

EU Commission promises Dublin mechanism overhaul

Written by Julie Levy-Abegnoli on 14 January 2016 in News
News

European migration Commissioner has told MEPs Dublin reforms would be presented in March, amid ongoing refugee crisis and mounting pressure on Schengen.



European migration, home affairs and citizenship Commissioner Dimitris Avramopoulos has met with Parliament's civil liberties and home affairs committee to discuss the ongoing refugee crisis.

While confessing to MEPs that he was an optimist by nature, he stressed that; "We have to be realistic and honest. The situation is getting worse. There were between 3000 and 4000 arrivals each day in Greece over the holiday period, and more and more member states are introducing internal border controls."

He added that; "We are at a critical moment where our unity is at stake, both in terms of the refugee crisis and our security. Europe is at a crossroads. Our task is not to fuel fear or backtrack and water down our goals, we must show leadership."

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He noted that; "So far, the Commission has taken the lead and fully played its role in proposing European solutions to co-legislators. We need member states to deliver on their commitments." Although there have been countless summit meetings between EU leaders, so far, there has been no real progress in dealing with the refugee crisis.

Avramopoulos did not deny the need for more concrete actions, saying; "Decisions are not enough - the different schemes have not delivered the expected results. All member states have to play the game and show solidarity."

A number of EU countries have closed their borders and suspended their Schengen membership in an effort to contain the large influx of refugees. The Commissioner said; "It is clear that we need to improve the management of our external borders in order to maintain Schengen."

There have also been calls to overhaul the Dublin system, whereby responsibility for an asylum seeker falls upon the member state where that person first enters the EU. Avramopoulos announced that the Commission would propose a revision of the Dublin mechanism in March.

EPP group member, Anna Maria Corazza Bildt, was the first MEP to address the Greek official. She thanked him for his work and highlighted that; "The problem lies with the member states."

ECR deputy Timothy Kirkhope said; "I hope the Dublin review will be a solid review rather than just temporary," adding; "I am happy for more funding to be granted to member states, but they need to be held accountable on human rights and asylum and immigration standards." The British MEP also warned against "kneejerk reactions."

His ALDE group colleague Nathalie Griesbeck agreed, saying; "I regret the fact that we are reactive rather than proactive."

GUE/NGL group MEP Cornelia Ernst urged Avramopoulos, "not to mix terrorists up with refugees - that is extremely dangerous." She also slammed the Commission for its cooperation with Turkey, and asked him why he had not protested the statements by the Slovakian and Polish governments saying they would not accept any Muslim refugees.

On laws currently under discussion in Denmark that demand refugees to hand over their valuables as compensation for housing. These were "unacceptable," said Ernst, adding that, "such a debate should not be happening in Europe."

Avramopoulos insisted the Commission was monitoring the situation in Denmark and would, "examine the situation and officially respond once the law is adopted." He added that; "Member states - even those that, like Denmark, are not bound by the relevant EU asylum legislation - have a responsibility to welcome asylum seekers in a dignified manner."

EFDD group MEP Laura Ferrara called on European security agencies to enhance their cooperation, as

saying current databases, "are like cathedrals in the desert. We don't make use of information, and once we do, the damage has already been done."

Greens/EFA group Vice-Chair Ska Keller noted that; "For many years, Parliament has been calling for substantial reform and looking into fair allocation of refugees," urging the Commission to implement "strong and proper reform" of the Dublin system.

Avramopoulos said; "Dublin should not just be a mechanism to allocate responsibility, but also a solidarity instrument among member states. It must be revised deeply; it was adopted in a totally different landscape and I wonder if those who defend Dublin really understand the situation we are in today."

Describing Schengen as, "the greatest achievement of EU integration," he insisted that, "it has to be protected and defended by all of us. Schengen today is at stake. If Schengen collapses, this will be the beginning of the end of the European project."

About the author

Julie Levy-Abegnoli is a journalist for the Parliament Magazine

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