers and migrants being produced by Mr Díaz Tejera. In the meantime, as is good practice for the Assembly, the committee will have been getting more information from the front line. We should not spend so much time talking in generalities – we have to spend more time talking about specifics. We hope to bring more of those specifics to the Assembly in the next part-session.