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الجمعية البرلمانية للبحر الأبيض المتوسط

1st Standing Committee on Political and Security-related Cooperation

“Security Challenges related to Migration”

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I. INTRODUCTION

1. The Mediterranean Sea stands as a bridge between its shores: Southern Europe and North Africa. Over the centuries, this natural frontier has been a space for the exchanges of influence and closer ties between two different political, cultural, economic and religious realities that have respected and influenced each other.
2. However, in recent times the Mediterranean has attracted the world’s attention for reasons of insecurity, terrorism and armed conflicts, which have led to an unprecedented humanitarian crisis and security challenges. Many people have been forced to leave their land and property, and seek a safe place, thus facing countless dangers, such as exploitation by criminal traffickers, extreme weather conditions, hunger, finding themselves in many situations endangering their own lives and those of their families. ISIS terrorists have exploited this situation to infiltrate our countries.
3. The Mediterranean Sea, a space of union and convergence between peoples and regions, has become a sea of suffering and death.
4. It is vital to analyse the situation relating to the waves of migrants, their living conditions and their integration. At the same time, it is also crucial for PAM to contribute to raising awareness among the populations of the host and transit countries, overcoming misunderstandings and animosities, and building trust. In this sense, PAM supports the United Nations, through the Office of the High Commissioner for Refugees, and other non-governmental organizations, whose key objective is to monitor and improve the conditions of refugees, asylum seekers and migrants in the Mediterranean. Furthermore, refugees belonging to vulnerable groups such as women, children and disabled people should be granted special protection in order to ensure that their particular needs are addressed.

5. At the political and parliamentary level, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Mediterranean (PAM) has developed and launched many initiatives aimed at peace building, preservation of human rights and democratic values, promotion of economic and social development, preservation of culture and religious tolerance.

II. ASYLUM SEEKERS AND REFUGEES, THE NEW MIGRANTS

6. The Geneva Convention of 1951 – Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees defines the term refugee in Chapter 1, Article 1, as follows:

A. For the purposes of the present Convention, the term “refugee” shall apply to any person who:

(1) As a result of events occurring before 1 January 1951 and owing to well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of his former habitual residence as a result of such events, is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it.

7. The granting of asylum in foreign countries to individuals fleeing persecution is one of the oldest practices in civilization. References to this practice can be already found in texts written 3,500 years ago during the peak-ages of ancient Middle Eastern empires, such as the Hittite, Babylonian, Assyrian empires, and even ancient Egypt.
8. Currently one out of every 113 people on the planet is an asylum seeker, internally displaced person or refugee. Globally, in 2015, around 24 people per minute were forced to leave their homes, which represents an average of 34,000 people per day.
9. The United Nations Refugee Agency, HCR, estimates that there were at least 10 million stateless people by the end of 2015, although data from governments indicate the presence of about 3.7% stateless in 78 countries.
10. Syria continues to be the country of origin of the vast majority of recent refugee flows – 4.9 million; followed by Afghanistan with 2.7 million and Somalia with 1.1 million.
11. Migration patterns are increasingly complex and involve, in addition to refugees, economic migrants. The latter are looking to improve their and their family’s quality of life because their state has failed or has no resources to provide a better quality of life.

