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Transit Migration in central and eastern Europe

Council of Europe – January 2001

Mr TELEK (Turkey).- We have discussed the issue of migration and its many facets on many occasions, and it seems that we will continue to take up the issue for a long time to come.

We can envisage two sorts of solution to the problem that we are facing . The ideal solution would be to get rid of the problems that force millions of persons to migrate from underdeveloped countries to developed countries. That would require sustainable development of poor countries, including the creation of jobs, improvement of living conditions and protection of human rights and freedoms. It is clear that we will not be able to realise this solution today or in the near future. It will take considerable time for Asian and African countries to reach such standards. Therefore, we can assume that illegal migration will continue for years to come. We can hope only that the trend will decrease.

The other solution would require the international community to come up with practical measures. The United Nations, and the European Union, along with the Council of Europe are actively involved in that context.

There has been tolerance generally shown towards political asylum seekers in conformity with the standards accepted by international organisations. The difficulty lies with the verification of reasons produced by applicants seeking political asylum. On the other hand, developed countries generally keep their doors tightly shut against economic migrants who seek a better life and greater opportunities. In some exceptional cases, certain quotas are applied under certain conditions. However, countries not in need of cheap labour do not show any tolerance to illegal migrants.

I shall underline another dimension. Many people who wish to migrate for economic reasons fall into the hands of illegal gangs, including terrorist organisations. I support the rapporteur's idea that there should be a review of national migration policies with a view to creating opportunities for short-term legal migration. Thus we can prevent abuse of the right to asylum by those who migrate for purely economic reasons but pretend to be political asylum seekers.

Transit migration is not a problem that is restricted to central and eastern European countries. Turkey, which serves as a bridge between Asia and Europe, has become one of the transit routes. That fact is becoming even clearer when people with nothing in their possession but hopes for their future become illegal cargo in the hands of criminal organisations. In the first days of the year, at the very start of the twenty-first century, a shipload of migrants from Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Pakistan and Afghanistan perished in the Mediterranean when their ship broke in two.

As the EU takes measures to fortify its walls against such migrants, the transit migration countries become alternative targets of illegal migration and trafficking in human beings. Measures to curb illegal migration are important, but they can be effective only up to a certain level. Strengthening

these measures is necessary to fight the tactics of human trafficking and illegal migration, which become more elaborate as time passes.

The EU should provide assistance to transit migration countries in an effort to alleviate the pressure created by tougher migration policies introduced by the EU. It should support the efforts to combat illegal migration and human trafficking. Burden sharing is a must in this context. It will also provide relief to EU countries. Our aim should be to convince unfortunate people to resort to legal ways rather than trusting criminal and, in some instances, terrorist organisations.

Facilitating short-term legal migration may answer part of the question. In that respect, we should support the solution offered by the rapporteur. Most of the migrants whom we are discussing seek only seasonal jobs, and issuing short-term visas to them will certainly encourage them to stay on the legal side of the requirements.