12. Refugees flee from situations where life has become unsustainable and basic conditions for survival cease to exist and/or where freedom, the fundamental right of any human being, is jeopardized. Climate change is a new factor that is generating the so called Environmental Refugees, looking, as an example, to the region of Lake Chad.
13. Conflicts in some North African countries have had different origins. The Arab Spring has brought to the states of the region new challenges, which have directly or indirectly influenced their internal stability, in most cases with heavy repercussions on neighbouring countries.
14. As a consequence, some states in North Africa, members of PAM, are facing new threats related to the possible increase in terrorist activity, both in their territory and in the territories of neighbouring states.
15. The multiple and fragmented terrorist threats require the legal and security institutions of the affected states to find ways to address them, increase their security and strengthen cooperation among themselves.
16. PAM has given particular priority to the issues of terrorism in the Mediterranean region and has made a commitment to combat all aspects of this scourge and has used its parliamentary framework to operate in this field.
17. Examples of this are the myriad activities that it has been developing and that are contained in the document *“PAM’s Activities on Counter-terrorism Issues”*. The complexity of the current conflicts has reached levels that undermine regional security and block political transitions to democracy.
18. This is the case of the conflict in Syria, which, because of events of extreme violence, has caused countless deaths, hunger, exploitation and slavery in the populations, devastation of places and an unprecedented exodus of people.
19. The serious humanitarian crisis in Lebanon is the result of the war in Syria, and the Lebanese Government is faced with the challenge to rebuild the state, control its borders and recover the economy.
20. In view of the seriousness of the situation in these two countries, and partly in accordance with PAM’s institutional mandate vis-à-vis the citizens of the Member states that comprise it, a PAM delegation made up of the Secretary General, Mr Sergio Piazzi, the Vice-President of PAM’s 3rd Standing Committee (Palestine), Hon. Bilal Qasem, and the Deputy Secretary General, Mr Mourad Youssry, carried out a mission to Syria and Lebanon between 28 and 30 April 2015, pursuant to the **Executive Report “PAM Mission to Syria and Lebanon”**.

21. The aim of the PAM representatives in this mission was:
- a) *“To discuss with the Syrian Parliament the possible political solution to end the ongoing war, weeks before the start of the new rounds of talks in Geneva under the auspices of the United Nations.*
 - b) *To support and facilitate the international support to ease the grave Humanitarian Situation in Syria and the displaced Syrians to the Neighbouring countries.*
 - c) *Following a request by the UNSG, this PAM mission was also fielded to verify the situation in the Palestinian Refugees Camp (Al Yarmouk), taking into consideration the latest attacks on the Camp (situated in the outskirts of Damascus), which deepened the Humanitarian crisis in Syria and the region”.*
22. The mission resulted in multiple contacts with representatives of official entities and non-governmental organizations, having concluded:
- a) *“PAM mission concluded its mission with a positive note based on the commitment shown by the Syrian Parliament and high officials in reaching a permanent political solution to end the three years ongoing crisis;*
 - b) *On his return, the PAM Secretary General briefed the members of PAM Bureau on the outcome of this mission. It has been agreed to continue to use the parliamentary network of PAM in order to support the political negotiations and secure the safe flow of the needed Humanitarian aids;*
 - c) *PAM will enforce, furthermore, its communication with the UN representations in Syria to facilitate, in all possible ways, the delivery of the humanitarian aids and support all initiatives aiming to reach a comprehensive political solution to the Syrian Crisis”.*

III. HUMAN TRAFFICKING – A TRANSNATIONAL PHENOMENON

23. Mass forced migration results from situations of extreme despair and puts men, women and children in great insecurity at the hands of human traffickers, subject to sexual exploitation, forced labour, slavery and removal of organs. Worldwide there is a clear consensus on the imperative of combating the phenomenon of trafficking in persons.
24. The *United Nations Convention against Transnational Crime* and the *Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons*, adopted in 2000 by the

United Nations General Assembly and signed and ratified by most states, are important support instruments in combating trafficking in persons.

25. However, it is imperative that states transpose into domestic legislation and take an active role in its implementation, strengthening cooperation between states in combating human trafficking and smuggling of migrants. They must also adopt measures to combat terrorist actions by extremist groups, including the sexual enslavement of women and girls through trafficking, with special attention to the Yazidi girls who are captured in Iraq and then sold in slave markets in Syria.
26. Aware of this very serious problem, in his address at the *“Debate on Trafficking in Persons in Conflict Situations”*, in New York on 20 December 2016, PAM’s delegation, indicated: *“We come with a plea: for Member States to take steps to help victims of trafficking today – and prevent further cases in the future”*.
27. In addition to the issue of trafficking in persons, migrants are also subject to criminal smuggling networks. Migrant smuggling is a crime that seeks to obtain financial and material benefits through the illegal entry of migrants into a state that is not their country of origin and has caused the deaths of many thousands of people.
28. The *United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime* defines the smuggling of migrants as: *“Procurement, in order to obtain, directly or indirectly, a financial or other material benefit, of the illegal entry of a person into a State Party of which the person is not a national or a permanent resident.”*
29. Following the mass flight of people from countries at war or in serious economic crisis, with the greatest emphasis on the Syrian people, criminal smuggling networks have intensified and created new routes and operational methods of smuggling.
30. According to the **United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC)**, the smuggling of migrants reveals the following tendencies and patterns:
 - a) Criminal networks increasingly provide their smuggling services to irregular migrants who, due to increasingly strict control at state borders, seek other alternative routes for illegal entry.
 - b) Migrant smuggling is a highly profitable business in which criminals enjoy low risk of imprisonment and punishment. This type of crime is increasingly organized and changes the routes and modus operandi according to the circumstances, placing the safety and lives of the migrants at risk most of the time.
 - c) Because of smugglers’ actions of sheer indifference towards the lives of migrants, thousands of people have lost their lives.

31. Taking into account the information provided by IOM, **in 2016, 363,348 people** arrived in Europe via the Mediterranean, mainly arriving in Italy and Greece. During the same period, **5,083 people lost their lives** while crossing the Mediterranean Sea, as shown in the table below:

Recorded deaths in the Mediterranean by route, 2016

	January	February	March	April	May	June	July	August	September	October	November	December	Total
Western Mediterranean	5	2	21	9	3	1	11	10	-	-	1	7	70
Central Mediterranean	90	7	258	611	1,130	388	208	40	341	431	703	372	4,579
Eastern Mediterranean	275	46	45	10	-	-	7	3	27	2	14	5	434
Total:	370	55	324	630	1,133	389	226	53	368	433	718	384	5,083

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32. The route with the highest number of deaths, throughout 2016, was the Central Mediterranean, where 4,579 people lost their lives.
33. These numbers demonstrate the urgent need to strengthen actions to combat the organized crime of smuggling migrants with cooperation and coordination among countries, increasing efforts to involve means and improve strategies. Combating migrant trafficking is a transnational phenomenon in which smuggling routes go far beyond the countries of North Africa and also include countries in sub-Saharan Africa and Europe.
34. All countries on the migration routes are interested in finding a sustainable plan to manage these numbers. It is imperative to find solutions to expedite responses to refugee asylum applications in the camps. Interpreters, support staff, and persons with binding powers on asylum applications are needed on the ground.
35. A way needs to be found to reconcile the ageing workforce in Europe with young people with no prospects for employment or better living conditions in Africa.
36. The UN Refugee Agency points out solutions such as voluntary repatriation for those still able to return home. Those who are unable to return because of continuing conflicts can be relocated in another country. Another way will be integration in the host community. In the last decade more than 1.1 million refugees became citizens of the country that granted them asylum. They are citizens who contribute socially and economically to the society that welcomed them.

37. It will not be easy, but it is in the most difficult times that we have to show our solidarity with those who suffer. We must join our efforts and find the way. It is in the most difficult times that we show the best of ourselves.
38. All we know that recent terrorist attacks in Europe and the MENA region have been conducted by a few individuals, who reached our countries pretending to be refugees and asylum seekers. They are the 0.01% of those who crossed the sea. The key issue for our MPs is the following: how can we address this issue in order to safeguard both our state security and the rights of refugees? A lot has been written, many public debates have taken place, many walls have been erected, and the Schengen agreement has been suspended But no solution has been found.
39. The UN projects biblical numbers of people on the move, in the next future, from the Sahel region to our countries, both North and South Mediterranean. This is in parallel to ISIS terrorists escaping from Syria and Iraq under the military advances of the Russian and US led-coalitions. For these reasons, in addition to the important preventive and pre-emptive work of our security services, we must engage into a serious parliamentary debate, involving our Governments, in order to address a matter where the silence of the EU is extremely loud.